

Introduction

The Traction of Drawing

Andrew Barrie and Laurence Simmons

Why an issue on drawing? Some suggest that with the proliferation and maturation of digital technologies, drawing is now “done and dusted”. They ask what use remains for the hand that traces on clay, wood, stone or paper. Others maintain that is there still a place to be savored and explored between traditional drawing experiences and contemporary digital expertise during the conception of buildings.

This collection of essays, interviews, drawings and reviews seeks to explore the technologies of drawing – their marks, lines, scratches, furrows, incisions, touches, dots and dashes, bits and bytes, inscriptions, string lines, vectors, nurbs, stains and blotches. All pencilled, inked, chalked, brushed, printed, illuminated or even erased on diverse grounds. Drawing, as this list suggests, is based on an intimate knowledge of material manifestations, of making manifest the material. We focus here on how drawing exteriorises the mind and emotions, and how drawings make present the invisible: how they forecast, predict, make present the to-come of architecture.

But we also want to explore how drawing draws upon oblique or tangential lines, that is, we wish to follow drawing down its wandering pathways to see how it might also sever or section a building plan. Our issue title, *The Traction of Drawing*, suggests that we believe drawing still has some traction, some pull and attractive power. But we would also argue that this “at-traction” comes from the fact that all our papers explore the line of drawing as an heuristic device and, as Laurence Simmons following Jacques Derrida suggests, this line always “journeys with a single companion, the rubber: that cancels, chases away, renounces, places it under ‘erasure’ (*sous rature*), allowing it to be different to what it thought it was, to renew itself again each time”.

This, the eleventh issue of *Interstices*, derives, more or less, from a symposium held at the University of Auckland in November 2009 on the occasion of architect and architectural theorist Marco Frascari’s visit as Distinguished Visitor to the School of Architecture and Planning. Frascari has argued in many recent studies for the necessary interface between traditional drawing experiences and contemporary digital practices during the conception of buildings. But his interest in drawing was first sparked when he worked with Italian architect Carlo Scarpa and saw how he used drawing as a form of communication with both students and builders and clients. Scarpa’s drawings were performances. The first thing that architectural students about to take Scarpa’s design studio had to learn was that they would no longer be required to present their work traced in china ink on *carta da lucido* (heavy translucent vellum). The implicit requirement of Scarpa’s studio was that non-duplicable drawings were to be traced on Bristol board or similar material using a range of coloured pencils and pens. According to Frascari,



Scarpa probably had *synesthesia* (a condition in which normally distinct senses or perceptions overlap). For him, and subsequently for Frascari, the purpose of a drawing was not just to depict what any human could see, but somehow to convey the totality of what we feel. Scarpa was not interested in a drawing as a representation of a real building; for him, the drawing should express some essence – some perceptual presence of an architectural idea – rather than just pretending to be a photographic substitute.

If I want to see things, I do not trust anything else. I put them in front of me, here on paper, to be able to see them. I want to see, and for this I draw. I can see an image only if I draw it. (quoted in Los 1966: 17)

The drawing surface, and its interfacing with the media of drafting, became Scarpa's essential expression of his synesthetic experience as inauguration of architectural imagination.

Federica Goffi explores this alternative to mere "photo renderings" and charts the ambiguous entry into a building, and its on-going unfinished representation, through a close reading of Tiberio Alfarano's 1571 hybrid-drawing of St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican. Alfarano's drawing, with its multiple associations as transparent veil, palimpsest, decoupage, intercollage and iconic representation, takes us well beyond a representation of a likeness frozen in time and provides what Goffi calls "a metaphysical gate" into St. Peter's Basilica. Sarah Treadwell's essay ruminates on the work of another "synesthete". Her elucidation of Saul Steinberg's drawings of a plan, site plan and perspective of a hypothetical motel, Magnolia Motel, putatively located in the American South, also turns to Frascari's writing on Scarpa's drawing in order to find similarity with the way that Steinberg draws, especially the way he draws words. Steinberg described himself as a writer who draws and he defined drawings as "a way of reasoning on paper".

It is through a discussion of a hypothetical set of drawings that Itkinos may have prepared for the Parthenon, and presented for the first time to Pheidias, that Michael Linzey explores the unintended, or secret, life of drawings. Drawings, he argues, do not represent ideas, nor are they simply objective products of the experience we call architecture, but they present ideas to the world for the first time; they can take on a life of their own. For Stephen Loo, to draw is to call into visibility that which is to-come. However, Loo, in contrast with the Romantic notion of (architectural) genius that has long incarnated spirit to form, draws upon Giorgio Agamben's understanding of genius as an impersonal but inseparable pre-individual component to being human. For Loo, the mixture, or more correctly parallelism, of the instrumental and the imaginative, found, for example, in the drawings of Italian Rationalist Massimo Scolari, demonstrates what Frascari poetically calls "the transmutation of angles into angels".

A number of papers in this issue examine sets of design drawings. Susan Hedges explores the drawings of Lippincott's Smith and Caughey Building (1927), uncovering how scale is used to structure the ideas & imaginings of the architect. Here, drawing becomes an act of unraveling, of clarification, and of the step-by-step visualisation of complex forms. Andrew Barrie juxtaposes the "*okoshi-ezu*", a little-known drawing technique that emerged in seventeenth century Japan, with recent projects by Toyo Ito, to speculate on the shifting role of thinness in Ito's architecture. Simon Twose meditates on the interactive drawing process followed

in one his own projects. He explores the complex and dynamic relations between the building, the drawings, and the body of the drawer, concluding that during the design process these elements should be understood not as independent components interacting, but as intertwined, inseparable, and “intra-acting”.

This issue also includes refereed drawings by Michael Ostwald, Luke Pearson and Chris Morgan. These authors present collections of drawings, each accompanied by brief meditations which position the work within the current field of knowledge in drawing: Pearson echoes Hugh Ferriss’ illustrations of the United Nations’ building; Ostwald presents designs for a monument based on the mapping of historic events; and Morgan draws on a small work by Dubuffet.

In recent years, Auckland’s architecture culture has undergone a period of growth, with increasing numbers of lectures, exhibitions and publications. The non-refereed section includes projects and interviews with a number of recent visitors to Auckland. Los Angeles-based architect and academic Hitoshi Abe and Tokyo designer Akihisa Hirata visited the University of Auckland as part of their annual series of visiting speakers; we present examples of their most recent projects. Momoyo Kaijima of Atelier Bow-Wow taught and lectured around the country as the University of Auckland’s International Architect in Residence. She was interviewed by Sarosh Mulla and Patrick Loo, who present a meditation on her globally-admired design and research work. This section also includes reviews of a selection of this year’s local crop of books and exhibitions.

If a conclusion can be inferred from this issue on drawing, perhaps it is that, as Mike Davis suggests in his paper, drawings still work. Davis argues that we must shift to what he describes as a post-digital condition where, by critically re-evaluating and renegotiating the roles of the various instruments available, we come to understand that the “craft” of drawing applies across all drawing practices, both analogue and digital. This is an optimistic view of drawing: one which sees the gap some identify between traditional drawing methods and digital instruments as artificial, and in which drawing maintains its central role in architectural thinking and making. We too are optimistic about drawing, and hope you enjoy these diverse explorations of the role of drawing as much as we have enjoyed assembling them.

References

Los, S. (1966). Introduction to M. Massironi, *Vedere col disegno*. Padova: Marsiglio.