

Urban Meditation and Drift

An Inquiry into Urban Living

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Any argument about the nature of humanity that I make comes off so contrived. The idea that I can understand the whole of humanity is absurd. Designer as savior, revolutionary, and political guru. While reading the new *Émigré* (Barringer, David. *Émigré #68. American Mutt Barks in the Yard*. PAP, 2004.) the platform of the impassioned designer was put forth quite eloquently,

WHAT DO I THINK I AM DOING? Art is an expression of hope. In other words, a delusion, a denial of what is likely, a willing disregard of probabilities. Reckless defiance. An assertion of self against the odds.

Q. What artists inspire you the most?

A. The dead ones. They inspire me to work faster

The idea that we are going to save the world in some ways is complete whimsy, yet, at the root of it drives us to design and put forth work that is wrapped in the passion and conviction of its maker. I have to agree and at the same time disagree with David Barringer here. The rational of hope and its delusion is what gives art its purity and essence. It is this naive fantasy that drives work that has the power to move people. It is the reckless defiance that creates work unheard of and never imagined. It is that delusion that brings forth the amazing landscapes of Monet, the sculptures of Dali, and the graffiti of Banksy. I like to say that humans are fundamentally irrational creatures, with that a given it is completely rational, to be irrational.

In art and design we try to imagine worlds that do not exist, that illustrate a utopia set apart from the sometimes depressing illusion that we call reality, or we draw attention to the harsh reality of life that brings us one step closer to feeling human, developing a connection between ourselves and the world. It is this bridge between what we believe to be reality and utopia, coupled with experience that make us into who we are. Humans, a fanciful amalgamation of association and experience make up a dynamic range of proposed utopias, realities and artistic expression. But I want to address the proposed stereotype, somewhat reinforced by my 'delusional' assumptions put forth above. The artist is not some schizophrenic madman locked in the attic with a paint brush—even though there are a fair share of them. Art is about the passion of the visual, the admittance of never sitting happy with the answers you are given about life, never quite nourished of you visual nutrition. Art is looking at the world as if there is something that it is not telling you, something that you must traverse it longitude and latitude in search of philosophy, of the intangible, of the epiphany—the moment of clarity.

We set out on foot in search of answers. Mental and physical drifts that lead us into territory very familiar and very distant. If you were to choose one block in a city, one that you know so well, one that you walk every day, and explore its surface, traverse its pavement with eyes fixed upon the story that it has to tell. Who are the people that traverse these streets with you who wear down the buttons on the cross walk? Who drives the cars that wear down the man hole covers. What caused the cracks in the sidewalk? Who built the buildings that surround you? Who inhabits these buildings and what stories do they have to tell? As we move through space we add to the story, of our lives, of the street, of the people who surround us. The walk, creates a story of place, of time, and of being. Who we are and what we are at that moment is someone that we will never be again. Experience adds to experience and experience adds to the associations in our mind and the story that we have to tell.

The journey that we make through space, these explorations, as artists, as designers, as people aware of our environment, contribute not only to our story but in help to formulate a way in which we experience that story and will interpret stories of the past and the future. The act of walking as an aware individual puts you in tune with not only the environment, but also yourself. But to be aware can be more than just paying attention and absorbing and speaking the language of your surroundings, it is to develop an interior monologue that allows us speak about ourselves, that develops a harmony between mind and body, it helps us formulate a language in which to understand a place, that is not intended for us to comprehend. Walking is the act of harmony, of self reflection and understanding; it can transcend the point-to-point mode of transportation into the nomadic drift of space time.

The walk is a metaphor for understanding and exploration. It is not only at the root of human mobility and transportation, but transcends the functional into that of art. David Barringer might say that walking is an expression of hope. Maybe it is an expression of hope, of a means of gaining some glimpse into understanding, a building block to epiphany. But at its essence, walking as a poetic act, that which soothes the troubled soul, and repairs the jaded illusions is more than delusion, it is something that—and maybe this is naive—we have all done to caress our souls and grasp that sense of self that so often fades in to the distance. As artists, designers, and people engaged in a dialogue between ourselves and our environment we develop a deep connection and need, to understand, explore and cultivate a coherent and rational reality within an incoherent and irrational space and time.