

Eddie Stobart & the Flâneuse

The sans serif typeface of an Eddie Stobart lorry (Keisha Louise) hurtles down the A77 Pollockshaws Road into the city centre. A cycling commuter, head down, dressed in a cagoule and some paint splattered jeans swerves off the highway, narrowly missing a wave of road mulch kicked up by the vehicle's Maragoni tyres. It is 8.07am on Monday 1 September 2014. At the corner of Wallace Street two friends are engaged in conversation.

Flâneuse 1⁽¹⁾: (walking). This is our starting point, (she indicates both to the spot on the road and her own body). This urban garden has just come up in the last year, (pointing), and behind it is a development arranged by the New Gorbals Housing Association. (Zips up jacket). Whenever I think of the Gorbals I think of hearing about this social experiment. They thought children living there weren't getting enough sunlight so they would put babies on this rotating bed under a lamp like incubating chicks!

Flâneuse 2: (snorts in amusement). So this is your daily commute? (Shouting over wind and traffic). It's pretty busy!

(Shakes head from side to side). It isn't too bad, you certainly don't think of this as a domestic area though (staring at new housing development). You can read a lot of new buildings as to whether they are social housing or private homes through their balconies. (Arm Pointing). Here in these glassed out buildings they speak of lounging and leisure, whereas in social housing, balconies are inserted into the design so there is some sort of outdoor space, but they often are built too narrow so they conversely become an enclosed space, or a space of conflict. I suppose they just become sort of corridors.

(They link arms). It's like that text by John A. Dolan we read where he studies external house decoration on estates where people had bought their council house, after Thatcher 's Right to Buy 1980's Housing Act. ⁽²⁾

The cyclist has to dismount as the bike path comes to an abrupt end. Passing two parked cars she sees sleeping suited men; mouths open, face screwed, determined to clock up some down time before work. The cyclist re-mounts at a large empty Georgian building, she is momentarily protected from the rain by a painter's gondola hanging at the third floor.



(They guide each other around some broken glass). That's always there (pointing at the glass), I've been cycling round that glass for the last two years. There is a real wind tunnel here too, I nearly always get blown over, the buildings are constructed without thinking about the strange effects of weather.

(Fingers caress a smooth penny in jacket pocket). What is it to know the detail of a place, intimately? To know with your eyes closed how to navigate its roads - networks? It's like the commute, (pointing towards the vehicle and sleeping worker) it becomes your personal portrait of the city or something. It gives you a rhythm, you repeat it daily, and slowly your trace becomes etched into its surface...albeit an unpaid part of our working day! (Whispering into ear)-I think it is really good that you sleep a lot. You work really hard but you do manage to sleep,

I know so many people who, often related to their work they just don't sleep well, for years even.

(Smiles and waves at a painter on the third floor of the building across street). This place has been under a paint job for the last year, it's such a weird colour - like brick or makeup foundation? It's been empty the whole time too, but last week 'Bruce the Lawyers' moved in, as it's near the law courts I suppose.

(Referring to the painter). He's doing a thorough job up there. (Smiling) It's like the 'painting of the Forth Rail Bridge' ⁽³⁾.

(Eyes role). Or the Works Progress Administration⁽⁴⁾?

(They turn to walk on). Or is it? May be there is something in the slowness and meticulous detail he works for that isn't about an enforced monotony or control...may be he is the one extending the job, using that time to resist the efficiency and productivity we are all pushed to run to? He's maintaining something...



(Checking iphone). Yeah may be - it reminds me of a Kurt Vonnegut Tweet: 'everybody wants to build nobody wants to maintain.'

The designed Sheriff Court stands on the Clyde in grey cloud. Anxious individuals hang around its landscaped gardens, biting nails, smoking. The Eddie Stobart lorry is now parked on Gorbals Street. The driver gets out of the truck and heads for the entrance to the court. As he passes the cyclist he drops a news clipping. The headline reads: 'Truck Off: Haulage firm bids for controversial contracts to provide lawyers in criminal trials. Legal profession protests against Stobart's plan to remove defendants right to choose solicitor.'

(Pulls out a crushed MilkyWay from rucksack pocket, divides and shares). You can go in there, (head nodding to the court house) they are actually public places you can go in. I once went into court and I felt so awkward, it felt like such a private space. (Bites MilkyWay) I went to see the Victoria Climbié case at the Old Bailey. It was like a surreal performance. I remember feeling like I was meant to be able to physically see truth, like an object in the room.

(Switches bag to other shoulder). Do you think we should be going to the law courts? I mean what is our responsibility? As a citizen who is subject to the very same laws at work within the court room we should know about them, participate in what that legal system is? (Swallows), yet, who really has access to that participation and I suppose beyond that, who has access to so-called 'public' space?

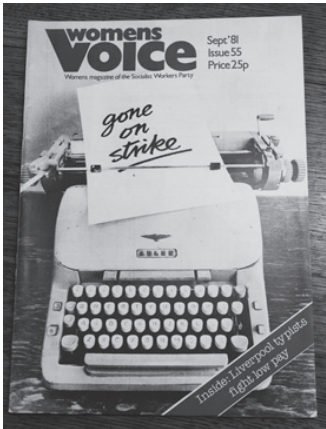
(Distracted, pointing). This big wall that juts out of the other court is strange.

Yeah. I wonder if a wall in a court of justice is materially very different to another wall? Is it imbued with the law itself? (Laughs) I mean what is a building telling us, or how is a building affecting us in ways that we don't realise?

(Stopping to get out a bottle of water). The way I see it is, buildings are designed for a function, and people's interactions become analysed as the research for the construction just as a chair is analysed. It's a process



Flâneuse



that doesn't want to allow for a discussion of whether we, as the city's inhabitants, are aware that our commute to work via this infrastructure is a political one.

(Looks left into a glass fronted commercial unit). The white walls of the gallery embody a contradiction too, I see them as wanting to be part of the city but also to be separated from it. They have the same voice as the Sheriff Court, it tells us: 'I am a public institution and you are able to enter but really you're not going to', it's just there for a particular type of person or a particular type of activity.

Yes it purposively severs itself from the wider context, its wider part within how we are organised.

(Hands cupping mouth). The white wall has a very loud voice but seeks to hide it, hide its context, labour, history, community and connection, as it wants to create a clean space for something to be viewed in. It's funny though, as I want to know and acknowledge all those layers, I want the messiness, the complicatedness. That is what feeds how I understand space, myself, objects.

(They grab each others arm as they cross the road junction). I wonder if that's an attitude shared between women? I always want to grasp things physically. I hate the idea of an endurance art performance but then a labourious process, struggle, dedication become the parameters I set for myself to work within. I have to have some sort of level of difficulty, everyday. If there isn't all that, I feel like I haven't done enough.

A large column of concrete shadows the cyclist briefly. It was constructed over the last eight days by an automated cast concrete system that pours and sets concrete in constant motion at a rate of 30cm per hour. Around the concrete core there is a steel frame which is fronted by a large glass block. It is a modular fabrication. Every unit in the building can be moved out if needing replacement. A construction worker is grumbling about the design, he indicates to his colleague that the modular system won't ever be put into practice; it will be more cost effective to tear down and re-build the whole structure.

(Blows nose) I suppose it's about time travel, seeing the layers beneath and around a place, a building; their shifting socio-political and cultural context. It seems to remind me of Archigram's⁽⁵⁾ idea in the 60s where the only permanent part of the building would be a crane that would continually add, change, rebuild. (Places tissues in pocket).

(Both sit on a concrete plaza bench, looking out on the river). A lot of architects have designed their perfect chair, they go on to design a building; working from the micro to the macro. There is that term 'Gesamtkunstwerk', signifying when an architect works on the totality of a building. It became linked to approaches in the Bauhaus school too where you would work your ideas through many different materials and contexts. Imagine that in City Planning terms! It could mean designing everything from the master plan to the minute details of the furniture placed in the buildings!

(Smiling, nodding) City Planning, mmm...how much say do we have in that? (Pointing towards the concrete tower). It makes me question how this new building will impact the students using it? How will it mean they interact with their education, or think about the city, or think about work?

The politics are poured into the very concrete of the building, (laughing).

(Grabs other's hand). Yes and what does that mean if concrete is one of the only materials that

gets stronger with age - the idea of permanence is within concrete!

(Squeezes hands). But, if concrete is damaged, it is the opposite. And, apparently there is some new concrete that is developed that has bacteria in it that is self healing, (eyebrows raised, grinning).

The cyclist steadies herself against the curb and gets out her map. It is rush hour, and she must travel across the city South to North, negotiating the M8 motorway which, like the Clyde divides the city and its inhabitants. On her map, the motorway is shown in its original plan, with its beginning in Argyle Street. It charts a time before the art community moved into the area and before the local residents pushed the road North. She memorises her route, (St. Vincent, Douglas Place, Cowcaddens) towards the Forth and Clyde canal.

(Walking slowly, hands in pockets). You know, the artist and writer Moyra Davey calls herself a 'flâneuse who never leaves her apartment'⁽⁶⁾; she wanders from the confines of her home. (Forehead wrinkles). Women have not only been prevented access to public space but those, 'protagonists set to understand contemporary city life have been read through male figures of the dandy, the stranger and the flâneur'⁽⁷⁾.

Yes who has mobility is the first question. And then from there, what ways do you try and negotiate what the city does to you? How it affects you intimately and how you can challenge how you engage with it?

(Unzips cagoule). Do you mean how do you become a part rather than apart of it?

(Takes off scarf and places in rucksack). It makes me think of community. There was a programme called 'The Secret History of Our Streets', which examined the Duke Street area. Before those who lived there were forced to moved outside the city to 'new towns', everyone knew each other. The programme showed how those close relationships weren't able to move with the inhabitants as the new architecture didn't let it. Women particularly, left in these new homes felt very isolated. (A bagpiper playing 'You've Got the Love' silences the discussion for 3 minutes).

Yeah I remember reading about that, and how on the weekend people would trip back to the city for a night out, and so the bus came to replace the home as the most communal space. (Steps over puddle). But, for the women it was not (arms hyphening in air) 'appropriate' for them to ride the bus and so if they joined they were excluded from that make-shift community space, as well as in the domestic and public space.

(They pause under the M8 motorway just past Cowcaddens tube station, arms linked, voices raised over the drone of the traffic). I wonder about the spaces we are drawn towards. Those urban wastelands that haven't been developed yet. Is it something to do with seeing potential in a place that hasn't decided what it is yet? There is possibility in it because it isn't profiled yet, it hasn't been functionalised, or designated or categorised as to what it is, it isn't the artist studio or the new build?

(Having to shout even louder as two Eddie Stobart lorries pass overhead). May be these are the spaces the flâneuse is drawn to - that which is public but which isn't inscribed in the laws of public space as we know it. Free to be re-imagined, re-wandered, re-drawn.

1. Flâneuse: feminine of flâneur: a woman who is or whose behaves like a flâneur.
2. John A. Dolan. "I've always fancied Owning My Own Lion". In *At Home: An Anthropology of Domestic Space*. Edited by Irene Cieraad. Syracuse University Press, 2006
3. BBC News. "Forth Road Bridge Painting is Coming to an End". (5 September 2011)
4. The Works Progress Administration (WPA) created in 1935 under the US President Franklin D. Roosevelt sought to address unemployment during the depression by creating millions of jobs including the construction of public buildings and roads. The WPA was the largest New Deal Agency and was disbanded in 1943.
5. An architecture group formed in the 1960s based at the Architectural Association, London.
6. Moyra Davey quoted by Jessica Weisberg. "Can self exposure be private?" In *The New Yorker* (2 May 2012)
7. Aruna D'Souza and Tom McDonough. *The Invisible Flâneuse? Gender, Public Space and Visual Culture*. Manchester University Press, 2006: 4

