**The Flâneur**

**Notes on a film by Dorothy Allen-Pickard**

**Words by Phil Waterworth**

*To want nothing. Just to wait, until there is nothing left to wait for. Just to wander, and to sleep. To let yourself be carried along by the crowds, and the streets. To follow the gutters, the fences, the water’s edge. To walk the length of the embankments, to hug the walls. To waste your time. To have no projects, to feel no impatience. To be without desire, or resentment, or revolt.*

Georges Perec

**[instagram.com/waterworthphil](http://instagram.com/waterworthphil) S8 9EF**

The process started two weeks prior. Dorothy made contact with me via Instagram. Dorothy, a documentary filmmaker was about to take part in a the film maker challenge at Sheffield Docfest where she and others were tasked to make a film in a day, edit over a weekend and screen it publicly on Monday. Dorothy, asking a mutual friend if there was anything ‘interesting’ happening in Sheffield on the Friday she was due to make the film, contacted me wanting to know about how I was encountering Flânerie from a disabled perspective. We shared ideas, influences and visions. We held our fingers crossed for a sunny day as we planned our Odyssey across the Steel City…

**Woodbank Crescent S8 9EF**

 Sheffield is not a big city, and walking around it and filming in one day you see how small it is. But, the whole raison d’être of the flâneur is surely to enlarge the minuscule, the forgotten and overlooked, to see things *anew.* We started at 9.30 when Dorothy came to my house. We both had black coffee and the dogs, Mimi and Iggy Pup tried desperately to distract. Joe arrived perhaps 30 minutes later, very hot and keen to cool himself down. His first request was for a coffee. We went upstairs to my studio so Dorothy could film me arriving and departing in the wheelchair lift. Dorothy also wanted to film me at my desk. As she set up, I started making lines with my pen, imagining the journey from my house in Meersbrook to Institute of Art in the centre of Sheffield. I stuck fragments of collage to the brown page, left over wrappers from a recent item of clothing, torn bits of maps and cut out arterial lines of major roads through Sheffield. The clothing wrapper belonged to a shirt I bought the day before for today’s film. It was a pattern of small circles divided by horizontal and vertical lines. It resembled elements of some kind of ‘plan’ or aerial view of an industrial complex. I left the piece of work unfinished knowing I would return later and add further marks after our walk, the memory of place imprinted on my consciousness like a stain.

 The community transport was expected at 11.00 but I was anxious it was going to be late or worse still, not turn up. I phoned the office and the voice on the end of the line assured me it was on its way. No sooner had I put the phone down and the transport pulled up outside. I had this driver before, I forget his name. He doesn’t talk much and plays 6music really loud. We get on the bus to some drum n bass and make ourselves comfortable. A next track comes on that Dorothy and I say is All Saints and we guess the year. I go for 1994, Dorothy 1995. A voice then comes from the driver who tells us, It’s TLC. We laugh and applaud his knowledge of 90s girl bands. He says nothing.

**Flat Street S1 2BA - Fitzalan Square S1 2AY**

 He drives us to the HPO Institute of Art building on Flat Street, parks up in the disabled space across the road and lowers the ramp. I transfer into my wheelchair but my left leg kicks out in spasm, signalling I need a piss. The only way to get the leg down is to relax, almost allow my body to just go slow. Difficulty here is by relaxing, my bladder thinks its time to release. It isn’t. The driver helps me to push my lower leg onto the foot stand. My foot is in place and secure. I am lowered down onto the road, reverse back and propel myself across Flat Street and through the entrance of the HPO building, speeding right past the reception and down the corridor to the toilet. I am too late but this piece of writing is not about my toileting escapades so let’s leave this here.

**High Street S1 2GA - Dixon Lane S1 2AL**

 We wheel over onto Fitzalan Square and onto High Street, crossing a cobble stoned path that leads onto the tram track and then onto the tram track, mindful of the tram tracks where one’s wheels can get stuck. Joe, an expert in wheelchair topography, tipped the wheelchair back slightly to get me over the ridges. Rolling down Haymarket, we encounter a shop front painted over roughly with different shades of blue paint. It is immediately striking and we go over so I can run my hands over the texture. It looks like a mash up of Yves Klein and Hans Hoffman and it’s there on the high street, a piece of abstract expressionism next door to B&M Bargains. Moving on we loiter around the top of Dixon Lane as I show Dorothy the location where parts of This is England was filmed. It’s busy and I warn Joe to keep an eye on the camera. It’s quite clear we are filming but people don’t seem to care. They clear a path and watch the passing entertainment.

**Haymarket S1 2AW - Exchange Place S1 4RE- Broad Street West S1 2BQ**

 We turn left onto the vacant space where the Castle Market was. It is now used as a public graffiti gallery. The surface here is smooth, an Island of Solace for the disabled flâneur. Joe goes for a cig while I wheel around, looking around at this ever-changing exhibition. Not many people pass by. We roll down towards Exchange Place, taking a right along newly constructed paths separated by flowers beds. This really is botanising the asphalt as Walter Benjamin proposed! I touch the plants and flowers on display as Dorothy films close ups. This is new for me, observing these plants. We normally just move past them but by filming close up here, a pause has occurred late morning and it is a wonderful moment of colour, texture and smell. It’s getting warm so I put on my hat in between takes, remembering to move it later for continuity. This is a new language to me, and I am fascinated by the detailed planning of each shot. Dorothy notices a mirrored surface and wants to capture this. On seeing this later in the finished film I am struck by the originality of the image, how Dorothy saw a surface that could quite literally ‘reflect’ our movement. It strikes me that she is responding to the space, in particular, the architecture. Rather than filming myself and Joe, filming the reflection we cast and choosing this in the final edit.

**Park Square S1 2BQ - Commercial Street S1 2AT**

 It is nearing lunch time and hunger is lurking so we move along to Park Square roundabout and loiter a bit on the odd bit of unkept ground on Commercial street, just outside of Ponds Forge Pool. This is a curious patch of smooth terrain, it has a ‘forgotten’ quality as if work has stopped and no one knew what else to do here, what to place. There are small notice boards with torn fragments of events from two years ago while across the road, in the centre of the roundabout, a large electronic billboard, animated and fast moving, changes with alarming frequency. Sitting here, the sound of passing traffic like a slow tide, you can feel like you are occupying a disregarded promenade in a time washed holiday resort. Over there is progress, here is overgrown grass, graffito and decollaged notice boards showing events hidden by the void of Covid lockdown. We bid farewell to the sea, to our smooth harbour and move up into town to find a Greggs.

**Fargate S1 2HE-Chapel Walk S1 2PD-Mulberry Street S1 2PJ**

Fargate is busy by the time we arrive and there is disruption caused by maintenance crews in the centre of the pedestrian area. Barriers have been erected to form a makeshift path to areas of commerce. For filming purposes I imagine this is brilliant, showing a change in register from the relative peace we encountered at Exchange Place, where the flower beds imbued a sense of calm. Now it is all noise and confusion as people try to negotiate their way around the barricades. We enter and leave Greggs as soon as we can, try and find a space to sit on Fargate, to which there is nothing. We take a route down Chapel Walk, a side street off Fargate, to see if we can find a shaded place to sit. We find our own furniture on some steps outside the Crucible. It occurs to me that I always have a seat but it doesn’t stop me seeking out seats for others. I think maybe I have become more alert and attuned to spotting makeshift street furniture since I have been disabled. I don’t know. As a teenager, maybe 14 or 15, me and my mates occupied the streets at night, trying to find places to sit and be sheltered. School grounds were open back then and we would sit in entrance ways until being moved by the police. If we ever found an actual bench it was akin to finding a bed. Even now, 33 years on, I can still recall corners in doorways that were always the prime position. It warms me now to see Joe and Dorothy and members of the public sat on these steps, making a claim, a seat just while they eat. I never thought I’d be the one not joining them, out of their communal seat as I sit in my assemblage of metal like some Ballardian witness.

**Balm Green S1 2JA - City Hall S1 2JA - Barker’s Pool S1 1LZ**

 We finished our lunch and took a back street back onto the main roads. Mulberry street, what a glorious name. We encounter rough ground here and have the camera attached to my wheelchair so Dorothy can get footage of the terrain. A guy walks past us singing Back For Good by Take That and then proceeds to shout at his two huge dogs because they attempt to eat something off the floor. We emerge onto High Street and move past the busy bus stops as people look at us with the camera. Taking a left onto Balm Green, we roll around the back of City Hall and we marvel at imposing architecture. This is a smooth run in the wheelchair and wheeling round the front of the building, we can experience one of the first Islands of Solace I encountered, way back 2018. This is ground zero for the Disabled Flaneur project, site of the first map I drew showing the Islands of solace for the disabled flaneur/flaneuse. A problem existed then and I still grapple with now, that of translating 3D space onto the 2D page. In drawing a map, are we drawing a ‘map’ or are we drawing ‘directions’? Plus, what to include? My first drawings showed detailed drawings of aerial shots of buildings, and to be fair, they were more about the ‘drawing’, its legitimacy as a ‘good drawing’ rather than an exploration of urban space. Five years on, my drawings now are simply lines, showing passage, traversal. I am not there yet. This is still an itch I need to scratch.

 We walk down Barker’s Pool and head over to the Peace Gardens to see a friend. The heat is ferocious and Sheffield is alive. In the words of Richard Hawley, ‘tonight the streets are ours’.

**Peace Gardens, Pinstone St S1 2HH**

We wheel around the footpath to get to the Millennium Galleries so I can go to the toilet. I point out memorials to Dorothy commemorating the International Brigades who fought against Franco in the Spanish Civil War and the plaque dedicated to the survivors of Hiroshima. We talk briefly about the socialist leanings of Sheffield and this still remains to this day. Joe goes for a cig so Dorothy takes over and pushes me into the Winter Gardens and through to the Millennium Galleries toilets. Dorothy meets me at the bottom of stairs as I emerge from the toilets. A museum assistant assumes a stance of authority when she sees Dorothy’s camera, have you got permission to film in here? She seems really aggrieved at the sight of a camera. Dorothy, batting off this question with diplomatic grace, informs the assistant, I am part of Sheffield Doc fest, we can film all across Sheffield. You’d think this would resolve the matter but the assistant still looks rattled. We take this as our cue to leave this inner city greenhouse.

 We consider coffee but something cold as well. Dorothy proposes an ice coffee which absolutely does the trick as we sit in Cafe Nero watching the 3pm heat blaze Sheffield. It’s days like these you dream of, summer days that follow on from summer days of very early youth as children. The magic is still there, that luminous, slow joy that is the habitat of a British summer. I sit in the middle of the Peace gardens and do a line drawing go the city hall while Joe sits on wall. Dorothy records these afternoon pauses and watching later after the edit, I am struck by how this scene, in its slow moment of pause acts as a tender moment in the film. In the scene there is me and Joe and a third person just at the side of the wall Joe is sat on. A bin man taking a rest in the shade. It is such a beautifully shot moment where nothing happens, that I feel it speaks something central and important about the film. Three people, occupying public space differently but connected by the relationship in space.

**The Moor S1 4PA -** **Cumberland Street S1 4PT**

Here is our plenary, our YES!, our downhill path home. The plan is to let Joe push me for a while and then at my nod, let me go as roll down this archipelago of smooth terrain. Thus is my favourite point in Sheffield. I can roll down here independently to the bottom. It almost makes you feel happy to be in a wheelchair. We cross the main road at the top of The Moor and Dorothy attaches the camera to my wheelchair. The lens is pointing out capturing the surrounding landscape of shops and people. One thing I notice is it doesn’t feel as smooth as it normally is. On reflection I think it was just because I had to go slower because of the amount of people. Normally I floor it down here! For now, a slower meander down the Sheffield Ramblas is required.

 We reach the bottom where the path is split by Cumberland Street and we stop. Joe goes for a sit down while Dorothy and I set up the camera to film my upper body and face as I move around in circles at the foot of the Moor. This is a wonderful moment to notice the oncoming people walking down The Moor. I look around as I wheel around, noticing the street furniture on tops of buildings. I hate being in a wheelchair and I miss walking. It’s like a grief that is with me every day and every night. Thoughts occur to me to just get up and try to walk, but I would fall and I would not be able to get up. That loss of not being able to just move, to stand and stride out takes a lot out of you. But at this moment, on this patch of ground at the outer margins of Sheffield city centre, I can, for 30 minutes, before my transport arrives, wheel around in a smooth choreography that allows me to read the landscape like a book. A true Island of Solace for the disabled flâneur.

 Around the corner, I see the community transport arrive and we get in the bus, leaving our Sheffield Odyssey at the foot of Cumberland Street and yes, unbelievably there is a dropped kerb.

Words by Phil Waterworth 24th June 2023