TOWARD A RESISTANT DRAWING

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The text reflects on the five years of activity of the IMG journal, highlighting its role as a bulwark against the fragmentation of studies and the ambiguity of research focuses in the field of Drawing. In an academic context increasingly driven by quantity rather than quality, spaces of "resistance" emerge where technical sensitivity and critical vision merge into a balanced and innovative image of the future. The impact of new technologies, such as clouds of dots, algorithms, and artificial intelligence, is analysed, as they risk overshadowing traditional methods of architectural representation, which are essential for a critical understanding of architecture. Despite the trend towards hyper-productivity, solid research persists, integrating innovative tools with a rigorous methodological approach. The IMG journal stands out for its ability to combine past, present, and future, fostering interdisciplinary dialogue and critical reflection on representation, while maintaining a balance between technological innovation and cultural depth.

INTRODUCTION

A review of the IMG journal's five years of full activity, which corresponds to ten consecutive issues animated by the same generous energy with method and perseverance, cannot be separated from a reflection on what is happening within the –albeit broad and discontinuous– confines of the disciplinary area of Drawing. In this brief note, we would like to share the outcomes of some impassioned conversations between the authors to whom it appears evident how –in a panorama that is in some ways worrying and seems to prelude a sort of generalised disengagement from the fundamentals of the discipline– there still exist solid places of "resistance", in which sensitivity to the demands posed by the progress of technical means and even by the needs posed by the practice of academic evaluation manages to merge with a complete, balanced and at the same time visionary image of the future.

In times of constant renewal, it is now evident how IMG constitutes a solid bulwark against the spread of two widespread *biases*, that of the fragmentation of studies and the ambiguity of the research focus.

FRAGMENTATION

Clouds of dots, extraordinary remote–controlled flying objects, virtual tours for improbable surveys, the study of algorithms, tables, virtual immersions, the almost automatic production of images produced by AI, have generated the disappearance of those drawings in 'healthy' orthogonal or axonometric projection (or even in Brunelleschi's perspective) that can give an account of any architectural artefact in order to observe its quality and criticality.

The thermometer of this state of the art are the countless essays produced within the discipline of 'Drawing', some often supported by repeated arguments produced by

the same author, in which we frequently witness paradoxes generating bittersweet smiles; it happens, for example, to come across small collected essays on the survey of a small artefact in place 'X' photographed by 'Y', an inhabitant of 'Xland', and processed by 'Z', 'M', 'N' and 'P' who have never visited 'Xland' or touched the artefact itself.

The virtual survey, without the surveyor: the discipline of the future...

Images that some fools would consider 'obsolete', elaborated with the oldest (but still solid and standardized) methods of representation, are often replaced in scientific products, with contented happiness and lightness, by illegible screenshots showing applications of NeRF or Gaussian Splatting codes in which all simple metric data, the foundation of any architectural survey, disappears. Even today, more than twenty years later, Vittorio Ugo's words seem very topical: "Amazing special effects, renderings, photorealism, solid modelling... in reality they almost always conceal an emptiness of content, an absence of criticism and an expressive poverty directly proportional to the prevalence of image over form, of Darstellung over Vorstellung" (Ugo, 2004, p. 8).

This type of study leaves room for considerations about their existence that manifest a kind of engineering/informatics character of the scientific interests in vogue today, but also attempts to transform and disguise, often badly, topography and photogrammetry research for design studies.

The causes of this inordinate bulimia of production/confusion can be traced back to the continuous demand underlying the academic evaluation criteria for a plethora of research 'products' (sic!) whose value lies essentially in their volume rather than in their content.

It would seem, then, that we are witnessing the formation of real teams, ready to take the field in a match between 'bachelors' and 'married men', set up to win the most points in the general classification of the Thai A league, whose technical level, it is a well-known fact, has never reached sufficiency; but in a democratically sporting world,

the A league is everywhere, even in the neighbourhood oratories. Instead, it would be a case of playing in more structured tournaments where amateurism is not contemplated, and referees are more rigorous[1].

The consequence of playing at all costs and in any league is that both (critical) measurement and architecture 'disappear'; or rather, interest in questions about the representation of architecture disappears altogether.

Vittorio Ugo, with the lucidity that distinguished his thinking, argued that "having assumed the centrality of the project as a specific form of architectural knowledge, representation is configured as the privileged place both of its formation and elaboration, and of the interpretation and critical analysis of the built work. Representation is therefore to be understood as a technical and conceptual structure that regulates and manages, in both directions, the complex relationship that exists between the objectively heterogeneous spheres of 'words' (i.e. theory, criticism, aesthetics, history...) and the 'things' of designed and built architecture, considering, furthermore, analysis and project as entirely contiguous and integrated phases. The formative role of representation thus clearly prevails over the merely communicative one" (Ugo, 2004, p. 7). The words of the Palermitan scholar are echoed in many solid researches in the sector that, going beyond the desire to be a mere expression of productive quantity and acting as a counterbalance to the instructions on which photographic lenses to use, sink their gaze between visual method and intellectual intention, exploring the themes of visual culture with exactitude or, for example, investigate ancient optics and the models of vision after Euclid with extreme scientific rigour.

Tracing and describing today's trajectories of design studies is not easy as the search for meaning is often overwhelmed by an obsessed hyper –productivity generating great confusion. But as has happened throughout the history of civilisation, the action of resistance has never relented, sometimes expressing itself in extraordinary insights[2].

AIMING POINT

As mentioned, in recent decades more than in any other historical period, technological evolution has radically transformed operational practices in the field of representation and survey, introducing increasingly sophisticated tools. These tools have fascinated the most recent generations of scholars, sometimes pushing them towards an almost 'exhibitionist' use of technology. Although this has generally been able to raise the average level of research results, one cannot ignore how the enthusiasm for these innovations has sometimes risked blurring the critical sense, favouring an excessive focus on their technical capabilities rather than their real methodological and cultural value.

The comparison –often competitive– that led to the ostentation of metric precision and the quantity of data acquired in surveying justified, for example, the sharing of enormous –and 'heavy', albeit virtual– point clouds, which became the symbol of an innovation that risked proving sterile and cumbersome. However, these risks are not exclusive to our time. Already in the past, the introduction of innovative technological tools has aroused similar enthusiasm. Suffice it to say that even in the early 1990s, expert lecturers proudly glorified the performance of their (already) antiquated photogrammetric restitutors, showing how the uncritical fascination with technological progress has deep roots. The definition of the so–called 'digital twins' even led some to speculate that a sort of 'end of history' of representation was approaching, in which virtual models could completely replace the experience of the real thing. Such a faith in technology runs the risk of forgetting the ductility and cultural breadth of the disciplinary field of Drawing, which, by its intrinsic nature –as emphasised in the recent declaratory which explicitly recalls a scientific-technological field and a social-humanistic one– aims at balancing the correct acquisition of data with their critical processing.

Despite this trend, the renewed interest in traditional drawing and graphic analysis techniques that has emerged in recent years shows that each new mode of representation does not replace the previous ones, but enriches them, contributing to defining an ever–expanding methodological arsenal. Innovative technologies offer new keys to interpretation and surprising analogies with reality, but do not undermine the established value of traditional practices, which maintain an intrinsic and irreplaceable specificity. As Nita Faharany recalls with regard to the new acquisitions of neuroscience, "society does not adapt at the same speed as technology"[3], and the risk is that the gap between technology and disciplinary awareness will lead to the uncritical predominance of the former. Probably the wisest solution lies in committing one's energies to the construction of conceptual structures capable of managing the disciplinary implications of technical innovations in every field. Quality research is based on the solidity of questions posed from a well–defined disciplinary theme, within which the use of technology takes on a precise role and meaning. The most desirable fate for any innovative device, having passed the initial phase of experimentation, is to be brought back to its role as a tool, to an even 'routine' condition, integrated into solid operational practices. A critical approach to new tools, in this sense, cannot but open up unprecedented reflections, orienting both analytical and creative paths in an original way and triggering, as Vittorio Ugo (Ugo, 1994, pp. 15 –19) –whose predictive lucidity never ceases to amaze– once again recalled, the need for in–depth reflection on the heuristic potential of every mode of representation. It is precisely in this direction that the reflections of Riccardo Migliari take on particular value. In a recent note, he described 'hybrid drawing', an operative mode that fluidly combines analogue and digital drawing, proposing an exemplary synthesis that seems to resolve any previous conflict between the two different modes of operation (Migliari, 2023).

CONCLUSIONS

IMG's editorial proposals, relevant and sometimes surprising, trace an intense and recent history characterised by a clear militancy on these issues and represent an exemplary condition of balance, supported moreover by a truly multidisciplinary nature of the scientific committee, reviewers, and authors. Purely by way of example, which could be extended to practically all issues of the journal, a collection of essays such as the one in the third issue, Remediating Distance, shows in a timely manner how a substantial theme, urgently posed to the scientific community by the 2020 pandemic, cannot but be tackled with the support of knowledge and technical solutions, referring them, however, to specific interdisciplinary thematic areas and proposing complex and inclusive readings.

An old paediatrician –joking, but not so much– used to say that children who can already stand, first learn to walk and then to run when they move their head forward and, in order not to fall, they have to chase it, moving their legs. IMG's proposals always seem to be underpinned by a knowledge of the past and a solid awareness of the present, but they find their energy from the willingness to move into the future, carrying the head forward, building an unstable but confident balance, oriented with curiosity towards what we do not yet know.

NOTES

1 A small metaphorical glossary: team=a large group of authors; points=number of articles; ranking=indicators; A series=A class; Thai=little science; technical rate=coherence, originality and methodological rigour; tournaments=magazines; structured=not simple containers; referees=reviewers.
2 In the economy of meaning of the text, reference is made to Francesco Venezia's 2014 book, *Nel profondo della cattedrale*. Caserta 2010 –2014, with facing Latin text.
3 <https://www.ted.com/talks/nita_farahany_when_technology_can_read_minds_how_will_we_protect_our_privacy?subtitle=en>

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