

MOLLY SPRINGFIELD: *Chapter IX* (2008)

MARIJA DALBELLO

This text is an edited version of the audio commentary recorded by Marija Dalbello as part of the Zimmerli Art Museum's audio guide for the exhibition *Art=Text=Art: Works by Contemporary Artists* (September 4, 2012 – January 6, 2013). No passage of this text may be reprinted or quoted without permission from the author. To obtain permission, please contact Marilyn Symmes at the Zimmerli Art Museum at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey: msymmes@zimmerli.rutgers.edu.

When you look at Molly Springfield's *Chapter IX* (2008), what you see appears to be a photocopy of the first page of an essay titled "On Drawing from Flat Copies." The original of this apparent photocopy is the ninth chapter of *Handbook of Drawing*, a Victorian pedagogical treatise on elementary drawing published in London in 1879 by the drawing master William Walker. In his text, Walker commented on the advantages and pitfalls of careful copying. He also championed the *art* of drawing as an act of creation according to formal rules, as opposed to the *craft* of drawing in which students imitate the work of others.

In her drawing, Springfield removes this printed book page from its context by creating a copy of it. This does not appear to be a neat and clean photocopy; the artist seems to have made it without paying attention, as if she left open the lid of the photocopier, resulting in some distortion and thick black borders. The narrow white margin around these black borders leads us to wonder whether this framed object may even be an inkjet printout of a digital scan of a photocopy—the ubiquitous Portable Document Format (PDF) that pervades our reading experiences today.

Gradually we become aware that what we see is actually a remarkably skillful manual rendering of a printed page. Springfield has painstakingly outlined each letter and word so that her drawing of the printed page looks exactly like a photocopy (a photo-printing process that produces multiple prints), while the textual image simultaneously disguises its origin as a unique drawing. We are now truly participating in a mirage of visible writing: a copy of a copy of a printed text. This drawing is a mimicry—a near-photographic record of the visibility of a typographical page.

Marija Dalbello is an associate professor of information science and director of doctoral studies at the School of Communication and Information, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey. Her current research, teaching, and publications focus on visual genres and visual epistemologies, the history of knowledge and history of the book. She co-edited Print Culture in Croatia: The Canon and the Borderlands (2006) with Tinka Katić and Visible Writings: Cultures, Forms, Readings (2011) with Mary Shaw. She is currently editing Constructing the Heritage of Cultures: A World History of Librarianship with Wayne Wiegand and writing a book on the ceremonies of information in the Habsburg sphere. She co-directs the Rutgers Seminar in the History of the Book.

Yet Springfield also emphasizes the book as a material object. She has captured all the residual marks of the binding, gutter, and margin as they would be recorded in a photocopy.

Springfield's choice to situate her drawing within the context of a methodological treatise on drawing is a reflection on both the current age of photomechanical reproduction and the material nature of the book. We live in a time when a digital copy can upstage printed matter, but digital text is not a new form. It is steeped in the resistant nature of the print interfaces that haunt it. Since the 1980s scholars have pondered the complex relationship between print and digital formats. This drawing helps us to understand the various materialities of the printed page available today—and the relative ease of technological replication. One can photocopy or Xerox printed texts, or one can make a digital copy using a camera or scanner. In contrast to a printed page—printed with ink on a press—digital texts feel nearly immaterial to us.

Springfield's ghost-like fantasy of the printed page realizes the tension between mechanical reproduction and hand-written copy, between drawing and writing. A printed page is organized by its design constraints; the symmetry of repeating letters leaves a formal imprint upon the page. Handwriting, on the other hand, can fill the page, a river of black marks covering the white surface of the paper. Here Springfield prompts us to explore the interlocking relationships between drawing, language, and print technologies.