

Deanna Petherbridge: On Drawing

Interview with Richard Bright for the Interalia Magazine Jan/Feb 2016

Richard Bright: Can we begin by you saying something about your background?

Deanna Petherbridge: I was born in Pretoria South Africa and studied Fine Arts at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. As I get older, I'm beginning to realise the significance of this background, something I didn't really think about before. I've spent most of my life here in the UK compared to those few early years in South Africa, but having lived under such an acutely unjust political regime I was already radically shaped by different beliefs, fears and expectations from my future compatriots by the time I emigrated. In the 'swinging' London of the 1960s, people were just getting over post-war austerity war, and there was a consumer boom in Carnaby Street and on Kings Road and a buzzing party atmosphere fuelled by the sexual and social revolution of 'Flower Power'. I found this all very problematical to adjust to it, having come from a country with immense issues of poverty, suffering and discrimination where people I knew were in prison, and where as students we were involved in protests at the closing down of universities to non-white students. I therefore came to this country with a different kind of political consciousness, which made the early years in London very difficult, along with the factors of being economically fragile in a totally new country where I had to find jobs, friends and put down roots.

Secondly, as a practitioner, I came out of a very different artistic tradition. Again, this is something I hadn't really thought about until recently, but looking back on it I do realise that in South Africa, in education and professional artistic practice at that time there was a very significant graphic emphasis. Drawing can be done so simply: you can scratch in the sand or you can just draw with a piece of charcoal or with very simple instruments. Paper-based works don't have the material weight and monetary value of paint and canvases or sculpture. So drawing is not a grand tradition, it is a way of thinking visually at a very democratic level. It's the poor persons way of inventing and communicating.

Walter Battiss (1906-1982) was an influential artist, when I was growing up in Pretoria, whose own work and teaching drew on influences from indigenous traditions. In those years there were a handful of what we could now call 'outreach' classes for young people of all races to learn graphic techniques such as woodcut and linocut encompassing 'vernacular' subject-matter. Our pan-African identity was widely debated in my student years in the 1950s, while, on the contemporary art side, the influence of Léger, Picasso, Paul Klee (both the latter looking to cultures outside Europe) was dominant. And, significantly for my future career, Fine Art studies at the University of the Witwatersrand involved a joint practical and history-of-art degree. European Art History was taught by a very well-informed German refugee, Dr. Maria Stein-Lessing, but she was equally involved in collecting traditional Ndebele bead work and lived in an amazing house designed by Sir Herbert Baker, whose terraced-gardened neoclassical 'Union Buildings' (offices of the peripatetic government moving between Cape Town and the administrative capitol Pretoria) was so influential on my future preoccupations with architecture. I realise now that these early factors of environment and education have influenced me all of my life.

RB: Then you went on to study here or did you teach?

DP: I didn't study because I couldn't afford it – although I would have liked to do so - and I started teaching quite soon in a London secondary school with multiple other occasional and part-time jobs

along the way. I painted huge canvases (relating to anti-Vietnam war subjects) and made soft sculpture in stuffed fabric and did some exhibiting in the London Group. By 1967 I had moved to a Greek island, where I lived more or less permanently for about a year and then went backwards and forwards on long visits from London as I had my major studio there. My earliest drawings in Greece explored the constructed terraced landscape and flat-roofed whitewashed architecture of the island with its sharp shadows, and, in summer, the dearth of colour in the rocky landscape.

[FIGURE 1 *Untitled, Sikinos series, 1969*]

In the late 1960s and 1970s I travelled widely in the Balkans, Maghreb, Italy, Spain and the Middle East and I attended lectures on Islamic art at the Architectural Association in London. The first journals for which I wrote regularly in the 1970s were architectural journals (*Architectural Design* and *The Architectural Review*) and I taught drawing at the Architectural Association for some years in the Communications department. I was then interested in what was referred to as Town Art or Art for Public Places, although in time I came to reject many of the ideas associated with the movement. I originally wrote about it in *The Architectural Review*, where for a time I presented a regular monthly article and then in 1980s I started writing for *Art Monthly*, founded by Peter Townsend. I collaborated with him on his book *Art Within Reach*, Thames & Hudson, 1984 writing three of the chapters and was the editor of *Art for Architecture: A Handbook on Commissioning*, HMSO, 1988, in association with a small research team sponsored by the Department of the Environment. As well as sitting on all sorts of juries and committees including *Art for Architecture*, which I helped to launch, I also showed regularly at exhibitions such as *Art into Landscape* at the Serpentine Gallery and even won a few prizes. In addition to running a Public Art column for *Art Monthly* I also started investigating the structure of the art world and looking at other social issues, such as the rise of sponsorship in the Thatcher Years and its relationship to publicly funded institutions. In those days the Arts Council of Great Britain held a very authoritative and hegemonic role, together with other Establishment bodies such as the British Council (which still maintains what is shown at the Venice Biennale), museums and publicly funded contemporary art galleries and certain art schools. This was a very hieratic and centrally controlled art world, compared to the (apparently) *laissez faire* world of multiple practices that we live in now, that depends on different forms of competitive power structures. In the 1970s and 1980s monolithic art movements, for example Minimalism, were endorsed by the dominant institutions who influenced all aspects of teaching, exhibiting, acquisitions, curatorship, critical writing and publications.

Of the various art schools which I visited or taught at as a sessional lecture, for example the Fine Art department at Reading University, the most interesting was Middlesex Polytechnic. The Fine Art department ran a very liberal inter-departmental, non-mediumistic system where staff taught across the board. This would mean looking one moment at a performance artist, the next at installation art (that was then becoming an important genre) and the next watching film – video was then just being taken up. I believe, looking back, that the art that was being produced in the 1980s was extraordinarily inventive. A lot of things were set up then that have now become boring, stale old orthodoxies in the 21st century.

RB: This was teaching art across the board and you then specialized in drawing later?

DP: I didn't specialise as a teacher of drawing until I became Professor of Drawing much later at the Royal College of Art in 1995, although my own practice had been consistently drawing-based after I went to live in Greece in 1967. I moved there while still undertaking focussed visits to Middle Eastern countries that now one can't easily travel to any longer (for example the Yemen and Iran) as I was very much influenced by the geometries and design values of Islamic art and architecture.

[FIGURE 2 *Untitled, Islamic Series, 1977*]

I had moved into drawing because it seemed to me then as a way to solve a number of problematical issues about representation and the tactility and evocative qualities of paint that were challenged under the austere and reductive regime of Minimalism. Monochrome linearity seemed to me a much more abstracted means in which I could play contradictory games with three-dimensionality, and in an early series I deliberately constructed circular, square or lozenge-shaped works that could be hung any way up, without a predetermined axis of orientation.

[FIGURE 3 *Fountains of Suleimein, 1974*]

RB: Over the past twenty years or so, anthologies, conferences, dedicated degree drawing courses, research papers, have proliferated. They all speak of the 'expanded field' of drawing, expanded not only in what can be counted in as drawing, but also in how we can think about drawing. Why do you think there has been such an upsurge in interest in drawing?

DP: I've recently been writing about my time running the Drawing Studio at the Royal College of Art (1995-2001) for a forthcoming encyclopaedia on art and design education. I hope this is not false vanity, but I like to think that I was in the forefront of making drawing more interesting, more approachable and significant as something other than a technical exercise or secondary supportive practice. As we know the teaching of drawing had been basically dumped in the 1970s as a result of the Coldstream Report and educational shifts. As a result, the relationship of drawing to creative practice was undermined, ridiculed and marginalised for a long time. By the time of the middle 1980s it was students who started demanding drawing classes again because they were interested in body art in all its aspects of gender, sexuality and abjection in so far as it related to performance, feminist and gay studies and so on. The body as another kind of construct (that is from the representational and anonymous idealised 'figure' of traditional drawing classes) became extremely important in theoretical thinking and writing in this period with the turn to Continental Philosophy. Subjectivity and inter-subjectivity were now of interest, with students needing to interrogate and appropriate body issues in a novel way for new areas of practice. I think this is how drawing crept back into university agendas. The problem I found at the Royal College and since, is that drawing is *still* regarded as irremediably old fashioned, identified with representational and traditionalist figurative art and incapable of change and expansion. Somehow it is associated with a conservative Thatcherite agenda of mythical old-fashioned bourgeois virtues. I remember being interviewed at the Royal College when I first took up the post by journalists from all shades of politically diverse organs, all insisting "so it's about back to basics?" while I was saying "No, no, no, we are *reinventing* drawing! We are reinventing drawing in relation to contemporary practice in a completely new way."

I think this is the reason for the popularity of the doctrine of the 'extended field' (the term of course has been borrowed from Rosalind Krauss's writings on the expanded field of Minimalist sculpture) as it allows contemporary practitioners to re-appropriate and re-position drawing under a trendy label without these old prejudices. I would go further and insist that we need to get away from the extraordinary reductive, ignorant notion that drawing is somehow good for us all, and if one draws an anonymous figure that resembles a static model or participates in communal or public drawing events, we are somehow, better people. Drawing as a moral imperative!

RB: The 'expanded field' of drawing is continually expanding. In recent years we have seen considerable interest in the use of video, drawing as 'tracking' activity, and even mark making by skateboard. Is it possible to define what drawing is and where drawing is now?

DP: I often think about these issues in articles or lectures. Drawing is always very slippery to define because we have the problem that we're specifying a separatist activity or an ideology or a series of images under a mediumistic label. This significantly reduces the complexity of what is embraced within the term and its relationship to other forms of practice. Nowadays drawing is appropriated more and more into the area of relational art, collaborative practice and socially responsible theories, often of a very woolly sort. The actual, material *thing* – the work on paper - that comes out of the process and exists in its own right, is becoming less and less important. Instead artists utilise remote and alienated means of recording their drawings, by video, by photography and film so that the immediacy of the actual drawing on the piece of paper is lost. Drawing is such a simple and direct medium, and so closely related to the hand and the brain in a way that no other media are because they depend on many technical interfaces. That the drawn image is being wilfully overlooked in favour of fetishized processes of making is possibly because we live in a period dominated by conceptual art where objects themselves are less significant than their textual frameworks. I have always been convinced by that important maxim of modernism that the artwork and its meaning are identifiable and communicable *through and by* its visualisation, but this is now discounted. The significance of drawing, I believe, should be far more than a consideration of practice.

RB: Or performance...

DP: Yes, or performance.

RB: One definition I've read is that the drawing is the trace of a line of thought.

DP: Well, that's absolutely fine, up to a point. However, recently I have been looking closely at performance drawing and social or pedagogical events where groups congregate to do communal drawing exercises. In most of these activities, the trace of the line is no longer of any significance because everybody is making a grand gestural mess of marks upon a wall or huge piece of paper in various materials in the intense excitement of the shared one-off activity alongside participants as spectators and spectators as participants. These are wonderful spectatorial and bodily *experiences* where the performance is paramount. There are lights, there is music, there's drama and it's all about show-time, applauded by excited bystanders who rightly see their own participation to be essential to the 'success' of the event - however that is measured. When drawing becomes entirely an instantaneous spectacle, even if it does leave traces on paper of the activity or the marks of the participating bodies, there is no place during the making for authorial or shared decisions that "this is not good enough or this needs to be changed". But art making needs to involve judgement, critique, reflexivity and decision-making. Dispensing with this interrogative framework devalues the structural parameters of drawing as an independent art form. Perhaps performance drawing is trying to imitate or force and alliances with other cultural and social activities precisely in order to sidestep the difficulties of aesthetic judgements.

RB: What about the judgement of the final piece, the finished drawing?

DP: The final piece is usually the secondary film, the video recording, the reproduction, the facsimile. It's always at a remove, the thing that can be uploaded onto the internet or put on YouTube as a three-minute cut down and heavily edited version to make it look more dramatic, with lots of noise in the background of people clapping their approbation. Of course, the other thing about performance drawing is that well before the event the initiating artists or curators write self-promoting scripts about what they are about to do, telling us what it is supposed to mean (without testing whether this is communicable or even employing the subjunctive mode) with directions how

to respond 'correctly' to its effects and affects. This writing of self-endorsements (rather than notes about context or intentions) is now a requirement for all student end-of-year exhibitions. In so much contemporary art the idea that a spectator is capable of making a judgement is something that seems to have fallen out of the window. We are required to accept and endorse *propagandist* statements (and I use the excellent term that Clare Bishop has used in her various critiques of relational art.) Within this hyped-up script or blurb, originality of concept or the relevant artistic, social or political context cannot, of course, be admitted. This masquerade of accessibility covers an intolerable authorial and/or institutional power directive. Coercive Instruction lurks behind what is being touted as an open, participatory and democratic experience.

RB: Are there 'unwritten rules' when it comes to what we call 'drawing practice'?

DP: I think it's terribly difficult to live in 2015 and talk about rules, but I do believe that the art making which is of most interest is in the cases where practitioners have set up conscious or unconscious rules that shape the structure and editing of the process, the meaning and outcome. There are no generic rules but I think structural parameters are an incredibly important part of any kind of thinking or inventing. Nobody can come to every drawing completely fresh – although this is an important pretence for some - as every artist is actually working within their own procedural and inventive frameworks. The slight sketches that are just responding to whatever is considered fashionable are just copying empty gestures without understanding the dynamics behind them - there is an awful lot of this stuff – are of no interest to me.

RB: Stravinsky, talking about his own composing practice, talks about working within limitations, and working with those limitations freed him.

DP: My own drawings, regrettably are incredibly complex but they are always structured within a framework of rules and limitations, for example the principle of variety within unity and unity within variety. Limitation is a better word than rules.

RB: What role does pre-determination versus spontaneity play in the working process of your drawings?

DP: I've always worked with a degree of graphic control, for lack of a better word. I don't want to employ the word 'skill' because that is misunderstood and even sometimes used as a term of abuse. For many years there has been scornful talk about 'artistic skill' as if it is generic, which is nonsense because every artist develops her or his own skill. I'm skilled at making 'Petherbridges'. In the case of the drawings I did in the 1980s, for example, about the fragile ecology of the Aegean where fishing is close to exhaustion, I deliberately employed delicate transparent glass columns or aggressive metallic weapon or hook shapes to suggest threatened marine ecosystems, using the uncompromising graphic conventions used in design engineering.

[FIGURE 4,5 ,6 *Atlantis City of the Sea*, 1981; *Fragility of the Aegean*, c.1982; FIGURE *Echoes of the Deep* 1987-94]

I know it doesn't look like it because my work looks predetermined but, actually, each work is an exploration and a complicated journey. The originating concepts often relate to series: sometimes they are political or poetic ideas and sometimes they're about place or metaphors of human interactions or social systems. I never know quite where the drawing is going to go and there is a dialogue in the making with the work talking back to me. It's a painfully critical dialogue because I've always worked in pen and ink as a challenge because one can't erase it. Unlike painting or other kinds of media where there can be a series of radical changes or overlays, if something goes wrong

in pen and ink it can't just be deleted. Anything that goes down has to remain, to be used or reprocessed or reincorporated into something else. Sometimes, of course, the inability to 'rub out' kills a drawing when something has gone badly wrong but I can't bring myself to use graphite pencil, which can be erased. My drawings often get destroyed or torn up and I've a plan chest full of unfinished works.

Many years ago curator and writer Jasia Reichardt used the term 'narrative geometry' to describe my work and I think that's a really good and exploratory term for what I do. The non-specific formal 'geometries' that cannot be erased weave themselves into elaborate compositions, as in a very early drawing *Vox Ucelli*, 1971.

[FIGURE 7 *Vox Ucelli*, 1971]

RB: Taking [this] particular drawing, could you describe the working process from beginning to end?

DP: *Vox Ucelli* is a 3 meter drawing on one sheet that commemorates a real life experience... and let's hope that my description of it is more than propagandist! I had been living in Greece and as I didn't have a home in London, I was renting a cottage on the Devon/Dorset border and travelling back there on a really depressing, cold November evening. I wandered into Winchester Cathedral where the organ was being restored, with absolutely enormous organ pipes resting against the columns of the nave and reaching even to clerestory level. This was an experience so acute and surprising that I did a long narrative drawing about it, in which the organ pipes are to some extent recognizable and established a suggestive reference for other forms of pipe imagery. The title of the work was intended as a joke as it references the small, thin pipes that make birds sounds— not the huge organ pipes in the composition required for the lower and louder register -and I was also toying with the early Renaissance linear perspective of Paolo Uccello's *Battle of San Romano* (circa 1438-40) the version, that is, in the National Gallery London. The organ pipe arrangement relates to the cathedral context on the right (with references also to the wonderful old-fashioned church central-heating system) and on the left pipe-shapes have been transformed into fantasy towers, mechanical composites and curved barriers, partly forming an interior space and partly related to rolling contours of wintry ploughed fields. In the middle at the back are living tree shapes from a copse on a hill that the road used to go by, themselves drawn as mechanistic pipe shapes. The white space of the paper suggests background, foreground, vertical and horizontal according to the frontal or foreshortened view of the objects drawn upon it.

[FIGURES 8,9 *Augmentation of the Lintel* 1985, *Plan and Projection*, 2014]

I've always played with linear perspective and think that it's a great pity that we've forgotten about its possibilities as a formal device unconstrained by its traditional usage in art history. There are a million ways that perspectival formulae can be challenged and reinvented, turned upside down and used as a suggestive means to turn the picture plane into 'real', ambiguous or fictive spaces. If a blank piece of paper doesn't contain space – or the possibilities of something other than the two-dimensional surface of it's material being - then we are ignoring one of the richest and most evocative aspects of drawing. A moving line on an empty page immediately suggests a spatial dimension, to be denied or confirmed by the rest of the drawing.

RB: You have spoken about the serial aspect of drawing and discussed the idea of drawing as an act of repetition, which can become an extension of yourself and your life. You have described it almost as a mystical process (I am thinking here of your earlier work, *Mystical Geometries*). Can you say something about the act of drawing as repetition?

DP: To answer this I'd like to talk about somebody else, if I may, as I often show the work of a Tasmanian artist Penny Mason in lectures, whose work seems to suggest the mystical. I originally saw her work during my residency at Monash University in Melbourne, Australia 2003, when she had presented an installation on the gallery floor of swathes of very long, continuous sheets of paper on which she had repeated series of basic abstract brush strokes almost like the marks made by needles on scientific recording instruments, for example earth tremors or heart-beats. She told me that her rules were very simple: she would go on making repetitive marks until the ink ran dry on the brush and then she would change colour, or just change from one tone to another after so many strokes, or she would interrupt something going in one direction after a particular time-period with its counterpart. These very simple structural rules led to the creation of reams of continuous drawings based on repetitive gestures, over long periods of time. To me the work felt like a response to the actual experience of living and breathing in real time, and reminded me of a Greek Orthodox ascetic sect in Greece (on Mount Athos) called the Hesychasts. The few remaining monks are mystics who continually repeat the name of Christ (the Jesus prayer) whatever else is happening in their lives. Penny Mason's sustained and continuous acts of semi-conscious drawing appeared to reveal something mystical in this manner of repetition without self-censorship, taken to an extreme degree.

There can be moments in drawing when involved in sustained and semi-automatic actions that have taken a long, long time, when one forgets the body and moves outside of self. This total immersion can assume a kind of mystical vibration, because rules and repetitive practice have taken over outside of the ego, so self becomes temporarily forgotten or submerged. I have experienced it myself over the years in works such as this drawing from the series *Temples and Tenements* that took many months to complete the hypnotic detailing of the temple door frame carvings

[FIGURE 10, *Awful Visage of Entry and Exit*, 1987]

or in smaller one-off works where the drawing depends on repetitive abstract marks.

[FIGURE 11 *Abstraction* c.2003]

RB: What role do geometry and architecture play in your imagery? Does architecture have particular cultural implications?

DP: Architecture has always been incredibly important to me. The fact that I dream architecture makes me realise how important it is at an unconscious level. I dream more about interior spaces, cellars and attics, collapsing houses and railway stations than I do about people, and these dreams sometimes lead to drawings.

[FIGURE 12 *The Cellar and the Attic*, 1989]

Obviously I have the common anxiety dreams of missing trains or not knowing where I am, but more than anything I dream about difficult terrains, weird structures and semi-familiar places that I can't find my way around. I drew invented Cities for many years, but when undertaking residencies in cities like Manchester, Calcutta, Lahore, Singapore, Los Angeles, Melbourne and Sydney over the years I have made drawings that attempt to capture the specific qualities of actual cities. And not only cities: landscape and places that are defined as much by built structures as topography and vegetation. For example, recent series such as *The Fourteen Stations of the Tiber* and *Umbria Rurale* are commentaries on the Italian landscape and decaying rural communities in the area where I had a studio for some years after Greece. The crumbling romantic old ruins and the new breeze block barns exist side-by-side as nothing is ever completely destroyed, and in this drawing I played

exaggerated perspectival games to highlight the awkwardness of the juxtaposition. [FIGURE 13 *Umbria rurale III*, 2010]

I've also done a lot of India-related drawings over the years, most recently very small works related to Goa and Kerala.

[FIGURE 14 *Keralan Waterways*, 2015]

In all these drawings architectural and geometrical constructions stand-in for the rhythms of the different ways in which people live their lives. I use an architectonic language as a signifying trope but the architecture that occurs in my work is usually a metaphor of something far more complicated.

For example, my drawing *Blood Taboos* is a response to India at a time when I was regularly working and undertaking British Council tours there in the 1980s.

[FIGURE 15 *Blood Taboos*, 1987]

I undertook a residency in Calcutta in 1988 working at the Lalit Kala studios and wondering around that immense city, I would often see women sitting very sadly outside their miserable city tenements on rickety balconies. It was explained to me that these were women who were ritually ejected from their homes because they were menstruating. They couldn't sit inside, they certainly couldn't cook or prepare food; they couldn't cross the threshold and they couldn't do anything for men or male children because their bodies were blood polluted. I tried to deal with the implications of this ritualised rejection which functions as a societal punishment for being female. There are semi-abstract indications of female figures through hanging draperies although I didn't actually draw the figures. I was working at a kind of metaphorical remove by trying to suggest the aggression of this rite, by drawing dizzying perspectives and displacing danger into evocations of rickety balconies and high walkways and excluding if rotting bamboo shutters and blinds. So for me this drawing serves as a metaphor for a social condition that absolutely horrified me at the time and for all I know still probably persists in India and other countries. ¹

RB: Your book, *The Primacy of Drawing*, affirms the significance of drawing as visual thinking. What first prompted you to take on the task of constructing such a comprehensive study of the role of drawing in art?

DP: In the early 1990s I was invited to curate a touring exhibition for the Arts Council, which I called *The Primacy of Drawing: An Artist's View*. In preparing the concept, I thought how interesting it would be to juxtapose contemporary and historical drawings. As a contemporary artist, like most other young artists I see today, I was only concerned with the urgency of contemporary art and wasn't at all interested in art history. Beginning to think of all the drawings in the past of which I was totally ignorant I started to go to the British Museum, to the Prints and Drawings Study room, where I've been virtually living ever since! I realised that there were ways of thinking about drawing that, in some respects, held just as true for Goya or Rembrandt or Dürer or Leonardo da Vinci as artists' concerns in the 20th and 21st centuries. There were narratives about the similarities of drawings but

¹ An article by-lined as a Dispatch from Delhi, 'Campaigners challenge local custom that isolates women every month' by Gagandeep Kaur in *The Guardian* Wednesday 23 December 2015 referred to the continuation of this custom that "is most prevalent among the Gond and Madiya ethnic groups in Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh and Orissa" but I doubt if this is the whole or true story. There are moves to have this "serious violation of the human rights of women" banned by state governments.

it was also important to chart historical differences, and there existed an 'economy' of very specific means, materials and techniques which I could use as an organisational structure for displaying very varied works from different times.

For me, this was an absolutely breakthrough moment. I had been artist-in-residence in Manchester in 1982 where I came into close contact with the paintings and drawings in Manchester City Art Galleries. There were, of course, a lot of Pre-Raphaelite works, to which I have to admit I still have a resistance, but the collection was much wider. In addition to historical drawings, I found myself turning to the early 20th century British modernists whom I didn't know at all, particularly the Vorticists and Percy Wyndham Lewis whom I'd read but never before really looked at, and Edward Wadsworth, C.R.W. Nevinson and Paul Nash. In order to ground my small catalogue narrative about the relationship between contemporary and historical drawing I located it within a discussion of 'making' and materials, and drew upon my own experience as a drawer and observer of art to make the works as accessible as possible. The exhibition went terribly well and I was invited to do a lot of interesting things, (including, later on, a five-programme presentation on drawing for Radio 3)

After the exhibition I was approached by a publisher who asked, "Do you want to extend the catalogue into a book?" Twenty years later I finally finished the book! I had realised that my degree of ignorance was enormous, absolutely enormous and I had to set out to educate myself. So, I spent about twenty years *thinking* about, *looking at* drawings and writing the book *Primacy of Drawing: Histories and Theories of Practice*, 2010. I visited as many drawing collections as possible and returned to reading art history with the appetite and fascination which I hadn't felt since I was a student. People now refer to this book, I believe, because it's written as an artist stressing the importance and relevance of practice, and suggests ways of thinking about drawing that also refers to how artists thought (and wrote about it) in the past.

RB: Do you consider drawing a language? And, if so, is this language sometimes non-transferable to other languages, for example, the written or verbal language?

DP: I'm always worried about this because the notion of drawing or art in general as language constitutes a very difficult philosophical proposition and there are many sophisticated linguistic arguments to refute it. So I'm going to steer clear of your question, I'm afraid. I do think that there is not a drawing language *as such* but there are certain important connections and comparable language-like or more accurately conceptual structures which have to do with the linearity of drawing.

The fact that we draw in line means that we automatically making connections between the brain and the hand, pulling meaning and images 'out of ourselves'. We also make connections between the past and the future, because a drawing arises out of something embedded or borrowed and then moves towards something else, although not necessarily resolution. Unfortunately so much contemporary drawing consists of simple gestures and not much else, that boring and clichéd practice that I call 'default drawing.' The spurt, the 'so-what' type of gesture is what many artist are quite happy with – because everyone else is doing it or exhibiting and validating it - and the more simplistic and cruder and de-skilled it is, the happier they are. But I think drawing is part of a continuum of development and change.

RB: As well as the obvious practice of drawing in the creative sectors, it is also an important element in the fields of science, technology, engineering, mathematics and medicine. Do you see any crossovers of drawing practice between the arts and sciences?

DP: Yes, absolutely. At the moment I am supervising a PhD student at the University of the Arts who is working in the surgical field. She is attempting to prove through data and experimental teaching workshops that drawing and the understanding of drawing are equivalents of the kind of hand and conceptual skills that we've always known doctors require, even with the most sophisticated remote technologies. She draws in surgery and discusses these notations with professionals, and records the kinds of communicative drawings that are made between surgeons and their teams before they conduct an operation: drawing as mapping, communication, eye and hand co-ordination and manual skills.

Without doubt, people from the sciences use drawing as a significant form of notation that marks a need for change or an imaginative leap towards a new or unexpected development or solution. Drawing, as I've said before never erases itself completely, so the whole map of thinking and conceptual development is contained in itself if we understand how to unravel it. You may end something and go on to another series and end that and go on to another, but the linear connections of thinking are always there as a time based record of working out ideas, and possible solutions. But it's not a language with a vocabulary that everyone can understand by reading: its meanings and applications (including the metaphoric) have to be discovered through familiarity and use.

RB: That's why I talked about the non-transferability of language because there is a limitation of language.

DP: Absolutely, yes.

RB: Can we talk about drawing in education? Should we champion drawing in education and should we champion it as a curriculum essential?

DP: It's incredibly important because if we don't champion the ability to draw ideas out of self and to formulate and communicate visual constructs then we deny students access to their own imaginative lives and to their own intelligence. If they feel so inhibited that they can't actually take up a drawing implement and work out a series of lines as an equivalent of an idea or an observation or an emotion, then that is a great shame. And I make the distinction between equipping individual students with this complex ability in contrast with what I mentioned earlier: those mass 'draw-ins', where people take themselves and their children to participate in a sociable activity making communal squiggles on the wall in different materials. They may go home feeling they have collaborated in something terribly important as human interaction, but they and the organisers are really missing the point. This feel-good activity has very little to do with *learning to draw* or understanding the significance of graphic communication and how it works visually and what insight it gives into a personal but evolving imaginative, emotional and thinking life. The value set on sharing with strangers in collaborative performance is a form of displacement: drawing doesn't have to be directed towards a 'shared language'; it can also be an entirely personal and idiosyncratic practice and yet still communicate with others. It is incredibly important to give young people confidence, not by teaching a rote skill dependent on technical rules of thumb but by instilling confidence to construct a personal form of expression and communication. Every small child in the entire world after all, can draw unselfconsciously when young, and they understand that their drawings have a conceptual life. Then, somehow or other, we say that this is not important and they lose the ability. That loss of ability – as radical as forgetting how to talk, is, I think, an incredible restriction on human beings.

RB: From my own experience, this usually happens around the age of six or seven when you are told, usually by your teacher, that if you can't draw representationally then you can't draw. In a way, your confidence is being taught out of you.

DP: Absolutely, and this is such an important age for it *not* to happen.

RB: This leads to my next question. Can everyone draw?

DP: Yes, of course, everybody can draw but they can only draw within a supportive environment that encourages the belief that drawing has validity. I often lecture on this subject under the title of 'Micky Mouse and Michelangelo' or 'Rembrandt and Robocop.' I accept that few look to the model of Michelangelo to learn to draw any longer, they look to Mickey Mouse (I'm using this example in a generic sense) and popular culture. All learning involves some kind of an exemplar or prototype. But I do believe that the models of popular visual culture are being consistently closed down because the animated imagery that everybody finds on the internet, television or interactive games is incredibly repetitive and restricted. The modelling that we are giving children, within this ostensibly immense range of internet and games material or comic strips, is stereotyped, homogenised and visually uninventive, and most importantly the images are brutal, violent and pornographic. How can children believe that their drawings are associated with anything life enhancing? Even animation films 'for the family' seldom depend on inventive imagery, they follow the same slack drawing formulae. Drawing therefore, has been appropriated for something that is conformist and banal, or negative, destructive and frightening but nobody critiques or seems to worry about it because it represents a mammoth capitalist investment and cultural collusion. I worry because this is where children now identify themselves and find their models for drawing. Drawing is therefore an activity in which children represent human or semi-human creatures only in order to kill them!

RB: That brings me on to my final question. Can drawings change the way we think?

DP: I think they can and do, but as I've just suggested, it is not necessarily for the better.

RB: I was thinking of photography and how certain photographic images historically have changed the way society has thought about things. Are there drawings that have done the same?

DP: I've been recently looking again at Goya drawings, which are so extraordinary and I believe that Goya's prints changed the world for a lot of people. (Adults, that is!) The Goya etching of the headless, armless tortured bodies hanging from a tree in the *Disasters of War* (1812-15) Plate 39 (*Grande hazaña! Con muertos! What a feat! With dead men!*) or probably even worse, the single mutilated armless body with its shock of black hair perched so incongruously on the fork of a tree in plate 37 (*Esto es peor – This is worse*) must have changed people's lives completely in a pre-photographic age. These wrenching images of suffering and horror are acutely painful but the fact that they are so economic, so paired down, even in the complicated technique of etching make them incredibly powerful. Far more powerful I believe than a photograph, because somebody would have to edit or crop the photographic image after the event, but Goya's editing happens *within* and simultaneously with the construction of the drawing and every aspect is controlled by the brilliance of his hand and eye. The graphic imagery of Goya must have had a profound effect on many, many people about the consequences of war, and it still does. That's the power of drawing.

