

The Drawn Clock: Pablo Bronstein's Diagram of Power

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ABSTRACT: This paper analyzes Pablo Bronstein's drawing which is "The Drawn Clock" as a critical intervention in the discourse surrounding art, architecture, and the political implications of time. It posits that Bronstein's work serves not merely as representation but as an analytical diagram critiquing the Neoclassical clock as a colonial instrument. The paper employed visual and discursive methodologies to examine the clock's formal characteristics through a postcolonial lens, highlighting elements such as the pendulum's axis as a symbol of control and the radial hour markers as vectors of uniform time. The paper concludes that Bronstein's drawing acts as political criticism to reveal colonial time as a socially constructed imposition. The paper finally concurs that, "The Drawn Clock" emerges as a vital meta-diagram, connecting architectural representation with timekeeping technology, and critically addressing the enduring legacies of colonialism.

KEYWORDS: Drawing, Clock, Pablo Bronstein, Architecture, Diagram of Power, Neoclassical

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Figure: 1. Pablo Bronstein, Greenwich Pendulum mantel clock, 2018. Ink and watercolour on paper, artist's frame 95 x 82.5 x 8 cm / 37.4 x 32.4 x 3.1 in.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The longcase clock has been a timeless entry point to the European Enlightenment, an ideal of rationality, mechanical accuracy and empirical advance. It controlled everyday life in the domestic realm and assured domination over nature in the scientific realm (Nosonovsky, 2024). However, this apparently harmless measuring device was an unspoken, yet still a powerful instrument of imperialism. To the extent that the time was standardized, with the ultimate standard being the world-wide use of Greenwich Mean Time, the time standardization was not only a technical success, but a political technology that was vital to the colonial rule, trans-oceanic trade, and coordinating extraction of resources over large regions. It was the clock rather than the steam engine that was the essential machine of the industrial age and by extension imperial expansion (Lewis Mumford, 1934). This two-sidedness as the representation of the universal order and the instrument of particular domination becomes the main tension that the symbolic work “The Drawn Clock” (fig. 1), by Pablo Bronstein puts into a very sharp focus, questioning the process of positioning aesthetics of rationality on the side of control. “The Drawn Clock” is a work by Pablo Bronstein, an artist who has been famous in engaging with the architectural history and the spectacle of power through critical analysis of his work, and this is the same topic that he applies his attention to detail draftsmanship in this work. It is an ink drawing of maximum size, and portrays a grand, neoclassical longcase clock. Nevertheless, Bronstein does not show it as an object art. Rather, he makes it as analytically distant as an architectural elevation or an exploded diagram, as simply, and transparently, as he exposes the mechanical and ornamental parts of it. The drawing is not merely a representation, and the clock is considered to be an archaeological object, the design of which requires its interpretation (Kennedy, & McKenzie, 2023). Drawing is a form of research within Bronstein’s practice, and “The Drawn Clock” is his key example to study the language of authority in visual and structural aspects. The piece presents an invitation to the viewers to look beyond the iconic shape and regard the clock as a convoluted drawing of the forces that constructed the modern world (Mäkelä, et al 2014).

This article states that not a passive representation but an active analytical diagram is used in the work of Pablo Bronstein’s “Drawn Clock”. Based on this, it can be argued that the artist deliberately employs the conventions of architectural draftsmanship, with its emphasis on line, scale, and precision, to dismantle the clock as an institution. Bronstein renders the invisible political technology of the colonial time into a visual representation through this process of drawing. The drawing reveals how the constituent parts of the clock made by the arc of the pendulum to the radial dial were mechanisms used to impose the homogenized, Eurocentric time, which legitimised and naturalised the rhythm of the imperial dominance. Finally, the artwork is a meta-critical device that relies on the same methods of visualizing an architectural project, that once used to plan and justify colonial projects in order to deconstruct and critique them instead.

In this paper, the article has been validated in four stages. First, it formulates a theoretical context based on postcolonial theory, particularly Johannes Fabian’s concept of the ‘denial of coevalness’, while also drawing on critical histories of technology to conceptualize colonial time as a political category (Fabian, 1983). Second, it expounds on the draftsmanship as a critical methodology developed by Bronstein in placing his line-work as an argumentative strategy of uncovering concealed power relations. The third part takes a more formal review of the diagram, breaking down the major components of the diagram, including the pendulum, the dial and the Neo-classical case itself to demonstrate the way in which each is a signifier of power. Lastly, the paper wraps up with a synthesis in order to argue that the “Drawn Clock” is an essential resource towards visualizing and commenting on the legacies of empire that are still present in our daily time and measurement systems.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THE ARCHITECTURE OF COLONIAL TIME

Postcolonial Temporality

In order to comprehend the political interests of Bronstein in “The Drawn Clock”, this paper urges the viewer to learn the idea of time as a disputable area of colonialism (Stahn, 2023). What can be regarded as a seminal reading in this respect is a work by Johannes Fabian, “Time and the Other”, which brings out the very important notion of the denial of coevalness. In his argument, Fabian implies that anthropology being an empire-created discipline created a systematic placement of her primitive subjects in a time that was fundamentally different than that of the Western viewer. The way in which colonized peoples were pushed into a different time frame be it a primordial past or a state of being in the same timeless tradition colonial discourse negated the fact that all humanity was the same and that all existed in the same now (Fabian, 1983). This chronological separation was not merely descriptive but also functioned as a powerful ideological instrument, establishing a hierarchy of progress in which the “civilizing mission” was presented as the necessary powerhouse for bringing others into modernity (Leigh, 2020). This clock of Bronstein can thus be understood as the mechanism of enforcing this denial. Its timeless tick, which is constant, universal, does not merely mark time, it prescribes one, authoritative form of time against which all other, local times (seasonal, lunar, ritual) are calculated and found wanting, and this makes them legitimate, and backward.

Standardized Time as Imperial Tool.

A global empire required a logistical precondition of abstraction of time into a measurable and homogeneous commodity. The establishment and introduction of universal time, including the Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) in 1884, was inextricably connected with the demands of industrial capitalism and administration of colonial empires. The conversion of task-time into clock-time as

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E.P. Thompson called the turning point of industrialization in his masterpiece about time-discipline was one of the major practices of social regulation that emerged during industrialization (Thompson, 1967). It is at a global level that this science came to be a synchronizing instrument in maritime navigation, railway system and telegraphic communications, all of which were important imperial arteries. Trains carried out time in India, commodities in Africa and troops on different continents, all of which operated by a time standard set by the imperial metropole. It was what historian Vanessa Ogle calls the globalization of time, not so much a process of consensus but of bringing a hegemonic order to bear on the complexity of worldwide rule (Ogle, 2015). The clock turned out to be the final icon of this new, networked imperialism in that the organization of separate spaces that had never been made so possible before was not only affected but also natural and efficient, thus concealing the violence of its realization.

The Neoclassical Facade

The example of this technology of control is as important as the mechanism. The clock created by Bronstein is neoclassical in style, a very neoclassical manner with a very historical connotation. With its revival of Greco-Roman forms, Neoclassicism appeared in the 18th century as a visual language which professed to represent the values of Enlightenment, in reason, order, democracy, and civic virtue. Nevertheless, imperial and state authorities easily borrowed this language to justify their power. The spectacle and symmetry of the style coupled with the reference to earlier empires gave a facade of permanence and stability coupled with noble lineage to relatively violent and expansionist schemes. According to David Watkin, styles of architecture are never neutral and are loaded with ideologies and neoclassicism emerged as a style of authority (par excellence), as Watkin (1992) puts it. Through this aesthetic, which he has applied to his clock, Bronstein points out how power is at work, by spectacle and persuasion. The abstract art of the religious ornament of columns, pediments, and scrollwork idealizes the coercive technology contained within, and introduce an image of power as rational and beautiful, and therefore justified (Abdullahi, & Embi, 2015). This drawing of a facade by Bronstein is therefore an act of critical revelation, he recreates the allusive language of authority just to tear it down so as to uncover the machinations of the mechanical operations of control that are behind the exalted exterior.

III. METHODOLOGY: DRAFTSMANSHIP AS DECONSTRUCTION

The Diagram as Critical Form

Analysis of the work by Bronstein can only be achieved by defining the term diagram as it is used today with the humble explanatory illustration to a powerful critical form. In addition to its practical role, the diagram is a concept tool which visualizes the relationship, forces and concealed logics that organize a system. A diagram is what philosopher Gilles Deleuze, in Foucault, refers to as an abstract machine that is inseparable to any discursive or visual formation yet defines the operation of an apparatus and the relations of force within it (Deleuze, 1988). It is a cartography of power. Regarding art, the analysis of the problem of the architectural impulse in the context of the contemporary art emphasizes the importance of the analytical, spatial logic of the diagram that has emerged as one of the most important mediums of critique of the foundational structures of modernism. This is exactly the mode that “The Drawn Clock” by Bronstein is working in. It is not an aesthetic vision but an instrument of diagnosis that breaks down its object to expose the mechanism of the colonial time. It does not view the clock as having a fixed object to be admired but as a system that has to be read, and it is the visual vocabulary of intelligibility and exposition that brings out the political mechanics behind the clock.

The major approach of the critique conducted by Bronstein is his draftsmanship itself. His line is not expressive, nor gestalt; it is analytical, and conscious. Every stroke of the ink is a proposition. The solidness, monotony of the weight of the line reiterates the architectural accuracy of a plan or the scheme of a technician, a stylistic decision that links the work at once to authority, planning and control. Nonetheless, Bronstein contravenes this relationship. He uses this hyper-rational visual language to un-construct a power tool, thereby using the logic of this tool against itself.

Bronstein in his work prefigures the mechanics of construction, the very process of drawing turns into a performance of the very systems he tries to criticize. It is the line marking the rod of the pendulum that is a claim to its uncompromising power; it is the fine cross-hatching that colours the pediment of the neoclassic that a revelation of its decorative role. Each of the marks is a deliberate gesture of digging up, shedding off layers of historical and political signification. The meticulousness with which the drawing is done is not the virtuosity but a kind of forensic work, in which the hand of the artist is a scalpel, carving up the clock to show its ideological interior.

The methodology of the given work is inherently and, indeed, imperatively multidisciplinary, which is, admittedly, a straightforward consequence of the multidimensional and critical direction of artistic work of Sergio Brontenant himself. An art historical critique that concentrated solely on style, composition or aesthetical provenance would be ineffective and not be able to encompass the kind of critical richness and political tones as a work such as “The Drawn Clock”. In order to sufficiently wrestle with an art piece that also serves as a meta-analysis of systems of power, the present paper makes use of an integrated approach in which various disciplinary lenses overlap to complement one another in uncovering other aspects of the meaning in the piece.

This framework is based on an intense art historical analysis which offers the hermeneutical instruments to read the formal aspects of the drawing in terms of its line work, technique, composition, as well as its conscious placement to the current art practices. This primary analysis makes the object a constructed image, but to comprehend what the image constructs, one has to involve other

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disciplines. The drawing has a central motif, the clock, the key to which is unlocked through the prism of the postcolonial theory. Using the contributions of such scholars as Edward Said, who described the dynamics of Orientalism, and Johannes Fabian, who criticized the anthropological denial of coevalness, or the imposition of a distancing, hierarchical time on colonized peoples, this view provides the critical terms with which to conceptualize the clock as not a timekeeper, but a tool of what Said terms orientalism and a strong symbol of the processes of othering (Said, 1978; Fabian, 1983).

In order to historicize such symbolic role, the framework includes the history of science and technology. The critical context is provided by such scholars as Lewis Mumford who defined the clock as the most important machine of the industrial era and Vanessa Ogle who has elaborated on the globalization of time under the empire (Mumford, 1934; Ogle, 2015). Those observations indicate that timekeeping was a technology of social discipline and imperial power, a system of regimenting work and the government of vast areas. This historical contextualization is a complement to the postcolonial reading that demonstrates the material engineering and enforcement of abstract power relations.

In addition to that, the architectural theory provided a critical commentary on the language of visual representation that Bronstein uses. The housing of the clock is not a random aesthetic decision, the Neoclassicism of the clock was used by architectural theorists over the years to represent the authority, rationality, and imperial majesty. Further, it becomes apparent that even the architectural drawing itself is the practice of representation stained with ideological authority, which is able to project the idealized, frequently repressive, orders onto space (Fraser, 1984).

This meeting of disciplines is not only cumulative but synergistic. Integration results in a critical apparatus through which one drawn line in "The Drawn Clock" can be contemplated as both a formal artistic component and as a signifier of technological rationality as well as a colonial power line. This methodological overlap is necessary for explaining how Bronstein's work functions. His drawing superimposes different disciplinary standpoints, and in doing so, it turns the conventions of technical drawing, classical architecture, and rationalized time against the very systems of power, measurement, and representation that those conventions helped create and authorize. The drawing therefore operates both within these systems and critically against them: it adopts their methods of ordering and representing space and time while simultaneously revealing their constructed and disciplinary character.

IV. ANALYSIS

The Pendulum

In Bronstein's work, the pendulum in his drawing is depicted as a straight unswerving, vertical line, stumbling down with mathematical accuracy out of the heart of the movement and down to the bottom of the case. The symbolic meaning of this work has its basis in this visual treatment. It's ideal verticality and inflexibility practice is an ideology of unchangeable order and unquestioning power. It does not imply potentiality but details one and only one, limited, course, its line is already determined and mathematically set. This rings deafeningly well with the work of Michel Foucault in the study of disciplinary power which does not only work by brute force but by the regulated, regular and normative control of bodies and time (Foucault, 1977). This metronomic swing of the pendulum is the most suitable analogy to this type of power: it is insurmountable, detached, and inexplicable, and it includes a beat that should be learned and followed. This pendulum in the colonial environment turns into the centre around which all other temporalities are compelled to orbit, the visual image of the disciplinary power that attempted to coordinate all of labour patterns, as well as religious life, to the beat of one, imposed clock.

The Dial

It is with the hand of Bronstein that clock face or dial becomes much more than a mere interface into a map of domination of time. The hour-hand is not simply a number; it is an elaborate, sharp line, shooting out in every direction, as the spokes of a steamer, or even more frighteningly, as the rays of power flying outward like spokes of power, around a centre of power. This radial structure is a common diagrammatic device used to describe systems which emanate out of a central, authoritative source. Such radial diagrams tend to represent networks of control and distribution, as a work on modern art and media by art historian James Nisbet suggests (Nisbet, 2014). In this case, both lines present a homogenizing grid of time, and impose a single, abstract, time, a set of twelve equal hours, sixty equal minutes, on the heterogeneous, lived, and often repetitive time of the colonized cultures. As explained by Vanessa Ogle, this imposition, which is a key procedure of globalization, was both a way of imperial administration (Ogle, 2015). In this way, Bronstein turns its dial into a map of the hegemony and reveals how a local time measure (such as GMT) was generalized, systematically eliminating other methods of marking and distinguishing time.

The Mechanism

Bronstein is not afraid of the inside of the clock; he reveals its complex mechanism as would reveal it in a manual. The mechanisms of gears, levers, and driving weights are shown in the greatest detail, showing the intricate mechanism behind the seemingly simple movement of the hands in the dial. The critical role of this work is determined by this exposure. These elements are the darker side of the engine, the sophisticated, and in many respects, undetectable bureaucracy, logistics, and engineering that supported imperial power. The clock mechanism in like manner demands that all the gears should fit perfectly together to get the clock to go, and so colonial rule depended on an immense, interlocking system of administration, transportation and communication, to impose its will.

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This is in line with the political theorist, James C. Scott, and his idea of "legibility" in which states reduce complex social realities into standardized systems in order to more effectively measure and manage them (Scott, 1998). Bronstein renders the clock mechanism readable to reveal the analogous mechanisms of control in the political world, which are often puzzled. The sketch shows that the well-organized face of the clock exists on a complicated, machine-like heart.

The Neoclassical Mask

With this powerful mechanism enclosed is a luxurious neoclassical fabric, which Bronstein has provided with a preoccupation with its decorative excesses of fluted columns, broken pediment, elaborate scroll-work, and a base carved to the ninetieth degree. This aestheticization is not a natural one; it is the last and most convincing element of the power structure. The neoclassical style offers an illusion of beauty, tradition and civilized grandeur to mask the coercive functionality of the machine it houses. It glorifies power and makes it look dignified, rational and permissible as opposed to imposed and violent. Architectural historian David Watkin has shown that neoclassicism was always used as a style of authority by any institution that wanted to demonstrate the appearance of stability and eternal virtue (Watkin, 1992). Bronstein emphasizes the way ideology works with seduction by carefully depicting this facade. The case is so beautiful that it does not invite one to ask questions about what is contained in this system. His gesture of delineating it so accurately is thus an act of de-masking; he imitates the appealing qualities of it only to show their role as an ideological mask, to show that the act of projecting power is always, to a certain degree, an architectural and aesthetic project.

V. THE DRAWN CLOCK AS META-DIAGRAM

The Act of Drawing as Critique

Bronstein's "Drawn Clock" is ultimately most powerful in how it functions as a meta-diagram that is a diagram illustrating the very process of diagramming power. The breakdown of its single elements ends up with the recognition that the primary critical intervention is the grasping of the drafting itself. Bronstein, very accurately, goes for the most typical instruments of the architect and the engineer, and the operations in his work are like ones in the plan, the elevation, the line, the same instruments historically utilized to design plantations, map colonial territories, and create the administrative buildings of empire. Visually, he makes this the most effective instrument of control, and then at the apex of its own internal logic, he turns this weapon on the one of its key symbolic products which is the clock. This is a profound methodological critique. In accordance with theorist Mieke Bal, when an artistic practice "theorizes" its own medium and conditions, it can identify the ideological basis of representation itself (Bal, 2002). By using the master's tools to take apart the master's clock, Bronstein points out that the visualization methods are not neutral. His image is not just an image of a clock; rather it is a deconstructive act, visibly demonstrating the systems of order and control were first drafted into being, and hence can be drafted out again.

Making the Invisible Legible

An essential feature of the meta-diagram is its power to make what is intangible, tangible. Bronstein's work takes the concept of "imperial authority" and "colonial time" as well as other ideas that are abstract, diffuse, and thus very powerful, and then the artist provides them with a clear, concrete, and visual form which is open to the scrutiny. The pendulum's descent becomes the rhythm of discipline; the radial dial becomes the projection of a homogenizing grid; the gears become the hidden bureaucracy. This move towards legibility is at the core of the work's critical function. It is in line with Gilles Deleuze's description of the diagram as a map that uncovers the "relations of force" within an apparatus (Deleuze, 1988). Prior to Bronstein's intervention, the political technology of the clock that guided the performance was more like a background condition, a framework that has been naturalized and is thus invisible. By applying to it the hyper-legible conventions of technical drawing, he takes it to the forefront. The artist turns the clock into a text that can be read, thus giving the viewers an opportunity to unravel the power that is embedded in its design. The piece is a revelatory device that brings to light the far-reaching but unnoticed forces of historical and political conditioning that before it was hidden in plain sight.

"Colonial Time" Constructed and Exposed

Finally, "The Drawn Clock" loudest message is that "colonial time" should not be regarded as a natural, already existing phenomenon, but rather as a technology that was constructed with a lot of care and forcibly imposed on people. Bronstein's diagram breaks the clock's façade of being a neutral, universally measuring device, bit by bit. Every single purposeful mark plays its part in the unveiling of the clock as a trick. The interpretation of the neoclassical facade uncovers timekeeping as an aestheticized ideology; the scrutiny of the mechanism gives way to its being a complicated engine of systematization; the understanding of the dial and pendulum points to its being a device of regulation. This visual argument powerfully substantiates postcolonial theoretical claims of scholars like Johannes Fabian, who claimed that time was a principal "political resource" in the colonial project (Fabian, 1983, p. 144). Bronstein ushers in the visual evidence supporting this theory. His artistry is a demonstration that the global temporal order was not something discovered but rather was built, drafted, engineered, and designed just like the imperial infrastructures it was serving. Bronstein's meta-diagram by means of presenting the clock in this manner is not simply illustrating a clock; it is revealing the very blueprint of a dominant temporal paradigm, thus enabling us to envision, and perhaps draft alternatives.

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VI. CONCLUSION

This article has made the case that Pablo Bronstein's "The Drawn Clock" goes beyond its role as a mere representation of a timepiece to operate as a highly effective critical diagram. By combining visual analysis with theoretical framing in a very detailed manner, we have illustrated how the work of art dismantles the complex interplay of time, architecture, and imperial power. Bronstein does it by turning against the one language in which the architectural draftmanship is done, the exact line, the scientific view, the technical schematic to analyse the neoclassical clock. As a result, he makes the political technology of "colonial time" visible which was the most far-reaching but invisible way of how this apparently neutral mechanism functioned as the main tool of giving order, regulating bodies, and legitimizing rule over great empires.

The piece of art is thus much more than just the power; it is the power itself, an active interrogation via form, a meta-critical instrument that reveals not only the power's blueprint but also the spatial-temporal framework underlying the power.

Bronstein's work is not only important in terms of the past critique of the object. It is, in fact, a very important and transferable contemporary critique method. In this age when the aftermath of empire is not only in the beaten monuments but also deep down in the daily structures of our lives such as global time zones and standardized data formats, Bronstein's way of doing things is still relevant. He makes us be on our guard when faced with the everyday systems shaping our existence and it is his work we turn to when we want to be reminded that the ideologies being quietly executed by these systems are the ones we should confront.

His work is a proof of the notion that the political act of engagement is the most powerful of all when it is done in the form of drawing out the hidden logic of an object or a system through careful and critical looking.

By unveiling the historical architecture of power, "The Drawn Clock" is a tool that makes us capable of identifying and questioning power relations of today that are governed by a similar logic thus putting in doubt the authority which is accepted as natural and exercised by those systems which are still in operation in the modern world.

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