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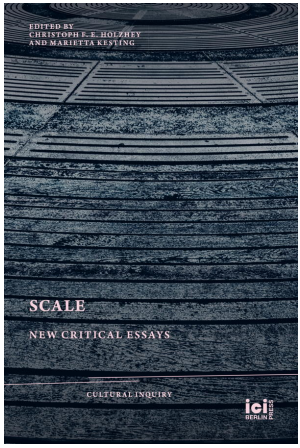

Scale: New Critical Essays, ed. by Christoph F. E. Holzhey and Marietta Kesting, Cultural Inquiry, 40 (ICI Berlin Press, 2026) <https://doi.org/10.37050/ci-40>

FILIPPO BOSCO
JOSÉ ANTONIO MAGALHÃES

Diagrams

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Diagrams

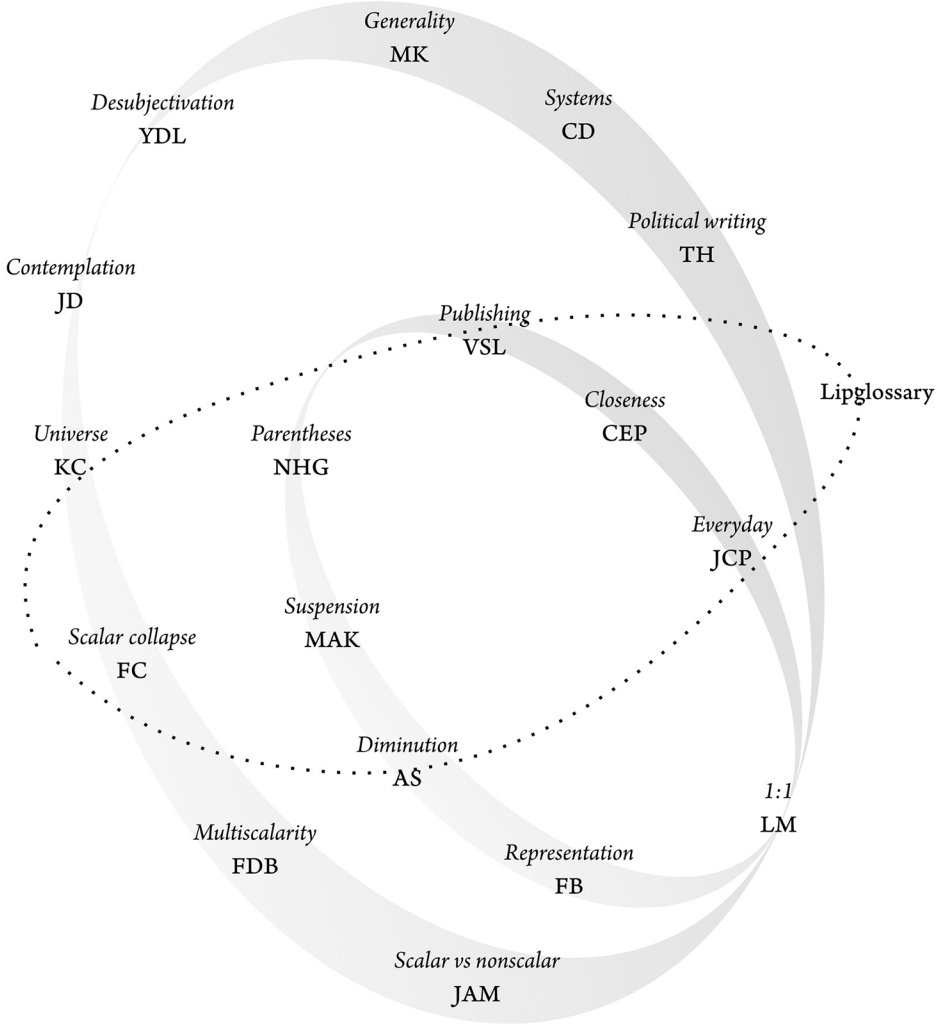

Diagram 1. Porous sequence knotting smaller and larger scales

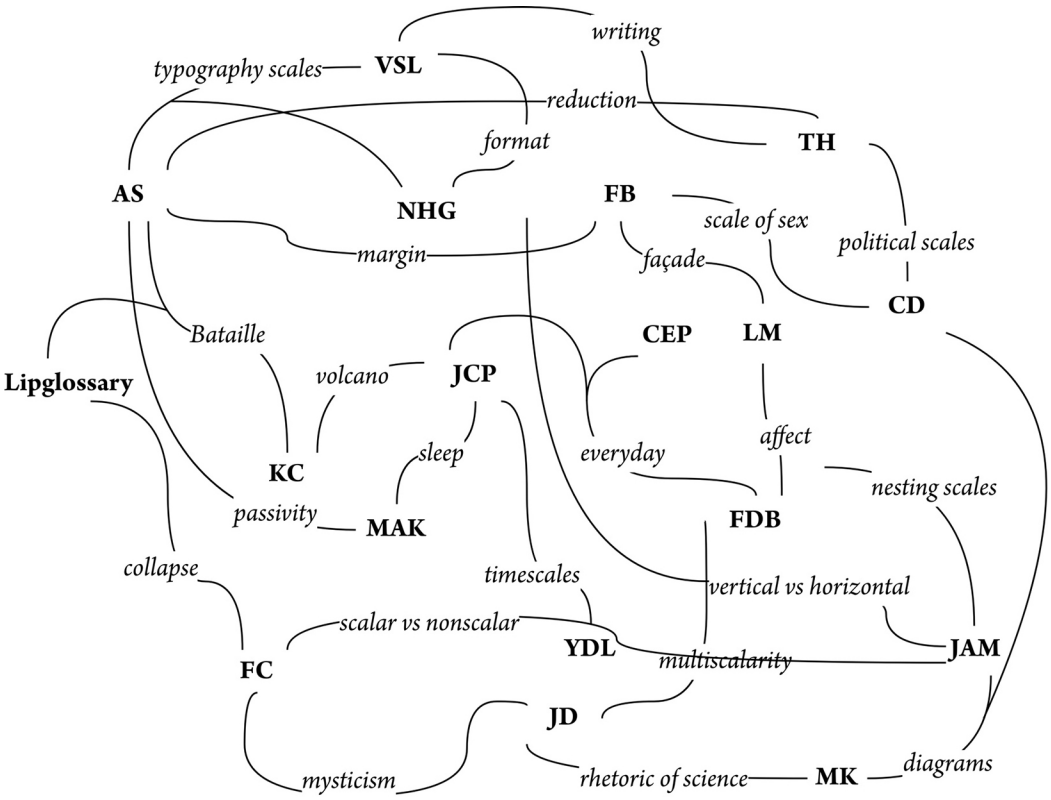

Diagram 2. Dynamic map of thematic links

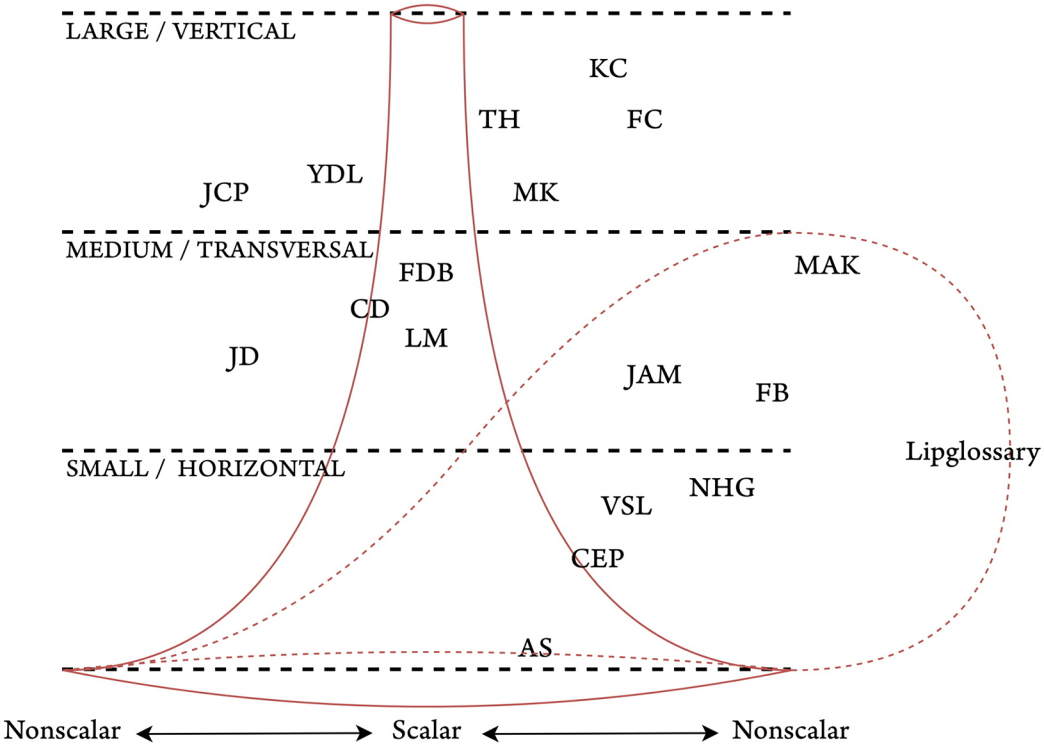

Diagram 3. Topology of scale, orientation, and scalarity

LEGEND

FB	Filippo Bosco
KC	Kirill Chepurin
FC	Franco Costantini
CD	Cat Dawson
FDB	Federica Di Blasio
JD	Yuri Di Liberto
TH	Joshua DiCaglio
YDL	Tobi Haslett
NHG	Nicolas Helm-Grovas
MAK	Marietta A. Kesting
MK	Magdalena Krysztoforska
JAM	José Antonio Magalhães
LM	Lisa Messeri
CEP	Claudia E. Peppel
JCP	Jasmine Clotilde Pisapia
AS	Angelica Stathopoulos
VSL	Verónica Stedile Luna

NOTES

Much of the reflection about scale in this volume has to do with linear nesting and its limits — can something be said to be above or below something else, and under what conditions? For many of the contributors, during our two years of working on scales, diagrams and the practice of drawing them became important. We also had many conversations about the relationship between form and content, and specifically about the form of books and texts. When finally putting together the volume, it seemed to us important for the book to reflect on its form and contents, in their scalar and diagrammatic dimensions.

The three diagrams that open this volume together with the chapter list are meant as a dynamic table of contents that provides multiple approaches to the essays that follow the introduction. The texts themselves are organized alphabetically for neutrality and to avoid fixed sections and structures. Instead, the reader can explore the subject matter via the three diagrams, which provide different kinds of information and orientation.

The first diagram positions each paper in a linear sequence to suggest a possible reading order based on key concepts and a general understanding of scale. The sequence knots and divides itself into two strips, corresponding respectively to themes of large scales and small scales. The two strips should not be read as strictly nesting onto each other; on the contrary, they are porous and open to proximities and crossings. This is the case with the dotted line that pierces the reading sequence to collect the essays that directly refer to the work of Georges Bataille, who inspired the section of the book titled 'Lipglossary'.

The second diagram is a dynamic map that constellates the essays via thematic links captioned by a word. The links allow the reader to create various paths across the book and to follow ideas and concepts as they emerge and are treated from different perspectives by two or more authors. We encourage a non-linear exploration of scale and its porosity with many other subjects. The map therefore reflects the rich and unpredictable dialogue among disciplines and standpoints that took place throughout the past two years at the ICI Berlin, in the weekly colloquia, workshops, and conferences of our fellowship.

The third diagram explores the relationship between three axes: scale (large, medium, small), orientation (vertical, transversal, horizontal), and scalarity (scalar, nonscalar), placing the book's chapters in relation to these attributes. Its Klein-bottle-inspired shape suggests that it shouldn't be read as a Cartesian plane, but rather as involving more complicated, partly topological and often indeterminate relationships. There is a prima facie association of the large scale with verticality, the medium with transversality, and the small with horizontality. This is expressed by the bottle's shape, which is vertical at the top and becomes horizontal at the bottom. However, as we move from the top to the bottom and, therefore, from the vertical line to the horizontal plane, we also tend to drift laterally from the scalar centre towards the nonscalar periphery. The orientation axis thus does not simply correspond to the scale axis but mediates between scale and scalarity. At the very bottom, the bottle folds into a dotted line, which should neither be projected on a plane nor as a coherent shape (such as a tongue-shaped slope dislocated on the third dimension). It must rather be read as a line of flight or a non-orientable topology whose scalar relationship with the rest of the diagram is problematic and underdetermined. In that sense, the main difference between chapters that drift from the centre towards the left or towards the right is whether their positioning is meant to play with this shape or not.

In our discussions about diagrams, an important idea — present notably in Gilles Châtelet's *Figuring Space* — has been that diagrams, rather than communicating fully formalized and worked-out relationships, capture a gesture of thought still in the act.[1] As a consequence, these diagrams are not expected to be fully readable, but rather play with a margin of indeterminacy about the relationships they express.

We are thankful to artist and scholar Patricia Reed for joining our discussion and inspiring us to experiment and think with diagrams.

FILIPPO BOSCO
JOSÉ ANTONIO MAGALHÃES

1 Gilles Châtelet, *Figuring Space: Philosophy, Mathematics, and Physics* [1993], trans. by Robert Shore and Muriel Zagha (Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000).