

WWW DRAWING Mehrdad Hadighi

There has been much recent conversation about drawing, perhaps due to the ubiquity of digitally output “drawings.” Articles have been written about the implicit value of hand drawing in comparison to computer-generated drawings; conferences and symposia on drawing have been held, even asking if drawing is dead!

WWW Drawing refers to two realms. One is the realm of the three “W” authors —West, Wines and Webb — who were on campus at Penn State University in late March 2013, making large-scale drawings with students in the Stuckeman Family Building. The other is the realm of the World Wide Web. This pairing is intended to instigate an exploration of the realm of drawing in relationship to techniques and technologies, above all through the physical act of drawing, but also by thinking, theorizing and writing about it.

Drawing is always already a mediated task: by the eye, the hand, the mind and the instrument of drawing. The Eye-mind-hand triangle — supposedly an unmediated, pure, environment for the passage of ideas, lines, and images — is far from that. At least since Henri Bergson's *Matter and Memory* (1911), we have known that the relationship between the world, its image on the retina, and our mental comprehension of that world is a mediated realm, far from pure, and far from direct. Following this logic, the eye-mind-hand realm is also a mediated environment. In this realm, techniques and technologies are only the most visible and outwardly expressed part of that mediation.

In fact, it is impossible to identify a “pure,” unmediated form of drawing, even in pre-“technological” times. The Ancient Egyptians invented and utilized a Wooden Corner Ruler, both for measuring and for drawing straight lines. The Nuragic people of Sardinia used compasses to draw circles. The Greeks invented a scaled ruler and used it to make architectural drawings. More complex drawing machines were invented more recently: Leonardo da Vinci invented a lathe-like machine in the late Fifteenth Century for drawing elliptic sections and, around the same period, Albrecht Dürer invented mechanical devices for drawing curves. In 1603, Christoph Scheiner invented the Pantograph to copy and scale drawings.

Drawing has been entangled with technique and technology since its inception, particularly drawings made for imitation. The Aristotelian definition of drawing as an imitative art placed it squarely in service of a referent — in Aristotle's case, of nature, the ultimate referent. In order to progress in this imitative arena, in representing the appearance of nature, questions of technique have always been paramount, and have not only assisted in depicting appearances; most importantly, they have shaped our cultural conceptions of our world, and our practices. Drawings of Chinese Gardens depicting depth as layers not only described their *appearance*, but also defined the Chinese Garden *conceptually*. The Renaissance invention of perspective as a drawing technique is intertwined with the Renaissance conception of “man” as well as the Renaissance organization of buildings and public spaces. In the Twentieth Century, the use of cinematographic technique in drawing has also served as a conceptual tool for reformulating our understanding of reality and nature.

So, why now, with the invention of digital technology, do we ask if drawing is dead? Was it not dead, already, when we discovered one-point perspective?

What appears to be an altogether “natural” drawing instrument, the pencil, was in fact not invented until the Sixteenth Century, when sheep farmers found a large deposit of graphite in England and used it for marking sheep, long before it was used for making drawings.

To restate: drawing is a mediated discipline. Its value is not constituted by how “pure” it is; its value is not constituted by how it depicts; its value is not constituted by how it expresses. Rather, its value is gauged in terms of critical practice: how drawing establishes and maintains a circulation between ideation and materialization, between things intelligible and things sensible. Although drawing appears as a static thing recorded on a medium, circulation is important in its conception. This is indeed the very thing that defines it. Every great drawing must circulate between the physical activity (whether by pencil, or by keyboard) and its criticism — the latter providing reflection that results in iteration and, thus, once again, a circulation through ideation and materialization.