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TOWARDS A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF DRAWING

Raquel Pelayo

University of Porto, Portugal. i2ADS - Research Institute in Art, Design and Society
mpelayo@arq.up.pt

Review of Seymour Simmons III, The Value of Drawing Instruction in the Visual Arts and Across Curricula –
Historical and Philosophical Arguments for Drawing in the Digital Age, New York, NY: Routledge, 2021

I wish I had written this book! I wish I had had the time and patience to gather so much relevant data to propose and substantiate essential arguments for teaching Drawing as a fundamental subject at any age and in any area of education, because it serves the full development of the human mind! Seymour Simmons III, Professor of Fine Arts Emeritus at Winthrop University (US), based this long and exhaustive work on a panoramic understanding of Drawing, gradually built up over his career as an artist, art educator, and a researcher on arts education, specializing in Drawing.

I met Simmons a decade ago, in 2012, at the Wimbledon College of Art, University of London, on the occasion of the Thinking Through Drawing 2 - Drawing in STEAM conference. It was a happy and memorable meeting due to our shared view of the breadth of Drawing and the fact that, along with our backgrounds in Visual Arts, we both have graduate degrees in Education: Philosophy of Education for Simmons, and Education Sciences for me. These perspectives allowed us to ask different kinds of questions about teaching Drawing, so this new book urged me to write a few words about it.

Another thing that brought us closer together was my professional experience in teaching and research. Although a painter by training, I have always taught Drawing, and, for the last 20 years, I have taught the fundamentals of observational drawing to future architects at the School of Architecture of the University of Porto. While its counterparts around the world dispensed with drawing as a foundational skill long ago, our School requires two years of drawing taught by Fine Arts graduates. The first year course, Desenho 1 (Drawing 1) involves two, four-hour classes per week of freehand observational drawing using traditional media and subject matter, including the figure. The second year, Desenho 2 (Drawing 2) applies freehand drawing to architectural practices with less than half the class time of Drawing 1. There is no use of digital technology those first two years, but even after students begin designing in digital media, hand-drawing is required in architecture classes through to graduation. In these ways, our program maintains high standards in drawing and that expertise has been recognized in our graduates and alumni – including Pritzker Prize winning architects Siza Vieira and Souto de Moura. Also, the centrality of observational drawing in the curriculum helps explain why this public Architecture program is placed among the top 100 world-wide and the 50 best in Europe, however peripheric our country may be.

Simmons also emphasizes the importance of hand-drawing in fields like Architecture today, but my first objective in discussing his book is to highlight its visionary character, that is, the importance that I foresee for future generations when narrow views of Drawing are broadened and misunderstandings about it are overcome. The most pernicious of those prejudices, as Simmons points out in the opening text, is to conceive Drawing as a talent that only a few are born with. An idea whose stubborn longevity only can be explained by its connection to the popular concept of artistic genius, that dates back to the Renaissance and insists on populating the imagination even today. Instead, the thesis of Simmons' book is that Visual Thinking (considering the senses as a whole) is a structuring function of every human mind, and that Drawing, as a central visual thinking tool regardless of the type of knowledge or intelligence, is applicable across all curricula.

This view is supported by recent data from Cognitive Science research, pointing to the important role of mental imagery in human thought, defying the common idea that we think mostly in words (Kosslyn, Thompson & Ganis, 2009).

Despite such research, most present-day curricula are grounded on the assumption that Visual Art is a peripheral area of knowledge and that Drawing occupies an even smaller space within it. The result is that, apart from artists and designers, drawing skills are not cultivated by other areas, although they use them and, for lack of training in this area, students cannot reach their full potential. This vision of Drawing, as a specialization domain and, what is worse, the exclusion or reduction of Drawing from the curricula in common and compulsory core pre-university education - recently extended to Brazil and England - represents a great loss to what educational systems should ensure: that new generations, regardless of the area they work in, become fully qualified to face any challenge, however difficult they may be, to future societies and humanity in general.

Fortunately, in my institution, the University of Porto, we witness the opposite. This year, two drawing majors were created across departments for students enrolled in any of the fifteen faculties. They aim to encourage students to "think outside the box." Also, an inquiry is going on to find out how drawing is used inside the university in all its schools and in all areas of knowledge from law to medicine, engineering to humanities, to name only a few. DRAWinU, as this research project is called, is housed at the Fine Arts Faculty research unit (i2ADS), where I am affiliated. Simmons' book is going to be a resource for that initiative, where it also reminds us of how Drawing was understood in the past.

Drawing education has historically lost the momentum it once had, for example, during the age of industrialization not so long ago. Simmons recalls that Drawing was a critical educational foundation then, as it was in antiquity, but this has faded as postmodernity and the digital age emerged, bringing with them remarkable new pictorial technologies, although their advantages can be misleading. The intellectual skills provided by learning how to draw to the human mind begin and evolve with the direct use of the brain-body, grabbing the most basic scratching utensil. Such skills are not replaceable by mechanically mediated pre-programmed computing, and the focus only on the production of quick and largely "virtual" results leaves the culture of consistent human competencies in the lurch. This lack of vision will ultimately cost future societies dearly.

Many reasons have been advanced for what happened, including the immediatist logic of political neoliberalism (Akai, 2022), but whatever the cause, Drawing has been impacted, sometimes in paradoxical ways. For example, as never before has Drawing become ubiquitous, and, also, as never before has the significance of Drawing in education blurred. In Taylor's (2008) words, "the constitutive problem [is] that if Drawing is everything, then it is also nothing - or at least nothing special."

At the same time, Drawing is emerging as an autonomous domain of research and teaching, but many of the same difficulties are involved in such an endeavor. In this regard, Garner (2008) pointed out that "Drawing today is characterized by diversity," that its research and practice have become symbiotic, that its boundaries have eroded, and that its corpus of knowledge needs documenting to establish itself. Meanwhile, Taylor (2008) points to the "informality" and "pluralities of Drawing" disciplinary research as barriers to be overcome.

This is the heterogeneous and problematic context of Simmons' admirable work. Facing such intricate issues, the book is structured to join together three different interwoven fields: History, Philosophy, and Psychology. A comprehensive History of Drawing works as a backdrop and is always present throughout the chapters. It maintains a permanent reference to Drawing's legacy, from earliest memory to the present. In its turn, Philosophy's use is to inform and reorganize Drawing's legacy in ways that make sense today, while ensuring that the relationship of Drawing to the wider history of knowledge is

intelligible for all. That is crucial if the discourses of a Drawing Theory are to be shared with other areas of inquiry. This approach results in an unprecedented contribution both to Educational Sciences and to Drawing Theory, and may be one of the most robust contributions in recent times to the establishment of Drawing Instruction as a theoretical field in its own right. This is, therefore, a mandatory book for educators, artists, and researchers alike.

In assembling arguments, including examples, evidence, and explanations, in support of learning to draw in the digital age, Simmons methodically creates a rigorous taxonomy of five paradigms of Drawing Instruction, - as design, as seeing, as experiencing, as expression, and as visual language. Simmons uses the Theory of Multiple Intelligences by Howard Gardner (1983), with whom he worked directly in his Harvard days, as the psychological framework for the difficult task. He also takes up his earlier ideas (Simmons, 1994) identifying philosophical principles underlying the various modes of graphic representation as well as the ways different eras viewed, used, and taught Drawing. The five instructional paradigms are addressed in the middle chapters of the book where they gather - according to these philosophical and psychological bases - the various preexisting concepts of Drawing, which have remained scattered, disjointed, some nebulous, others mixed, and still others at odds with each other. Here, too, the privileged relationships that each paradigm establishes with certain areas of knowledge outside Visual Art are also indicated.

In "Drawing as Design" Drawing is a mental tool for understanding, or creating, something based on logical thinking as defined by Rationalism (Platonic, Neoplatonic, Aristotelian, or Cartesian), where reason is considered the foundation of certainty in knowledge. Deductive reasoning is most often used in this model of Drawing, which requires and/or develops Logical-Mathematical Intelligence. Its use can be found in different areas of knowledge: in Art, Design, and Architecture, but also in Mathematics, Science, Technology, and Engineering.

"Drawing as Seeing" is when Drawing as visual thinking is a means to apprehend the appearance of things. Here, Drawing is the very tool of Empiricism since this philosophical stance is founded on the belief that knowledge is revealed from direct perception. Used in this way, Drawing requires and/or develops Spatial Intelligence and deals primarily with inductive reasoning. Examples can easily be found in Art and Medicine, as well as in Natural Sciences, where knowledge about the natural world is based on observation.

Simmons uses the title "Drawing as Experience and Experiment" when Drawing is means of reflective thinking, a way to facilitate imagination, inspiration, and creativity. Philosophically, he associates this paradigm with Pragmatism in which knowledge is based on doing something and undergoing the consequences, an action-oriented approach that brings together intellect and body. The intelligence at work here is Gardner's Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence, as it seeks a mind-body connection. Abductive reasoning is the main form of logical inference with examples from Art as well as Experimental Science, including even Theoretical Physics.

For "Drawing as Expression," Simmons refers to Drawing as means of emotional cognition, meaning capturing the emotions expressed by someone or something. The philosophical focus switches from Epistemology to Ethics, and the paradigm that frames this modality is Existentialism, which takes human beings not as a collective essence, but as unique individuals. Gardner's Intelligences at work here are Intrapersonal and Interpersonal, which correspond to knowledge of oneself and others. With examples

from Art, Art Therapy, and Psychology, this area is the most unexplored in contemporary educational systems.

Finally, "Drawing as visual language" is when Drawing is a means of encoding thought by creating symbolic systems of meaning. Here, Semiotics, the study of signs, symbols, and signification, is pointed to as the conceptual paradigm for the ever-open modalities of using Drawing. Gardner's Intelligences at work here are Linguistic and Musical, with Drawing as the origin of written language and musical notation.

Simmons substantiates and characterizes each of these approaches to Drawing Instruction with relevant theoretical references as well as examples of drawings by children, adolescents, and adults. In the process, one can sense the vastness of the landscape as pedagogical experiences are explored; as the larger place that Drawing could, or should, have in education is proposed; as international data and arguments are provided for serious and informed reflection by educational decision-makers; as several ways are pointed out to meet the challenges of the digital age, while taking advantage of its predominantly visual potential to facilitate the teaching of Drawing.

This is one important achievement of Simmons' book: that it gathers, organizes, clarifies, and makes sense of the varied legacy of knowledge about Drawing Instruction available today. Another is taking the reader on a historical journey through how the mental power of Drawing has been explored within different philosophical conceptions of knowledge and how Drawing Instruction addressed the social, political, economic, and cultural challenges in each era, while expanding functions and roles in the practice and teaching of Drawing itself.

By exploring in these ways the ideas and concepts underlying different approaches to the teaching of Drawing, this book contributes to overcoming the aforementioned difficulties that we face today. By crossing boundaries and finding bridges, the author helps to mitigate what Petherbridge (2008) called the "slippery and irresolute [nature of Drawing] in its fluid state". He also combats another problem pointed out by Garner (2008) - the "tendency towards isolation, introspection and repetition" in current Drawing research that also results from the lack of a comprehensive work like this one. Simmons' challenging but stimulating discourse makes clear and apprehensible what is complex or ambiguous, a virtue of only a few.

At the same time, Simmons generously makes available a collection of references to authors from the Renaissance, like Leon Battista Alberti (1450/2013) - or that great figure, still so little known, Francisco de Holanda (1548/1984) - to the contemporary Deanna Petherbridge (2010), passing through remarkable authors of drawing manuals, even forgotten ones like Horace Lecoq de Boisbaudran (1848/1911). As a result, future research becomes easier to conduct once one can rapidly identify any author's main line of thought.

Simmons has not written a book of opinion or a critical review, but what could be called a contemporary treatise on Drawing Instruction. For me, it brought to mind Le Corbusier (Tzonis, 2001) who repeatedly used the expression "Les yeux qui ne voyent pas" (the eyes that do not see) because, for him, seeing is more a cognitive than retinal phenomenon. This herald of modern architecture defined Drawing as means to "observe, discover... invent and create". Likewise, I thought of Michelangelo, who observed that "che bisognava avere le seste negli occhio e non in mani perché le mani operano, e l'occhio giudica" (it is necessary to have the compass in the eyes, not in the hand because the hands do but it is the eye

that judges) (Pelayo, 2019, p.12). These views on Drawing, shared by great architects, are part of the culture I live in daily at the University of Porto School of Architecture. They also allow me to understand in-depth the pertinence and scope of what Simmons proposes, in opposition to recent trends in drawing instruction in Art and Architecture.

I believe the triumphant and rapid dissemination of modern methods of teaching Drawing in the fifties soon fell into the temptation of uncritical facilitation that derived from its iconoclastic point of view. But this teaching became dangerously disposable as it devalued the primordial function of representation lying at the very core of Drawing to focus instead on experimenting with the properties of materials. Later, by the end of the second half of the twentieth century, the ill-considered decision to abandon the fundamentals of Drawing by some Schools of Art, under the direct influence of a conceptual euphoria, opened the door, once again, to the idea that Drawing is a disposable subject. For these reasons, we should not be surprised by the recent cuts in common core subjects in university art education in some countries. It seems to me that there is no point in pointing fingers at certain policies. Simmons does not fall into this narrow perspective. Instead, he looks at the bigger picture.

If Drawing Instruction is to acquire robustness in education it is vital to strengthen the theory behind it. That's what Simmons does when he considers the ultimate consequences of viewing Drawing as something prior to and independent of Art. This implies recognizing that, throughout Western History, Art uses the mental skills or visual intelligence of Drawing as any other area of knowledge does. It is with this objective, trans-historical, and multidisciplinary perspective that Drawing is redefined as something that results from a universal human impulse to represent. This argument, in turn, allows us to understand the ability to draw as a central pillar that sustains human intelligence in all its forms, something that education systems cannot be indifferent to or underestimate.

This book is addressed to anyone who wants to look the future in the eye. It is a roadmap for navigating the main lines of a Theory of Drawing Instruction now possible in all its authority, complexity, and multiplicity, whose foundations Simmons indicates. In it also lie the foundations of an educational theory for the digital age. And, if this era is characterized by immediacy, let us remember that Drawing is the most immediate process for harmonizing knowledge and action.

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