

## **Invention, intervention and interaction: Drawing and the works of Helena Almeida, Lourdes de Castro, Gabriela Albergaria and Inês Teixeira.**

Hello to you all.

Hello Steve. Thank you for inviting me. I'm very happy to be here.

Drawing has a big place in my life as I do drawings in most of my artistic works, I teach drawing, I think about the whys and how of drawing and write about it.

It is some of those thoughts that I would like to briefly share with you today, as well as using this occasion to bring to you works of a few Portuguese artists.

Drawing is a form of record and research, as well as a way of understanding reality - whether an inner reality or an outer reality - and a creation often made from that prior research. It is a thinking process, a method, a skeleton, but also an explanation (better than words), an illustration, and even an artistic object (and the enumeration goes on).

Drawing is as much the action of performing as the resulting object.

In the early years of my investigation, I was particularly interested in drawing as a thinking process that detours verbalization.

At the time, I used case studies of architectural drawings of all kinds, because their primary purpose is to communicate visual and spatial ideas, rather than artistic ones. The architectural drawing fulfils its intention to express the idea of designing and building. It is distinguished from other creative expressions because its achievement is not an end in itself, but one step toward the possibility of existence, of becoming.

It was not only the way of presenting the “architectonic idea” that made architectural drawings an interesting object of study, but also that they often allow the creative discourse of the architect to develop, as the drawings show - even to the architect himself - what he intends to do.

Drawing becomes, then, like thinking aloud, or speaking to oneself; it is as much a reflexive thought as a way to engage with this thought and possibly bring it to action.

Architectural drawings also have the ability to reveal the mental processes that underlie the architect’s creativity, from the early vague sketches, or unclear first idea or diagram, to the final form of the object to be built.

But drawing exists in its own right, as well, not only (and I think of John Elderfield) *to externalize an interior image*; it exists not only as a process but also as an object: an object that contains a great quantity of explicit and implicit information, and an object which may be experienced aesthetically.

I have come to believe that the action that brings a drawing into existence is present, in the drawing itself, in an unavoidable way, and its presence is also perceived, or received, by the observer.

It is because we transfer so much of our mind and body identity into the action of drawing, that the understanding of this evidence makes drawing a unique communication: personal because of the presence of subconscious actions, and clear enough to be able to convey complex ideas that surpass barriers of language and cultures.

If drawing is the action, the object and the subject, at another level drawing is also the relationship between draftsman/woman, drawing, and observer.

We end up with a second threesome: the draughtsman, the drawing, and the observer. Each has its place in what we name Drawing.

In these sequences of triangulations, I have made an association of this threesome to three other concepts that help me go deeper

inside the subject.

(It may be somewhat incomplete or abusive, but when trying to clear things up, sometimes these slight abuses come in handy, and clear the thoughts for further thinking).

The first concept is **Invention** – *in actu* – something happening in the same instant that it is done - that is the creative process - conception and action.

Here we find the draughtsman - but he/she is not alone, as the action of observing is also a creative, inventive, one.

I would also place here the abstract observer of perspective, as it is a construct, an invention, and a representation.

The terms and concepts **recording**, and **imitating**, have precise definitions and also diverse meanings that fit into theoretical constructs, establishing their parameters and limits.

In **recording** you register what you have seen or experienced; in **imitating** you first establish something or someone as a model, making the ethical and the affective relation more intense.

To **imitate** is also the most direct way of learning, as through imitative repetition we learn to do things even before we know what they are for, before fully understanding them. Slowly, what you are imitating becomes yours, and then, what you are able to do, is also, something you know.

I **imitate** what I admire, what I want to make mine, as the ultimate way of showing my appreciation.

Sometimes, in art, we tend to disregard imitation; yet it is a creative process that relates to the concept of *mimesis*.

The moment of **imitation**, of *mimesis*, may be prior to invention, even when imitation contains slight non-assumed inventions.

In this way, life drawing establishes a creative/inventive situation that is prior to but also coexists with invention.

What the drawing registers is none other than a precise flux through

nerve synapses, to which we give the name: “*what I have seen*”, and which is then transferred to another precise flux of synapses we name “*the action of drawing what I see*”.

Almost all life drawings are memory drawings, because even if only a fraction of a second elapses between glancing at the object and drawing the line, even if this moment is so short that it becomes almost unconscious, when I draw, I am actually and already at a different time, drawing from a brand new memory.

In life drawing, this transitory mental structure, equivalent to the perception of sensual stimuli, is transformed in a brief time into the action of drawing and into the drawing itself.

Nonetheless, the brain has the capacity to create, bringing what was not before, into existence, and this “*life drawing from the memory*” is completed with new elements that are a mixture of what the artist thinks he or she saw, as well as what he or she chooses to add.

Thus, in **invention**, we have two distinct moments: the moment of *mimesis* – the creative imitation, and the moment of *poïesis* – the bringing into being of something that was not there before.

Simplifying, I would say that there are two ways of **drawing**: drawing from the **outside in** - and here we have all drawing that directly represents or investigates reality, more precise and analytical or more vague, more personal, whatever, but all referring to the classical concept of *mimesis*, which is the idea of creative imitation; and drawing from the **inside out** - where the object or subject drawn does not exist in front of our eyes, does not get into our perceiving organs before existing, and refers to the concept of *poïesis* - the making, the bringing into existence of something that did not exist previously.

But the two processes often coexist in the same drawing.

The second concept is **Intervention** – *in limine* – on the threshold

of - where I'll place the object, the drawing itself.

**Intervention** implies the crossing of borders, the entering inside other places, other beings.

In order for a drawing to be able to **intervene**, it needs certain qualities and capacities, namely, to have a clear artistic intention and the capability to trigger aesthetic emotion. Or it may be the kind of drawing that enables us to understand ideas or visions.

The drawing becomes a mediator, inside an open circuit of interferences.

The drawing is the result of *poiesis*, of the interference of something that was not there before, molding the mind to its new presence.

In 1991, the biologist Paul Grobstein wrote, in an article called "From Genomes to Dreams"

*"So, there is the genome, and there is the information one collects during one's own life by interacting with the environment. And that brings us to the crux of the matter. Is that all there is, as I once thought" If one knew everything there is to know about the genome of an individual, and everything there is to know about their experiences, everything reported by all the sensory nerves, could one predict their behavior? The answer, I'm now convinced, is no. There is a third source of information that influences the behavior of all individuals, something which is not in the genome and has never been in the sensory nerves. There is information, which the brain makes up for itself."*

We are a result of interaction.

But then, the adult mind sometimes seems to be a balanced unit resistant to changes - we protect ourselves from changes. On the other hand, we sometimes have a feeling that things interfere with our thinking process: ideas and feelings, or images and objects that alter us. And here is where the intervention/interference of drawing becomes interesting.

What kind of object is this that has the strength to physically change the organisms that we are?

Here we are dealing with drawing so I give you an example that is clear, compared to others, that may be less objective: perspective.

If you are not acquainted with perspective, you might look at a drawing without understanding what it represents.

Nowadays, our vision has become so specialized and informed that we forget that perspective is something cultural and not natural at all; photos, images of all kinds surround us in a way that their mode of representation feels as something innate. However, to consider as natural the ability of our brain to read the representation of depth through perspective, a method, which requires both so many references, and the understanding of a great number of abstractions to become possible, is a surprise.

So, for such an image, if we do not know this way of representing, the “rules of perspective”, we are blind (blind in the way that our brain has not formed the paths that make possible its understanding); but if we know it, then we do see.

The brain learns and changes, learns and changes; so, for every drawing with the capacity of surprising, or moving, or informing us, we go through a process of slight morphing of the brain’s pathways, of its capacity.

Drawing, being a thinking process of the mind is also a product, an object, which is able to **alter the responses and characteristics of the very same brain**, which has produced it.

The third concept is **Interaction** – *in absentia* – in the absence of - where I’ll consider the situation of the observer.

It was a bit mind-blowing: when looking up interaction, I discovered its origins as being - in the absence of.

It fits my understanding of the human observer whose mind is opened to activation from sensations and perceptions.

Through observing the drawing, his identity interacts with others and with him/herself.

**Interaction** implies a relation between the draughtsman, the drawing and the observer.

The artist accomplished his or her actions, the drawing exists, now what is going to happen when an observer looks at it?

Here I'm always asking myself the question – Why do we like drawings? What is so attractive to our minds about looking at drawings?

There is a pleasure in looking at drawings that relates to our own capacity of imitating.

When this record, the drawing, is observed, it is possible to reactivate the same combination of synapses, corresponding to what was seen, and when that happens we say: “*I recognize*”, or “*I remember*”.

It is interesting that some of the drawings made “from the outside in” usually trigger reactions, that bring together memories and knowledge of what is represented in the drawing, with an unavoidable comparing - an examining of people or things for similarities - such as comparing between the drawing and the model that we see, or between the drawing and the model that one knows, that we have in our memory, that the paths of our brain recognize.

Not only do we get pleasure from analytical drawing, from learning about reality, but we also get gratification at looking at such drawings, showing reality in detail.

Observers can frequently be overheard, commenting on the greater or lesser resemblance of a drawing to its model. “It looks just like it”

becomes a compliment to praise the artist's skill.

I have a theory that this pleasure and attraction in looking at drawings relates to our ability to recognize the gestures contained in the marks of drawing.

I come back to **imitation** as a mediator to recognition. To **imitate** is a process we systematically use, particularly in the first years of existence.

For instance, where vocalisation is concerned it seems that mirror neurons have a fundamental role that surpasses the simple mechanics of imitation.

Skoyles<sup>12</sup>, on his investigation of speech imitation, shows that there is a motor perception, acknowledged through the mechanism of vision that calls up memories identifying the physical gesture used, according to our own ability to carry out this gesture. This perception is related to a particular kind of neurons in our brain, mirror neurons.

More recently, Daniel Glaser and Patrick Haggard, from UCL (University of College London), studying ballet and *capoeira* dancers, say:

*"Our findings suggest that once the brain has learned a skill, it may simulate the skill without even moving, through simple observation," "An injured dancer might be able to maintain his skill despite being temporarily unable to move, simply by watching others dance."*

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<sup>1</sup> Skoyles, John R., "Motor perception and art", <http://www.globalnet.co.uk/~skoyles/art.html>

<sup>2</sup> "The continued existence of language therefore depends upon words being imitable. However, in spite of the importance of this, the theoretical and experimental concern of speech scientists is nearly exclusively with speech as spoken and heard. This perhaps is due to imitation being a transient and non-linguistic activity, while word perception and word production are both constantly occurring and obviously the reason of why people speak. However, this is a mistake: as noted above, imitation, in spite of playing a mostly transient role in language acquisition, is a necessary process for the existence of speech." Skoyles, John R.

My theory is that mirror-neurons are possibly very important in the observation and recognition of drawings.

The observation of a drawing awakens in us recognition of the movement made, to accomplish this or that line, this or that mark.

“So, what the eyes see in the drawing challenges our brain to locate memories of the gestures and the actions of the draftsman, and thus we identify, in our own body, what had to have happened to make the lines or marks in front of our eyes.”<sup>3</sup>

Thus the observer’s recognition acquires a new meaning: he finds in the drawing a corollary of his own perception, as well as traces of the process of the artist.

Now I would like to share with you the possibility of recognizing ourselves in the gestures expressed in the drawings of four Portuguese artists, and I’ll propose a very short journey through their works...

Helena Almeida materializes the elements of drawing, transforming the line into a three dimensional entity. She also reenacts the actions of drawing. She was born in Lisbon in 1934, and is a graduate of the Lisbon School of Fine Arts. Lives in Lisbon.

Lourdes de Castro is a collector of shadows. Her primary element is shading and shadows. She was born in 1930 in Funchal, on the island of Madeira. She entered the Lisbon School of Fine Arts in 1950. Lives in Madeira.

Inês Teixeira reinvents the tree/house, in a game where myth, erudition and innocence come together. She was born in 1965, in Lisboa. She studied Art History at the Universidade Nova de Lisboa. Lives in Lisbon.

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<sup>3</sup> **Rodrigues**, Ana Leonor Madeira, *Desenho*, Lisboa 2003, pp.29

Gabriela Albergaria, holds our hand on a journey through the green lines and the trees of her drawings. She was born 1965, in Vale de Cambra, Portugal, lives and works in Lisbon and Berlin. Studied at the Fine Arts University of Porto.