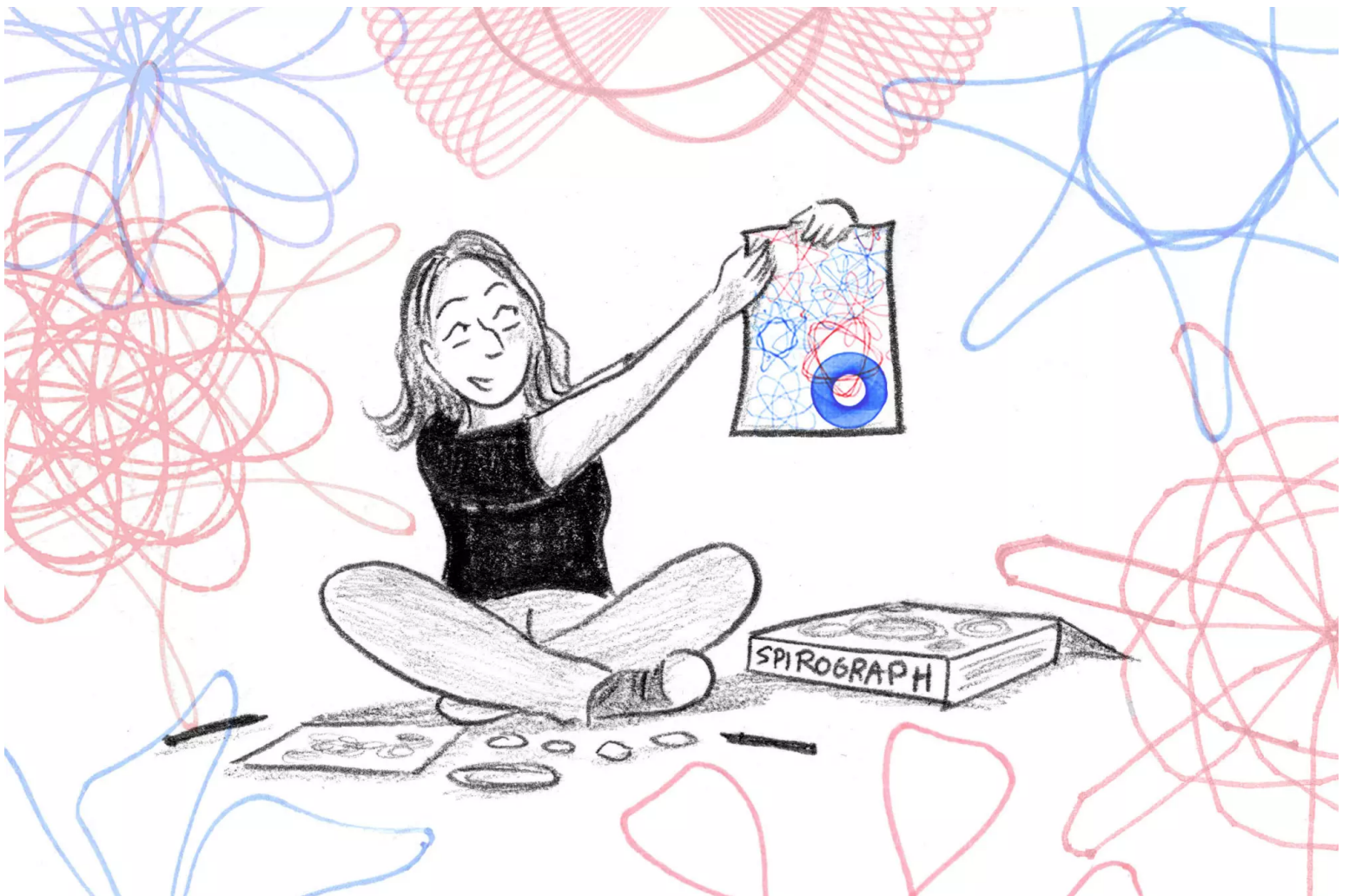


Voices

Amy Kurzweil and D. Graham Burnett

Op-comic: Thinking in circles



(Amy Kurzweil / For The Times)

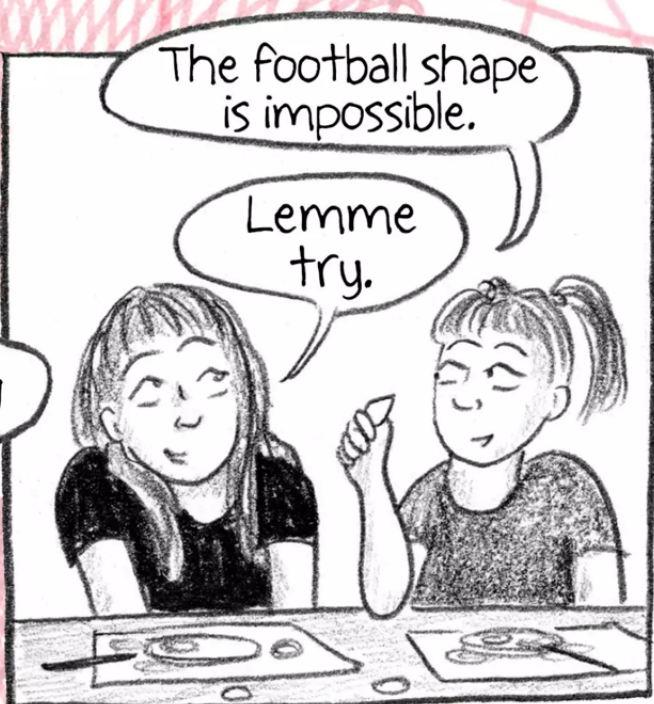
By Amy Kurzweil and D. Graham Burnett

Guest contributors

Feb. 24, 2026 3:04 AM PT



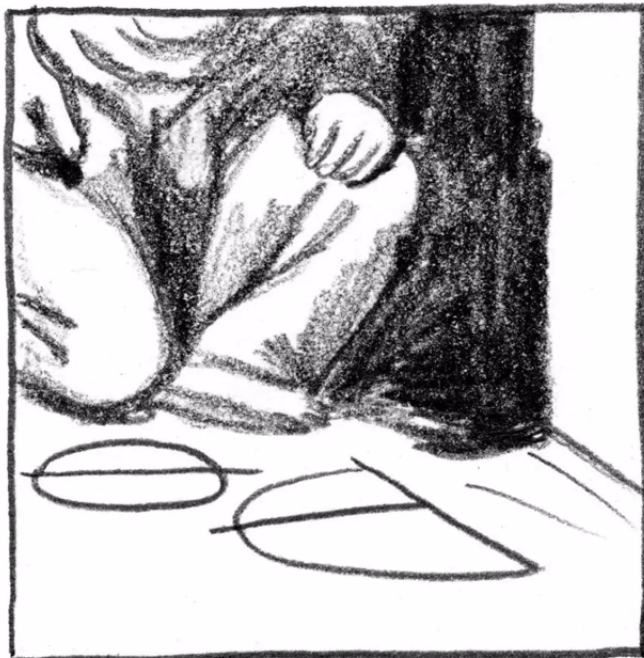
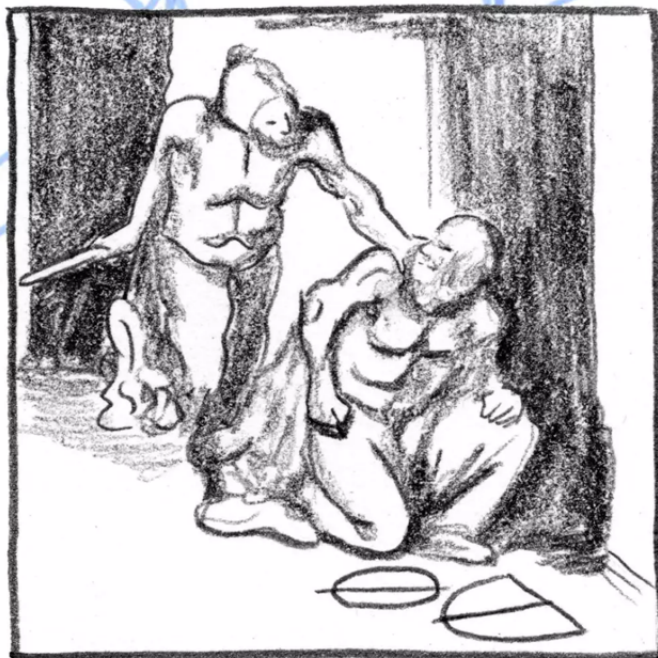
Why does drawing sustain my attention? Is it the repetition, the reveal?



Wow

Like the hypnotic Spirographs I used to love as a kid: Through the back and forth of a steady hand, an image comes to life.

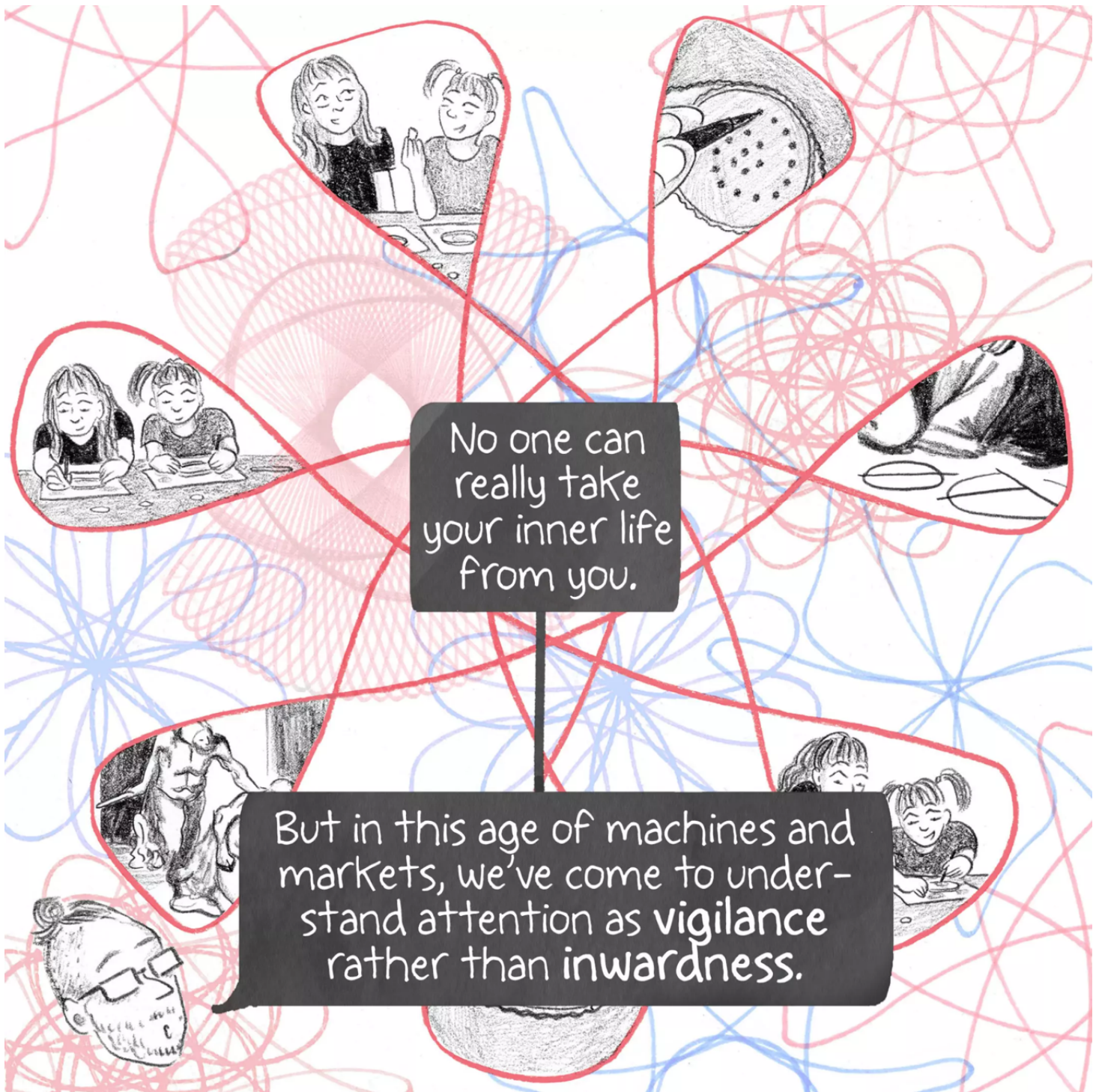
Archimedes, the ancient Greek mathematician, was epically absorbed by his own drawings.



As the ancients tell it: "Having given his mind to a mathematical problem ... Archimedes did not notice the invasion of the Romans or the sack of the city." He was "so intent on the figures he drew in the dust that when the soldier came upon him, he didn't look up."



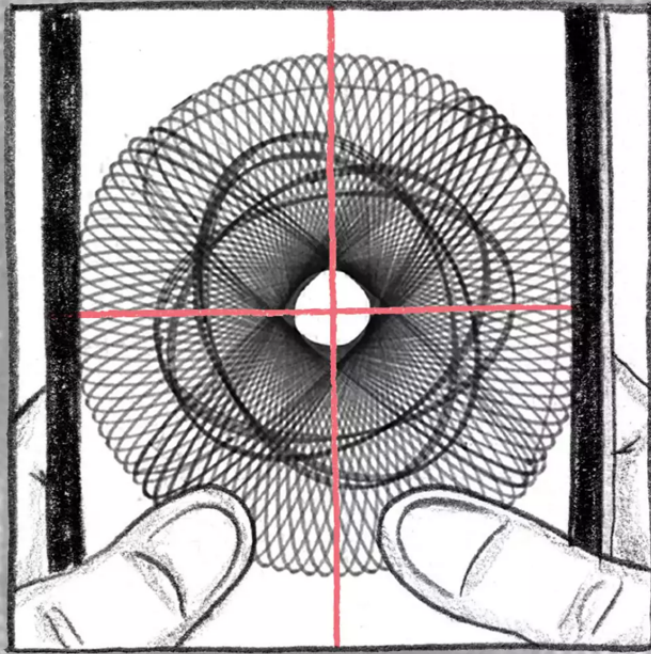





No one can really take your inner life from you.

But in this age of machines and markets, we've come to understand attention as vigilance rather than inwardness.

A healthy mind is always moving. An eye's locked focus on a target isn't really attention at all. It's stultification.





The genius
of real attention,
according to psychologist
William James, is the
ability, again and again, to
bend the path of our thoughts back to
our focus. Genuine attention
is actually a kind of
centripetal distraction,
like the lovely loop of the Spiro-
graph's rings.



[Amy Kurzweil](#) is a New Yorker cartoonist and the author of [“Artificial: A Love Story”](#) and [“Flying Couch: A Graphic Memoir.”](#) [D. Graham Burnett](#), a historian of science and a [professor of history at Princeton](#), is a co-author and co-editor of [“Attensity: A Manifesto of the Attention Liberation Movement.”](#)

More to Read

The easiest way to restore your attention span could be just outside your door

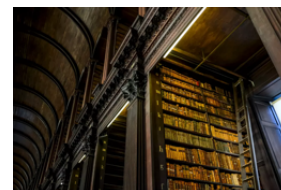
Aug. 21, 2025



Voices

Contributor: The woes of 'attention capitalism' are new, but the cure is ancient

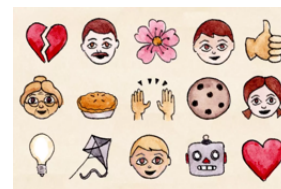
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