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Volume 4 Editorial

Materiality of Drawing/Thinking

The value of slow arrival: bodily gesture | spatial mode | response time.

Studies in Material Thinking Vol. 4 is focused on theoretical and disciplinary approaches that explore a variety of contemporary drawing practices in art, design and other contexts. Drawing may be described as a process that applies the mind to an idea that can only be articulated in visual form. It deals with concepts through material thinking and practice. Materiality exists in the support materials for a drawing, the tools and the time required to achieve the drawing. Design is another term applied in this way. When it refers to the drawn image, the term 'design' usually takes account of the drawing of lines on a surface and the drawing out of an idea.

The term 'drawing' includes the conceptual moments within the mind, the material reality of the drawing itself and the speculative artefact, product or building it prefigures. Drawing recognizes the transitional stages and inconclusive phases that exist in all creative practices. As a developmental process, drawing is useful in revealing relationships and potential connections. Vilém Flusser acknowledges a direct link between concept and reality, between idea and thing, when he reminds us that "the word is derived from the Latin signum, meaning 'sign', and shares the same ancient root" (Flusser, 1999). This relational concept of drawing and design had been foundational for centuries since the Italian Renaissance when Vasari (1960) founded the *Accademia del Disegno* in Florence and inspired painters, architects and sculptors of the time to value the superiority of the intellect over material practices. The idea that drawing activity was crucial to the realization of the intellectual concept lost traction throughout the second half of the 20th century. Schools of art and design moved far away from the belief that an idea must first be conceived in the mind then drawn on paper before it can be constructed or built.

Now and in recent times drawing is being actively rediscovered, not only in the academic context, but also in many artistic practices, as a vital material thinking process and as a distinctive artistic medium. The practice of drawing and the study of drawing practice are particularly interesting at present as a result of rapidly changing professional methods, the now ubiquitous forms of digital technologies and the fast pace of all these developments. Different drawing practices organize a variety of professional belief systems and artistic approaches that underpin the broad and culturally diverse conceptions of thinking or reason

we see in art and design practices. Different drawing approaches and applications not only reveal the variety in these systems of logic but also open up the early phases of discovering and evaluating ideas prior to the development of specific artifacts or systems.

To some extent, the revival of drawing as a valued activity can be attributed to a growing need for slow time. The slowness of hand sketching and particularly the slowness of sustained drawing activity can provide necessary time and reflective opportunity for ideas to be fully absorbed and transformed in the mind. Sternberg (1988) maintains that time is essential for creative processes to take place. Slow drawing allows time for new associations to be revealed before critical aesthetic decisions must be considered. Concentration on the drawing task in real time allows a deep awareness of the interaction between subject matter, drawing materials and the tools at hand. Barbara Bolt (2006) has researched the drawing investigations by David Hockney (2001) into artists' use of optical devices. She discusses 'handling' and 'handlability', two Heideggerian terms she uses to provide a philosophical framework for material thinking in creative practices. Bolt's discussion of the material conditions of drawing practice remind us that the process is a physical one that involves engagement with ideas, materials and tools all of which contribute significantly to the outcome.

In research, preliminary assertions such as concept sketches or theoretical hypotheses, executed as shapes, images, diagrams or words, are the starting point of most research activity. Whereas writers write, artists may formulate thoughts in drawings, pictures or illustrations, designers may use diagrams and plans and performers may use notations and schema. The rendering of these thinking processes in their preliminary, exploratory form, for personal reflection or for communication with others, is a vital part of the working process for designers, artists and researchers. For work that requires drawing in the early stage, drawing is appropriate. For work that requires written argumentation at the early stage, writing is appropriate. For art and design researchers, the articulation of new thinking and dissemination of results often requires a shift from the early modes of material thinking and developmental, conceptual activity in drawings for example, towards written forms. Communication of research process and results remains a challenge in practice-based research where there is a continuing struggle to validate the significance of visual forms of research thinking such as drawing. Research methods that reinforce and validate non-verbal work, such as active documentation, are a vital part of our methodology.

The papers included in this volume all focus on theoretical and disciplinary approaches that explore a variety of contemporary drawing practices in art, design and other contexts. They challenge or relocate our ideas on drawing as perception, the eloquence of cumulative resolution, evolutionary coherence, meaning and interpretation, notions of dexterity, the value of attentiveness, ambiguity, progressive logic, and sustained uncertainty in relation to drawing as a material practice. The different forms of drawing and of drawing practice described in these papers can be seen collectively to represent a significant potential for purposeful, investigative activity, which is the basis of all research. In its different genres, drawing has a locative and comparative potential that can articulate discoveries that are not well articulated in a written translation. These reflective studies on drawing as practice offer a strong collective argument for the value of drawing as a research tool. As researchers and educators, we select our methods and these important choices frame both the research enquiry itself and the wider impact on our developing methodological orientation. Ultimately, through a process of natural selection, we will affect the nature of the questions we ask and the future value of artistic and design research.

Cresside Collette contributes an interesting study on the symbiotic relationship between tapestry and drawing. She considers historic developments, contemporary shifts in practice, the relationship between drawing, design and the weaving processes and the changing role that weavers have played in the interpretation of designs and drawings.

In his paper exploring Heidegger's (1962) notion of Dasein (situated being) and the 'ready-to-hand', **Derek Pigrum** argues that both place and the drawing surface act as a membrane between interiority and exteriority. He uses examples of his own drawing practice to explain his understanding of transitional drawing, and the exploratory nature of dialogic drawing. In the process, he questions the entrenched idea of creativity "as a function exclusively of interiority, of the mind's eye, of ideas that form in the mind independently of the outside world and that are simply transferred to paper, to one of creativity that is continually enriched by 'Dasein dependent readiness to hand'..."

Julia Midgley's paper looks at the genre of reportage drawing and its role in collaboration with medical, archaeological and contemporary society. Midgley contends that reportage is a viable genre with an important continuing role in today's society. She argues that documentary drawings, unlike documentary photography, capture minutes and hours as opposed to fractions of a second and that reportage drawing is minimally invasive due to the nature of a pencil inscribing paper.

Using active documentation in her own artistic practice, **Lisa Munnely** investigates the corporeal and cerebral experiences in drawing. She discusses the effect of time on herself as a practitioner, on the type of line produced and on the final drawn outcome. She describes it as an immersion in time and matter, a slow burgeoning of awareness like the philosopher Henri Bergson's concept of the body as the "place of passage of the movements received and thrown back, a hyphen, a connecting link between the things which act on me and the things upon which I act" (Bergson, 1929, p.196).

Tom McGuirk's paper explores an epistemological understanding of drawing practice and provides the basis within art and design research contexts, for a reassertion of the significance of drawing practice as a research paradigm.

Reporting on an interdisciplinary collaborative study between artist and scientist, **Catherine Baker** analyses perception and vision with a focus on the role of physical eye movements as drawing. The study interrogates the conventional idea of drawing as a three-way process combined in the act of making marks upon a given surface and reports on the exploration of the interface between the moving eye and the drawing.

The graphic language of animation is the subject of investigation in the paper by **Martine Corompt**. She uses both historical and contemporary examples to explore stylised animated graphic representation as a form of language and to consider how it has been used in fine art practice.

The papers included in this volume all contribute to an interpretation of drawing as an embodied enactment, a lived experience of seeing into the world what is imagined in the mind, a process fluidly informed by the physical experiences of seeing and drawing. Varela et al (1991), define the act of perception as something not only determined and limited by actual conditions in the world around us, but also contributing to the reality of the world around us. Perception, as Varela describes it, is another way of thinking about the nature of drawing which is a complex process of looking out to the world (or inwards to the mind),

selectively recording through drawn images and seeing what emerges in the drawing. The effects of skill and practice and the choice of tools and materials all matter. This collection of papers presents persuasive examples of embodied enactment as Varela explains it. The artist or designer initiates the drawing, is directed by both thought and vision and further affected in response to what she sees emerging in the drawing itself.

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