

NEWHAM, AMANDA, M.F.A., *The Pedestrian*. (2009)
Directed by Barbara Campbell. 9pp.

The Pedestrian consists of 100 drawings on 9 ½ inch by 9 ½ inch (the size of my foot, squared) pieces of paper; these drawings are made from daily observation on my 13-minute walk from my apartment to my studio on Highland Avenue.

THE PEDESTRIAN

By

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Committee Chair

APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis as been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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Many thanks to my parents: George and Margaret Newham, for all of their support, who taught me to walk, and let me draw everywhere. And finally, much love and thanks to Mark Cobb, who sparked my wanderlust and took me on my first cross-country road trip—here's to many more!

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THE PEDESTRIAN

The Pedestrian is my body of thesis work that brings together the direct observation and physical action of my daily walks. These drawings take place in an in-between space I have claimed as my observational studio. This project encompasses notions about practice, performance, territory, rejection of the automobile, and the intersection of the ordinary and the marvelous. Consisting of 100 drawings on 9 ½ inch by 9 ½ inch (the size of my foot, squared) pieces of paper, these drawings are made within the 13-minute walk from my apartment to my studio on Highland Avenue.

A video “re-enactment” of sorts is also included in this project, but serves more as a celebratory parade with a marionette surrogate that is shown walking/drawing down this same path. Each drawing is a record of two walks (inbound and outbound) that attempt to collapse every bit of visual information my hand can notate as it is jostled down the sidewalk. The squares are placed two-high on a horizontal band on the wall. This paper sidewalk mirrors the sidewalked path from which they were drawn, and is meant to be strolled upon viewing. This walk the viewer/participant makes will lead him or her around the two walls in the gallery, and to a monitor that plays the parade footage partially hidden in the corner. The complete viewing/walking of this walkabout forms a makeshift parade as the viewer makes their way around.

Finding my Footing, or Why My Car is Parked

This project’s path has been quite winding, but can be traced quite easily back to my first semester in the graduate program. My biggest concern in looking for a place to live, was

finding an apartment within walking distance to the art department. My move to Greensboro was in the fall of 2007, when the US was in the thick of two wars --as it continues to be as I write this now--with oil being a primary cause. These with perpetual crises, the possibilities of Peak Oil's effect on the United States, pollution, and just general domination of automobiles on the landscape, all made me want to opt out. Owning a vehicle, I seized my opportunity to park it. As an artist, I romanticized the idea of living by hand and foot. I learned the bus routes and started using mass transit to run errands beyond my footing.

Drifting and Bi-Coasting

Oddly enough it was a holiday and a hiatus from sole pedestrianism that led me to psychogeography. I set out on my first cross-country road trip from Greensboro to Santa Cruz, California and back. My only experiences with the west coast were vicariously through beats in books, such as On the Road or Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas. I soon developed my own wanderlust. Exploring, walking in Death Valley, The Grand Canyon, (on mesas and flatlands I never really knew existed), were experiences I could not describe. I remember thinking that there should be more literature, more art, more about the psychological effect of such shifts in geography and terrain. How could I make work about walking through the redwoods forest during a full moon, or navigating the streets of San Francisco in a rainstorm at night, trying to find "City Lights" during a power outage?

This experience affected my psyche greatly, but I struggled with how to use it. In Debord's essay "Theory of the Derive", he says that *writing* about drifting serves as a password to the activity, but I didn't know what the passwords were that I could share. I wanted to share something visual -- maybe even something a bit more visceral and synesthetic. I returned from the west coast, and soon started to drift in my own city. I unknowingly took a prompt from Paul Klee: I literally took a line for a walk. This is when I began to walk and draw in tandem.

I started to drift, pen in left, tablet in right, throughout Greensboro. These first walking drawings were a just few shaky lines from observation, and I flipped to another blank page. I was thrilled at the notion of relinquishing some control over my tame, trained hand, (did very much feel like I was letting a pet run free without a leash.) Instead of making a few marks on a page, I let in the landscape, breathing it in, and walking it out; I let my walk compose. I walked from abandoned industrial plants, to neighborhoods with well groomed shrubbery, to painted primary playgrounds. I let this mess of a map collapse in on itself. Many of these enclaves were quite welcoming and pleasant, but some stretches lost their sidewalks quickly and turned to desolate asphalt meant for the toughest of trucks, not a curious pedestrian with a felt-tipped pen.

After a couple of bloodied knees, and a few dollars short (both conditions stemming from falling into unfamiliar territory), I reassessed my plan. I remembered that one of the methods of psychogeography advocated a more constrained walk, one in which you could better decipher your experiences over time. I decided to mark out my territory. I claimed the 867 steps from my apartment to my studio. This often highly populated strip dominated by both foot and street traffic was actually a bit intimidating, but in a much different way from the highway. Other pedestrians would look over my shoulder to see what I was doing, some looking backward every few seconds as if I were trailing them, taking notes (and I was, of course, with a sketchy notation of their presence). Drivers' faces looked perplexed. This began to feel like a performance. I realized I was performing a drawing, I wrote out my own directions:

Pedestrian Drawing--

- Simple media will be used: plain white (bright white *Somerset Velvet* printmaking/drawing paper) and only pencil, charcoal, ink will be used. I will alternate the drawing tool to differentiate inbound and outbound drawings.

- Paper will be torn to the size of my foot, squared. (9 ½“ x 9 ½“)
- I will draw this space each time I walk it, with complete attentiveness, observing and notating every bit of visual information I can collapse on the page; I will walk/draw at least twice a day, and repeated for as many times as I walk back and forth.
- The speed of the walk will vary naturally, but I will not try to walk hurriedly or slowly.
- When stopped at crosswalks, and in the case of other periodic halts in the walk, I will stop drawing. I will continue drawing when I continue walking.

Practice!

So, how do you *perform* a drawing, how do you *create* a space? The answer to both is -- practice. Certeau explained this in The Practice of Everyday Life: “A space is a place appropriated by practices.” I have continued my practice everyday, and have been keeping a journal for further documentation of my walks, and how it’s changed my observational habits:

Monday, February 23, 2009: Appetite for Observation

...I think the places that aren't my 'designated' in-between studio -- the places that I'm not sketching at the speed of foot -- I observe them quite a bit differently, [visually] tracing over everything, going back several times over, 'n recording it, like I might miss something essential. Something really important. (yeah. I have gotten quite a voracious observational appetite)

Thursday, February 28, 2009: Directing my Direction: What I visually record

I start drawing as soon as I leave through the backdoor, down three steps, right turn around the corner, a left around a massive oak, and then a right along the sidewalk. My feet usually stumble into at least one of the six potholes in my communal driveway (I rarely watch my feet, but rather the rough slats in the wooden fence, perched birds—a female cardinal, as was the case today-- or the bicyclists going by). I continue right and travel on the sidewalk, past the campus police up on their elevated driveway, and stop at Jacks On the Corner (which is, true to its name) and wait for the pedestrian light to blink.

I hurry across. I draw as I run across, which admittedly may not be the best idea, it's a pretty dangerous intersection, and am then met by some really lush trees that instantly provide a canopy, and solace from the busy street. Large red bricked housing flank the street; they are tall

but not overwhelming. All of these choices seem carefully considered; this area seems to have been consciously constructed to signify that you've entered a safe campus. Now green-painted benches crop up everywhere. The sidewalks and curbs are tended to, and shrubs are growing unnaturally topiary-like. Zebra crossings are paved in a similarly colored reddish-brick, and medians have mid-sized trees sprouting in lines. I walk straight through it. Smells of hotdogs emanate from YUM-YUM's, and an ATM machine stands between the shared parking lot between the Yum and Old Town Tavern. (When walking outbound, I linger and listen, Old Town has the best music that is piped out onto the sidewalk. Even heard Billy Bragg and WILCO's cover of a Woody Guthrie song, "California Stars" just last night). More sculpted bushes, trees, bricked walkways. The planted trees are trim and elegant, but there are some of the most interesting older trees along this walk that I've ever seen. [Three of which seem so unusually animated, they always get my attention and are drawn. One in particular that has lost most of its bark, its smooth trunk seems to glow bright white when I pass by in the evening. Eerily beautiful. A birch, maybe? The second is a hermaphroditic oak that has the strangest protrusions of both sexes in somewhat appropriate places. Another favorite is right near my studio, enormous, with large waxy leaves that seems overgrown and billows over onto the sidewalk like a big blob of a monster, with arms that you must duck underneath to pass.] A few free-weekly newspaper boxes and trash cans, and a turn to the right takes you up Highland. The light posts here are much different, very attractive with big round globes. From the street you can see Andy's sculpture on guard at the entrance and I walk up the stairs, stop drawing, and go inside. I'll finish this drawing with an ink pen when I return home.

Sunday, March 15th, Flashing my 15 Seconds

Ah! A new pedestrian light was installed the day I left for Philadelphia on spring break. Quite a nice surprise, this new one is much more efficient, before the light displayed a glowing/walking figure for three seconds, then a blinking red hand to hurry you along; with little indication as to how much time you had to run across. Good, because I usually get overconfident when I return from walking in a big city.

While the physical component of The Pedestrian is a common activity, the exploration and persistence in fluctuating conditions (rain / snow) have proved to be interesting.

Aesthetically, there are some walks/draws I favor over others – usually these were the tougher walks to make. By considering them as a unit, I do not feel the pressure to exclude the ones that are not as formally interesting. As Lee Walton said in my studio, “not all walks are good walks,” which proved quite true, but the ones that were made in the worst conditions, have proven to be the most interesting:

Monday, March 3, 2009: Sidewalking in the Snow

Wow, its gotta be about 4 or 5 inches...the powdery sort. It's really beautiful out. I didn't know how well I could manage the daily draw with the fresh snowfall, but I did manage a sparse sketch (funny, all buildings, cars, benches and trees have been whited-out). Was worried I'd slip, and the sidewalks are really slick, but I just made a path through the mounds of snow instead. ah, was great having no cars on the road... but yeah, really quiet out, and when the wind blew, swirls around like a snow globe...better return home before all melts and ices over.

Of course, the walks that throw you off-balance also ground your connection to the local geography as well:

Friday, February 20, 2009: Running (or Walking) Tally

Ha, now up to two falls. [Just glad I was wearing jeans; the concrete can really beat up your knees.] was walking with way too much stuff, and didn't think of distributing the weight more evenly across my body before leaving my apartment, so when I was drawing and looking all around and just casually tripped, the weight of everything made it impossible to catch myself and guard against a fall.

Luckily I haven't gotten so harmed that I no longer find it funny...it's still pretty funny.

And I was okay with the fact that when I got it together and started back drawing, I didn't realize that the drawing was upside-down... yeahhh, can't beat the decisions that make themselves.

Performance, Puppetry and Parades

The walking/drawing is a repeat performance that is improvised at least twice a day, and repeated for as many times as I walk this particular route. While I have outlined several guidelines, many variables influence the drawings. Time of day, varying moods, weather, the weight of the items in my backpack, blocked pathways, open manholes, panhandlers, and stumbling are all factors that I can tease out of the dense lines that comprise each square of this sidewalk piece. Certainly the awareness of being observed by others, as I am observing my surroundings, also affects the work greatly. The consciousness of all of these elements

encouraged me to create a celebratory document of this drawing performance that needed to be different than just a recording of the daily events. A parade that was one step beyond this daily walking/drawing performance seemed perfect. A one-person pedestrian parade was planned, with a marionette performed in bunraku (I am seen, in shadow, in the video-recording though not the central focus of the parade) to re-create and celebrate all the daily walks in the ice and snow, and the conclusion of this daily ritual.

Repetition. Repetition.

The more I have reflected on what my project means, what it is imbued with, how it functions, the more I have realized how passionate I am about it, how much I am in it. I had wondered if drawing a set place, creating a space and drawing it repeatedly could become more interesting. Every day as I happily ran into someone I knew, found a weird bits of evidence of the night before (a red plastic pitchfork? this was not here yesterday...) and people who make the world more interesting, a man in drag wearing purple tights and stilettos with a book bag headed for class—the answer is yes. It only gets more interesting. This intersection of drawing, walking, observation, puppetry/performance, personal politics, and play, has created a truly transfunctional, beautiful, living space. I am happy to have a hand, and a foot in it.

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CATALOGUE

1. Pedestrian Drawing #1	graphite and charcoal on paper	9.5" x 9.5"
2. Pedestrian Drawing #2	ink on paper	9.5" x 9.5"
3. Pedestrian Drawing #3	ink on paper	9.5" x 9.5"
4. Pedestrian Drawing #4	ink on paper	9.5" x 9.5"
5. Pedestrian Drawing #5	ink on paper	9.5" x 9.5"
6. Pedestrian Drawing #6	ink on paper	9.5" x 9.5"
7. Pedestrian Drawing #7	ink on paper	9.5" x 9.5"
8. Pedestrian Drawing #8	ink on paper	9.5" x 9.5"
9. Pedestrian Drawing #9	ink on paper	9.5" x 9.5"
10. Pedestrian Drawing #10	ink on paper	9.5" x 9.5"