Experiential Design – Rethinking relations between people, objects and environments

• Paper / Proposal Title:
Narrative Drawing as an Agent of Memory Re-Collection and Retention

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• Abstract (300 words):
They say a picture is worth a thousand words, a visually tangible piece of evidence documenting past experiences. Perhaps that is so, but I suggest its value is limited to a couple of hundred words at most. In order for words to participate with a drawing, their intentions must be represented clearly. Leaving a mark allows us to define a time origin, and it has merit when we literally draw on our memory. On occasion, the highly textured activity of drawing provides a measure of connection that transcends mere sketching; the memory becomes as real as the paper and ink.

A memory can be a very fragile thing, and breakage is inevitable if it is not properly packaged. It is critical that any fragments, whether disturbed by time, biology or psychology, be re-collected and re-presented in a truly intentional manner. Adams and her co-editors (2007) describe it in this way: ‘Drawing lends itself to the expression of its subject matter in a direct way, and allows a model of representation that maps the fragmented simultaneity of thought, accessing memory, visual fragment and intangible imagination.’ Further,
...the act of drawing is fascinating in the way that it struggles to translate experience, particularly experience besides that of the appearance of objects. Without representation, which requires definition of some sort, experience remains continuous, ambivalent, incomprehensible and irretrievable (Adams et al, 2007).

Drawing can become a unique act of reclamation - an attempt to recover the ephemeral visual fragments of a past connected to the soul of a place we once occupied. Narrative sketching and drawing has the potential to perform as an agent of memory creation and retention. It is my assertion that we can draw (with words and pictures, literally and figuratively) on our past to define a measure of our present.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Jim Dawkins is an associate professor in the Department of Interior Architecture & Design at Florida State University where he serves as an instructor in both undergraduate and graduate project-based design studios as well as courses in graphic techniques, specifically hand drawing and sketching, used for design ideation and visual communication. He is particularly interested in the overlap of the notions of high-touch with high-tech in design process communication where the human/digital interface is personal, physical and achievable. He is a registered architect in several states, having earned his BA in Design and Master of Architecture degrees from Clemson University prior to practicing for twenty years as an architect, designer and corporate officer with design firms in Atlanta, GA and Vail, CO. Dawkins' primary research interest focuses on the notion of thinking through drawing - graphic facilitation, communication, and mediation of ideas through hand-drawing techniques and their realization in traditional hand and digital hybrid forms of computer aided design. Secondary research currently involves the analysis of and instruction in hand sketching skills through the cognitive framework of expertise theory.