

Writing/Drawing: Negotiating the Perils and Pleasures of Interiority

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Words and pictures are ubiquitous, inhaled with morning coffee and exhaled in conversations, skype encounters and daily life. It might be argued that navigating between the visual and the written always involves an oscillation, a turning between variably activated modes that both depend upon and deny each other. On the relationship between words, the visual and their manoeuvres, an impressive array of scholarly analysis has been undertaken, with careful shifts, Manichean separations and precise nuances. But words and images do not occupy a general condition and instead can be understood to operate in cartels, organizations and cultures; relations between words and pictures are played out in bureaucratic structures and strictures, constrained in informational science and institutional habits particular to social and cultural groups.¹

Within building and design cultures writing is often treated in an instrumental fashion (albeit subject to specific disciplinary codes), and is frequently attached to a picturing of a spatial condition, the image illustrating the import of the text. At times design writing is abbreviated, caption, notation or signature, and picturing can also be as abstract as code, measurement or diagram; each mode produces conditions of design predisposed by their discipline. Unlike other disciplines, interiority is uneasily placed in relationship to its traditional representation; perspectives attached to a drawing set, the flythrough running past the client, might be described as superfluous, excessive or unnecessary. Historical anxiety around three-dimensional interior imagery, the so-called meretriciousness of 19th century perspectives, continues with contemporary accusations alleging the triteness of rendered digital images.

Perhaps, however, it is the references that such interior representations make to life beyond the drawing set, beyond the instructional documents, that is disturbing. Interiority is attached to socially and culturally selected manifestations of power, gender, labour and materiality and when these conditions emerge in images of interiority, drawn or written, there is the potential to amplify or undermine usual disciplinary concerns. The moment of impropriety, the sore point, that seems to collect around images of interiority (written and drawn), might be, in part, because conventional representational systems tend to fail the full circumstances of interiority, collecting instead picturesque or conventional forms and resisting the complexity of the condition.

The provocation for this edition of the IDEA Journal called for considerations of the full potential of interiority. Images of interiority, both benign and invidiously under-the-skin, allowing evidence of the repressed, the marginalised and the suspect to leak back into disciplines were requested to contribute to the journal. The contributors were offered an occasion to bring together writing and image as they addressed the pleasures and perils of interiority. An example was offered: a description of a well-known house in Bordeaux by Rem Koolhaas, recounted by Susana Ventura on a visit to the house where she observes Guadalupe, the housekeeper;

I follow Guadalupe back and forth. She zigzags up the ramp of the patio. She says this is the best way not to be tired at the end. ... Off goes Guadalupe with the vacuum cleaner in hand, vacuuming everything she encounters. First, the kitchen. She displaces the movable furniture below the kitchen bench, vacuums the drawers, the countless bottles, the ceiling, the door ... She shakes the carpet on the patio, puts it back in place. Then on to the top floor, where she vacuums Marie's bathroom and bedroom, the elevator platform, every single corner she can find.²

Here the architectural interior is disclosed through a reporting of movement and a material and technical engagement with surface, writing into the interior both attentiveness and neglect, constructing interiority as abject, with the stuffy persistence of unwanted patina (shedding skin and adherence of soot), and as a form of worship, (gilded with polish). The interior is formed in writing in terms of movement and maintenance, with language that is both personal and detached; the mobility of the elevator signals a persistent condition of all houses. The house, shaped by writings and speech, is a different creature from its more prevalent photographed form; words draw out the labour of housework that tires the body.

Whereas disciplines such as architecture, engineering and industrial design are conventionally understood to operate with well defined codes controlling access to participation in the image

field, it seems that for studies of interiority the deployment of words and images are frequently activated through multifarious metaphors of strand, thread or fabric; through knots and windings, as an interweaving between the various disciplinary codes that construct the fields of interior design and architecture. Images of mobile surfaces and active lines, binding disparate matter together, often structure theoretical writing on interiority and this is so in many of the papers in this volume.

Another example offered in the provocation was a black and white line drawing of an interior set up by a vertical section perspective by Atelier Bow-Wow, described by Irene Cheng as a parody of a technical drawing incorporating;

...many elements normally excluded from construction documents, such as perspectival depth; silhouettes of human figures engaged in prosaic activities like eating, brushing teeth, gardening, and sleeping; props like slippers, stuffed animals, house plants, and shag rugs; outlines of the views seen through windows; and the obsessive rendering of textures like those of wood surfaces.³

Using outlines, silhouettes and heavily textured rugs Cheng describes a drawing that offers a technical interior, a dimensioned, constructed and abstract set of building information, that is also an inhabited, furnished narrative of daily life. She writes occupation into the image as an indeterminate condition; people, while depicted, are partial, lacking spatial density, textures are unnaturally heightened and views from the building are 'outlines' of some other more substantial condition. The stories told by the furnishings are improbably clean; there is no colour. The interior is enmeshed in the linear and technical fabrication of an architecture that is spatially uncategorized and Cheng, with her writing, points to prosaic details that sustain a more open interiority.

Using metaphors of materiality and fabrication writers bind and unbind interiority, productively fissuring or rending images and words. The deployment of fabric, and its actions, in pursuit of an understanding of the relationship between text and image

might be because of the elasticity of fabric, its associations with production or/and its potential for transformative moves. For example Jacques Khalip and Robert Mitchell in the introduction to *Releasing the Image: From literature to New Media*, discuss Derek Jarman's film, *Blue*, made as he blindly approached death. Khalip and Mitchell use the following language:

By linking the indexicality of its aural register – the sense, that is, that we are listening to traces and recordings of voices and events that existed before and outside the film – to its refusal of representation in its visual register, *Blue* engenders a new sense of the image, one that is not intended to represent something else, but instead binds seeing and hearing together in a different way, and as such it requires the development of new forms of listening and seeing.⁴

The absence of representational images, the glow of luminous blueness and the snippets of words, sounds and music convey not only the loss of sight but also the fading interiorization of life. Seeing is not representational and is bound to words in speech.

Jacques Rancière addresses connections between writing and sight, the sayable and the visible and how they mutually inform each other. He proposes that images 'are . . . operations: relations between a whole and parts; between a visibility and a power of signification and affect associated with it; between expectations and what happens to meet them.'⁵ Rather than being static representations he suggests that images operate between strands of signification and visibility and external expectations. Released from the logic of representation the image for Rancière has an unbound potentiality with possibilities that are both spatial and concerned with configurations of inhabitation:

What interests me is the way in which, by drawing lines, arranging words or distributing surfaces, one also designs divisions of communal space. It is the way in which, by assembling words or forms, people define not merely various forms of art, but certain configurations of what can be seen and what can be thought, certain forms of inhabiting the material world.⁶

This edition of the IDEA Journal is focussed on the representation of interiority as it reveals imbricated relationships between textual and visual work, with each term prone to engaging in the other's production. Words can deploy a visibility in excess of some media even as visual elements can be organised to reveal textual and analogical patterns. The connections between words and the visual might be like Stan Allen's account of '[a]rchitectural representation [which] is in some basic way impure, or unclassifiable,'⁷ or as for Rancière, for whom the 'equivalence of the graphic and the visual creates the link between the poet's types and the engineer's. It visualizes the idea which haunts both of them – that of a common physical surface where signs, forms, and acts become equal.'⁸

The contradictions and conflicts between regimes of representation are necessary as Rancière has argued and his interest in the manner in which language and the visible recondition each other is part of the provocation. Rancière uses an active and particular metaphor of fabrication, plaiting, to describe the relationship between words and forms; 'Presence and representation are two regimes of the plaiting of words and forms. The regime of the visibility of the 'immediacies' of presence is still configured through the mediation of words.'⁹ The papers in the volume operate with a variety of strategies in relationship to the connections between words and images.

'The House of Ezra Pound: A one-family dwelling for a sociopathic philosopher, or the First Monadic Architecture Manifesto' by **Jorge León** and **Ismael Martín** seeks to undermine all apparent distinctions between the exterior and interior. Theoretically drawing on their client's interest in Ezra Pound's 'Vorticist' works and Leibniz's 'monad', a simple substance that is without parts, the house design is shaped as an intentional ambiguity that does not differentiate between the internal space and the external space of the house. The discussion that attends to the design language also draws together the process that attended the design and the strands of thinking that inform the design. The writing



Above
Figure 1: Peter Eisenman, Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, Berlin, 2005. Source: Russell Rodrigo



has attained a density that swathes the design in a deep temporal condition. And the design, sharp and compelling, asserts its own world, even as it traces the lines of thinking expounded in the text. In 'Binding Interiority' **Marian Macken** considers hybrid constructions, books and active drawings that refuse to be situated as only textual or visual constructions. Using Charles Rice's important insight into the double emergence of the representation of the interior of a building and the sense of interiority, Macken pursues the 'interior's doubleness', addressing the 'sense which involves the reality of the interior's spatiality as well as its condition as an image, one that can be imagined and dreamed, and inhabited as such'.¹⁰ Macken precisely traces images that dissolve architecture into gaps and repetitions, chasing the complications of interiorised external conditions and the temporal flick of a page that opens up the closure of the book form. Her words and images in combination construct the argument.

Russell Rodrigo's paper reads between Maya Lin's *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* and Peter Eisenman's *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* discussing the roles of minimalist aesthetics and memory. Rodrigo constructs a careful argument that, unlike the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial*, the inhabited interiority of the *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* is primarily one of performance and play rather than reflection and understanding. Alongside the text Rodrigo's photographs provide other readings and activate reflective attention: In one image two small girls run between the enclosing concrete blocks and sharp oblique knives of light cut between their fleeing feet (Figure 1). Lost futures of murdered children are recalled in contrast to the health and vigour of the pink-clad children. Children running away always activate a fleeting frisson of anxiety; play is indicative of serious issues.

A second photograph depicts black and white clad young people clustered at the base of tall blocks. Above the uniform group a similarly dressed young man holds himself between two concrete surfaces. His body is taut, maintained in tension, balance only just sustained and resistance necessary to avoid re-consumption into the group below. The history of the Holocaust raises questions

of absorption in group dynamics and behaviour and the dangers of mass behaviour. The images cannot be innocent. Rodrigo, between his scrupulous text and his candid images, allows the inevitable complications that emerge from such a critical piece of architecture.

Simon Weir in his essay 'Paranoiac Critical Interiorisations: Odysseus in Mies van der Rohe's Seagram Building and Buckminster Fuller's domes', makes a text that is both richly visual and writerly, collaging across time with persistent epic images and utilising Salvador Dalí's paranoiac critical method. The Siren's voices are heard and missed; blandishments resisted only by the stout ropes that lash Ulysses to the mast. The fibrous resistance of rope operates against songs that weave the air in order to charm the sailors even as Weir's own practice of interpretation, shifting between the critical, the concrete and the poetic, beguiles the reader.

Ro Spankie's essay 'Drawing Out the Censors' Room' traces the repetition of a room in a sequence of building and rebuilding for the Royal College of Physicians in London. The sequence extends across many years and the room is seen to both persevere and change in form. In order to present the evidence of the room over time developed surface drawings were constructed by Spankie. This type of drawing, seen as speculative and analytical, presents only proportions and geometries of the interior wall surfaces and appropriately conveys the ungrounded condition of the Censors' Room. The walls barely hinge together at the corners and the potential for rupture at the junctions, as Spankie points out, is architecturally exploited by Denys Lasdun. Unfolded, dematerialised, demonstrating the chokehold of history, the precise and elegant drawings, discarding structure, offer an absence of occupation and the emptiness of function.

In his essay, 'Kissing the Sky: James Turrell's Skyspaces', **Chris Cottrell** addresses an early installation by James Turrell called *Meeting*. Cottrell argues that his initial phenomenological reading of Turrell's work, based on his experience of the space event, was insufficient for the complexity of the conditions of interiority activated by the work. Utilising Sylvia Lavin's productive notion of

'kissing' a nuanced and insightful account is constructed revealing a pliable and dynamic notion of spatial threshold. The essay works from the premise of the interior, distinct from architecture, operating as a site of experimentation, coordinating surface and atmospheres.

In **Emma Cheatle's** 'Recording the Absent Inside the Maison de Verre' diagrams trace new architectural narratives of the well-known house *Maison de Verre* by Pierre Chareau. Revealing unexpected underlying structures, weaving together and fraying apart various lines of occupation, Cheatle sensitively crafts a written and drawn account that acknowledges the gendered, class and emotional conditions of architecture. The diagrams register visual and physical movement with sharp certainty even as they complicate conventional understandings of the house.

As a design research essay 'Spatial Fragments, Visual Distortions and Processes of Sense Making', by **Gabriele Kneuppel** is constructed in the context of practice and therefore a utilitarian cast might initially colour its reception. The paper, despite its mode of interview and analysis, is a compelling advocate for the efficacy of writing. The language of the interviewees reveals a world in which spatial conditions are partial, blurred and unfixed. Hélène Cixous, writing on her myopia and its removal, sketches the complications and losses between clear sightedness and the mists of partial vision; 'Is seeing the supreme enjoyment? Or else is it: no-longer-not-seeing?'¹¹ Kneuppel's writing drawn from the fascinating interviews, acknowledges Massumi's concept of the biogram, and produces an account of vision as dynamic, filtered by the mind and lived experience.

Karamia Muller's essay, 'Relational drawing as agency: negotiating the tangible and intangible of Samoan diaspora social space', considers the representation of the space of the Samoan community in Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand. Conventional architectural representation selects and represents conditions of space based on historical and disciplinary norms and the essay suggests that these neglect, conceal or differ from a Samoan cultural perspective. Rather than stepping away from disciplinary practice Muller instead utilises codes and techniques

Opposite

Figure 2: Peter Eisenman, Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, Berlin, 2005. Source: Russell Rodrigo.

against the grain. The close reading of space with relational documentation brings into view values of the Samoan diaspora. Muller describes the process as plaiting and her intertwining of cultural and design perspectives results in a series of drawings that are both formally innovative and socially critical.

The paper 'Cavum/Plenum: interpretations of domestic space' by **Michela Bassanelli** questions whether it still possible to consider individual houses as shelters for retreat and withdrawal. Utilising notions of cavum and plenum and drawing on Italian architect Aldo Cibic's notion of 'being there' the essay argues that a shift in attention from abstract spatial conditions to the involvement of actions and people is already apparent in contemporary architectural representation. Bassanelli considers the expanded architectural images from firms such as SAANA and Atelier Bow Wow.

The photo essay, 'Rendering the [Im]material', by **James Carey** cites words from Malevich: 'I have broken the blue boundary of color limits, come out into the white, besides me comrade-pilots swim in this infinity.' The passage continues, 'I have established the semaphore of Suprematism. I have beaten the lining of the colored sky, torn it away and in the sack that formed itself, I have put color and knotted it. Swim! The free white sea lies before you.'¹²

The sky is conceived as knotted together and containing the colours of the world. In contrast a white, infinite sea is imagined in which to swim. Carey's photographs, beating the boundaries, dissolve, fray and transform buildings, revealing woven structures beneath smooth plaster surfaces. Even as the photo essay evokes effortless movement through water it also attests to the resistance of matter. Physical labour counted in the unit of payment – a day's work, a seven-day project. Images of thickly material interiority investigate walls that are illuminated in their intermittent presence, on off, in out. Walls and floors register immaterial conditions of daily life as they transform into secret shrines, patterns of weather conditions and clouds of disapproval that overwhelm a small, banished child.

Each essay in this volume acknowledges, in different ways, the inclinations and liabilities of interiority. In each account, between words and images gaps appear that let the winds of the world circulate. Utilising images of threads and fabric, material is rent apart even as containment is signalled. For Georges Didi-Huberman the 'rend functions in dreams as the very motor of something that will be between a desire and a constraint – the constraining desire to figure. To figure despite everything, thus to force, thus to rend. And in this constraining movement, the rend opens the figure, in all of this verb's many senses.'¹³ Acts of fabrication, the papers in this collection rend open the conventions of the material that they address and, deploying words and/or pictures, they figure the wonder and complexity of interiority.

NOTES

1. Bernard Stiegler wrote, "The image in general does not exist. What is called the mental image and what I shall call the image-object (which is inscribed in *history*, and in a *technical history*) are two faces of a single phenomenon." In Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, *Echographies of Television*, trans. Jennifer Bajorek (Camb.: Polity Press, 2002), 147.
2. Susana Ventura, "Being Stuck: Between Reality and Fiction." *Log* 16 (Spring/Summer 2009): 145.
3. Irene Cheng, "House of Mirth: Atelier Bow-Wow's Ironies." *Harvard Design Magazine* 29 (Fall/Winter 2008-9): 62.
4. Jacques Khalip and Robert Mitchell, eds, "Introduction: Release-(Non-)Origination-Concepts," in *Releasing the Image: From Literature to New Media* (Stanford California: Stanford University Press, 2011), 2-3.
5. Jacques Rancière, *The Future of the Image* (London & NY: Verso, 2009), 3.
6. *Ibid.*, 91.
7. Stan Allen, *Practice: Architecture Technique + Representation* (London & NY: Routledge, 2009), 41.
8. Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, 99.
9. *Ibid.*, 79.
10. Charles Rice, *The Emergence of the Interior: Architecture, Modernity Domesticity* (London & NY: Routledge, 2007), 2.
11. Hélène Cixous and Jacques Derrida, *Veils*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Stanford, California, Stanford University Press, 2001), 9.
12. Kazimir Malevich, 'Catalogue 10th State Exhibition', Moscow, 1919, as cited in Barbara Rose, *Autocritique: Essays on Art and Anti-art, 1963-1987* (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1988), 71.
13. Georges Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images: Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press), 2005, 153.