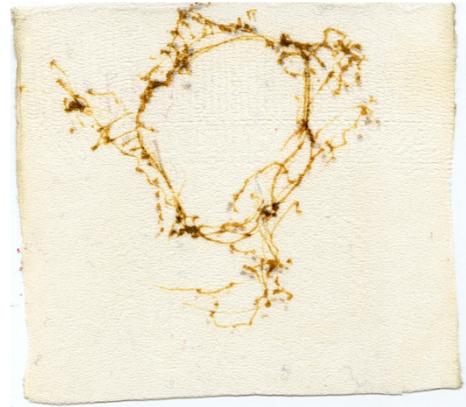


## Studio 1 | Drawings

David Dernie



The distinctive drawings that emerged from Cambridge's Studio 1 in the 1980's are a testimony to an extraordinary studio culture at the time at Scroope. Armed only with maylines, a photocopier, and a pharmacy of Xerox transfer liquids we were collectively inspired to draw and make, redraw and remake, to experiment and discover through drawing and making. We all knew how to draw up once we had an idea, but the lynchpin to the life of those studios was that we drew in order to discover. Like Klee's active line, 'on a walk for its own sake', drawings animated our thinking and through drawing, we found both effect and cause, our drawings revealed ideas, or as Dalibor commented in a passage on continuity and the natural world - 'the act of drawing is anticipated in the gesture of our hand, and the visible results in turn inform the hands movements'.

Drawings were the life-blood of the studio's research: what kind of drawings could explore the complexity of relationships between the pragmatic life, cultural conditions, memories, expectations and the visible parameters of a space? Although techniques were passed between us, the development of new drawings was a personal, creative affair. The studio was underpinned by a creative freedom with respect to the content of the project and technique and character of the drawings were integral to that content. Dalibor once suggested the rhythm of my drawing process was like a back and forth between dream and reflection – and the reciprocity between the two was always vital: it was like being on the edge of being lost. But the intensity of creative exploration with paper and materials was as fundamental to our exploration of the non-visible (or latent) structure of the space as was the subsequent reflection on the work – in the light of day. The visual work was always a challenge: 'If it starts to work too well too soon' Dalibor once said, 'turn it upside down and start again – see what you find'. We were inspired beyond our limits, to develop work that was quite distinct from architectural illustration, that engaged different kinds of knowledge, different ways of thinking. And at a certain point along the way there was a leap: *something just happened to be right*. This instinctive judgement, what Dalibor called a matter of *visual intelligence*, was a fundamental part of creativity of the studio.

At the same time the drawings embodied other forms of knowledge, reflected perhaps in their often complex structure, an acknowledgement that our experience of an urban setting, the life of a street for instance, is

always more complex than any one of its abstractions - it is an infinitely richer phenomenon than any one drawing or perspective can articulate (compare for instance the experience of the walker with the plan of the street, a diagram, section or three dimensional snap shot). All of these only allow a glimpse into one view or conceptualization of the street. But the experience of the street is not only the range of the visible, near and far, but is also the horizons of invisible, the cultures, histories and landscapes beyond the confines of the street. They are there by their absence. Dalibor refers to the receptive nature of architectural situations, how the fused horizons of auditive, visual and tactile experience also gather the horizons of our memories and associations.

The new kinds of drawings that emerged from Studio 1 during the 1980's explored this simultaneity of experience and the metaphorical structure of architectural situations. They invariably established a non-perspectival 'scaffold' – often a combination of line drawings that established the conditions of the scale, orientation and layout of the spatial arrangement. In the depth of the drawing (and in the days before Photoshop) often behind perspex to give it a physical depth, collage and tone explored the primary conditions of light and dark and carefully articulated thematic elements belonging to the content of the project. The drawings ranged from elaborately constructed layered collages or paintings to sketches and photomontage. Often multiple views, they were an attempt to combine conventional drawing types to portray the simultaneity of experience of a setting – 'all perspectives together' - and the continuity with the 'natural world'. The drawings weren't made to be 'read' as narratives. Rather the key visual experience was the reciprocity between the line work of the conceptual drawings and the light, textural and figurative structure of the depth of the drawing, in a way that was receptive to creative interpretation. Like the unfinished sketch, the collages retain an openness to reinterpretation.

The intention at the time was not to initiate a style of drawing, an inward-looking aesthetic, or to express a new theoretical approach. Rather the collages were a genuine attempt to reposition conventions of architectural drawing, a way of looking beyond the limits of its orthogonal and geometric projections to engage with other disciplines such as painting, photography, film and theatre, whose insights into cities or settings for human drama informed our own. Above all, the contribution of the visual arts to our work is evident in the central role afforded to the structure of natural light. Perhaps not surprisingly this informed primary conditions of spatial structure, its materiality and eventually its technical resolution. Light was of course a key to unlock the potential conditions of visible horizons, orientation, the physiognomy of the space, materials and external (given) conditions.

Some three decades later Studio conditions have changed, at Scroope and elsewhere, but the essential position of the studio as the locus of architectural research should not. Today hand-made collages in architecture are now all but eclipsed by their digital counterparts and hybrid drawings. But I think the enduring measure of Studio 1's drawings is not dependent on technique, or aesthetic, but on its contribution to establishing the creative role of drawing and design in architectural research. And this is part of a much deeper tradition of *disegno*, meaning both drawing and design. As 'father of all our arts' wrote Vasari, *disegno* derived from the intellect and created a 'universal judgment from many things'. And like the capacity of *disegno* to synthesize word and image, Studio 1's visual research gathered a field of tensional relationships: the scale of the space, the

texture of materials, the presence and movement of light, the plenitude and simultaneous presence of the horizons of the visible and non-visual in the space. Studio 1's drawings still point to a world beyond themselves and offer fruitful reflection: when I now look at them, I posit in that very glance Dalibor's rich world of inspirational teaching of which the drawings are products.