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Ramble: To Wander & Wayfind in Image & Text

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RAMBLE

To Wander & Wayfind in Image & Text

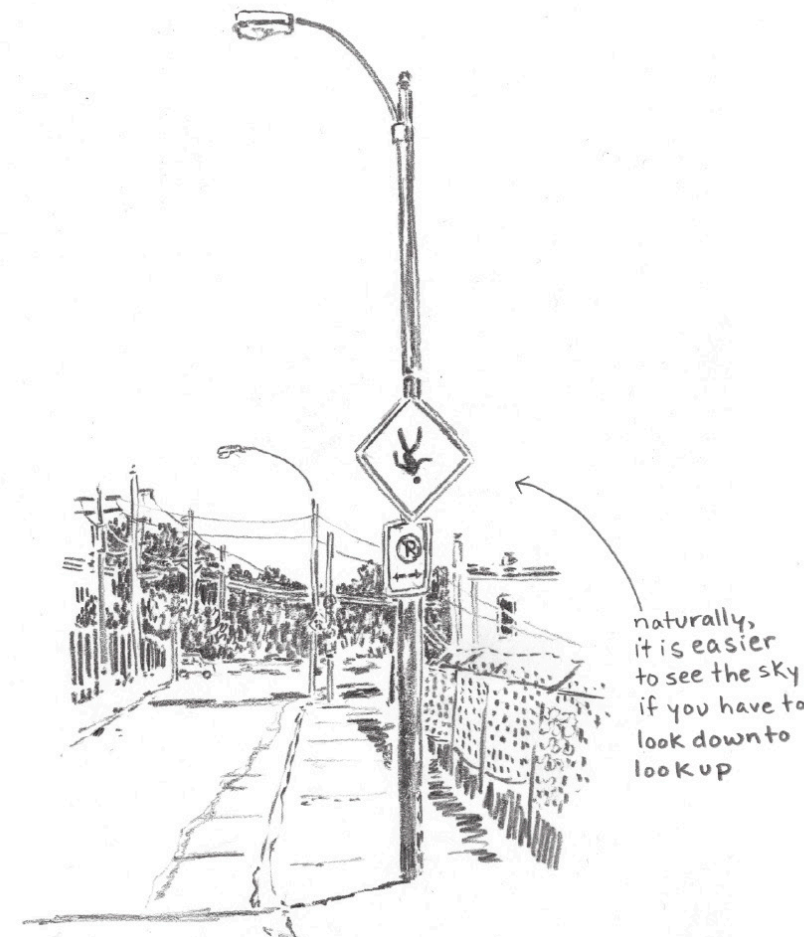
Charlotte Fleming

A pedestrian, an international traveler, and a bored-out-of-his-mind bus commuter take note of their surroundings. What do they notice? What do they find? Why does it matter? With these questions in mind, I take three works as my traveling companions: Robert Weaver's *A Pedestrian View: The Vogelman Diary* (2012), Weng Pixin's "Argentina Diaries" (2020), and Peter Arkle's *Dreaming on the 349* (2023).

This essay places these works in conversation with ideas of space/place (Yi-Fu Tuan), slow looking (Shari Tishman), and mapping artistic practice (Anne West). Ultimately, this essay considers how illustrated works wander through and wayfind meaning in sequences of everyday experience. In particular, I am interested in the ways in which image and text might ramble (move or talk seemingly without set destination) alongside each other in purposeful ambiguity. As Rebecca Solnit states, it is in the "indeterminacy of a ramble" that there "much is to be discovered."¹

"Down the Rabbit Hole"

The curse of the inquisitive mind is to fall down rabbit holes, falling far and falling often. As the name might suggest, rabbit holes are perceived as a pitfall, synonymous for wasted time, for going off-track, for diversions leading nowhere. By dictionary definition, these burrows are dual in nature—passive and active, negative and positive. On one hand, they are "a complexly bizarre or difficult state or situation." That is to say, something in which to get stuck. On the other, the rabbit hole is a portal to endless possibilities: "the pursuit of something...leads to other questions, problems, or pursuits."²



(Right)
Throughout this essay, images in graphite are excerpted from my thesis project "Ramble."

1 Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), 3.
2 "Rabbit Hole," Merriam Webster Dictionary, accessed March 5, 2024. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/rabbit+hole>.



As the most famous of fictional rabbit-holes³ suggests, “the pursuit of something” can lead to a veritable Wonderland. The rabbit hole’s reputation in current vernacular, however, no longer hints at a “conduit to a fantastical land,” but rather serves as “a metaphor for extreme distraction.”⁴ Pulitzer Prize-winning author Kathryn Schulz explores the term’s meaning in her 2015 article, “The Rabbit-Hole Rabbit Hole.” It should be no surprise that the Internet plays a central role in the rabbit hole’s redefinition. As a portal to digital worlds, it provides “a long attentional free fall, with no clear destination and all manner of strange things.” Time and space are compressed online so that we may fall farther and deeper in dizzying speed and disorienting leaps.

Schulz defines three rabbit holes in which to fall: iterative (circling around a singular idea), exhaustive (burrowing as deep as you can go, or “compiling a definitive account”), and associative (“you look up one thing...which leads to looking up something even further afield,” and so on). In seeking to understand the nature of the rabbit hole, she writes in its defense. Schulz notes that its negative connotation is tied less to the act of falling in, and more to whether you can find your way out. *Are you trapped or are you transported?*

(Above) I stumbled upon this fantastical

character while on a quest to watch the costumed pet parade in St. Louis. “All manner of strange things” are within reach if only we choose to pursue them.

Where Are We Going?

Before we burrow too deeply, I’d best state where I think we are going with all this. A consideration of the rabbit hole is not my end goal, but rather an entry point for discussing a particular type of illustrated work. I am interested in works that, like the rabbit hole, might be overlooked for their state of in-between-ness—of place (offering glimpses between spaces), of position (reveling in ambiguity), and of form (image and text carrying equal weight). Throughout this essay, I’d like to focus on works that, akin to Schulz’s “associative” rabbit hole, lead the reader through a series of connections (both visual and textual), yet are open-ended in their narrative destination.

So, what is the goal? To be quite honest, the primary reason for this essay is for artistic not academic ends. Throughout this thesis year, I’ve been seeking language for the sort of work I admire and, in turn, a better understanding of the sort of work I’d like to make. Which is to say, this might be an essay less for academics seeking to deepen research of particular illustrated works, and more for artists and students questioning the nature of their process. It is not surprising, then, that I find a kindred spirit in Anne West, author of *Mapping the Intelligence of Artistic Work*.

In her 2011 book, West speaks to the process of “mapping” artistic practice (the visual) through writing (the verbal) as a means “to make more apparent the hidden texture of artistic seeing and knowing.”⁵ While West employs “mapping” as a reflective practice (post-making), she frames valuable vocabulary for author-illustrators looking to make work (process and product) founded on “image-based thinking” in “dialogue with the written word.” Namely, that we need not consider the relationship between visual and verbal as a one of one-to-one translation, but one of “seeing” (engaging with environment) and “knowing” (seeking understanding).

5 Anne West and Katarina Weslien, “The Spirit of Mapping Through Writing” in *Mapping the Intelligence of Artistic Work: An Explorative Guide to Making, Thinking and Writing*, 1st ed, (Portland, ME: Moth Press, 2011), 247.

3 “Down the Rabbit-Hole” being the first chapter in Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*.
4 Kathryn Schulz, “The Rabbit-Hole Rabbit Hole,” *The New Yorker*, June 4, 2015. <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/the-rabbit-hole-rabbit-hole>.

With these ideas in mind, this essay will take Robert Weaver’s *A Pedestrian View: The Vogelman Diary* (2012) as our primary guide. Because dialogue between works yields more meaningful conversation than monologue, I’ll also draw insights from Weng Pixin’s⁶ “Argentina Diaries” in *Sweet Time* (2020) and Peter Arkle’s *Dreaming on the 349* (2023). Together, these three works represent visual sequences of daily experience. Their narratives unfold through loosely connected observations and ruminations. Each are tied to place, less in a descriptive sense (where we are) and more as a feeling. Their perspectives are not static, but ones that, like the rabbit hole (last time, I swear), “convey a sense of time spent in transit.”⁷ But before we trace how their paths converge, we can situate ourselves with a brief overview of each.

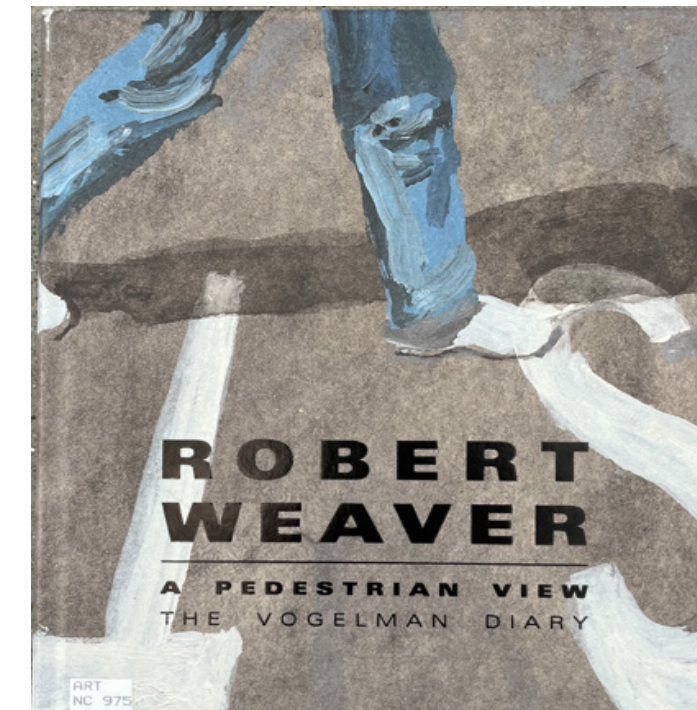
Three Companions: Pedestrian, Traveler, Commuter
A Pedestrian View: The Vogelman Diary

Robert Weaver’s *A Pedestrian View: The Vogelman Diary* is a “two-story” or “split-level” book, which divides the page into image and text that offer “different narratives...carrying on independently in each section.”⁸ The images are gestural gouache paintings of the comings and goings of pedestrians along a city street. The text, meanwhile, “summarize[s] his [Weaver’s] artistic experiences and reflections” in the form of a fictional diary by a character named Clarence Vogelman.

Created in 1982 and published posthumously in 2012, this work was initially formatted as fifty-three gouaches and accompanying text “in plastic sleeves filed in a ring binder.” *A Pedestrian View* exemplifies Weaver’s later work, which shifted from reportorial illustrations (1950s and 60s) to experimental artist books. Alexander Roob, editor of *A Pedestrian View*, characterizes this work as a series of “picture cycles” that explore “sequentiality in the image, ambulant modes of perception, and multi-perspectival narrative strategies.”⁹ Which is to say, Weaver not only projects the image of the pedestrian (walking figures moving

through their everyday life), but also performs the perception of the pedestrian in snapshot-like paintings (blinking in shifting perspectives) and stream-of-conscious text (mirroring the drifting mind and moving body built into the experience of walking).

(Below) Robert Weaver’s *A Pedestrian View* takes the movement of individuals along the city street as his subject. It is both the view of (street-level) and a view trained at pedestrians.



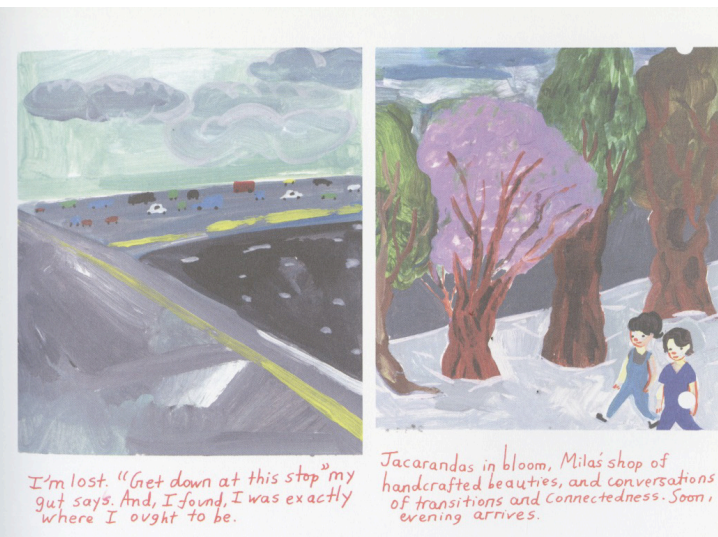
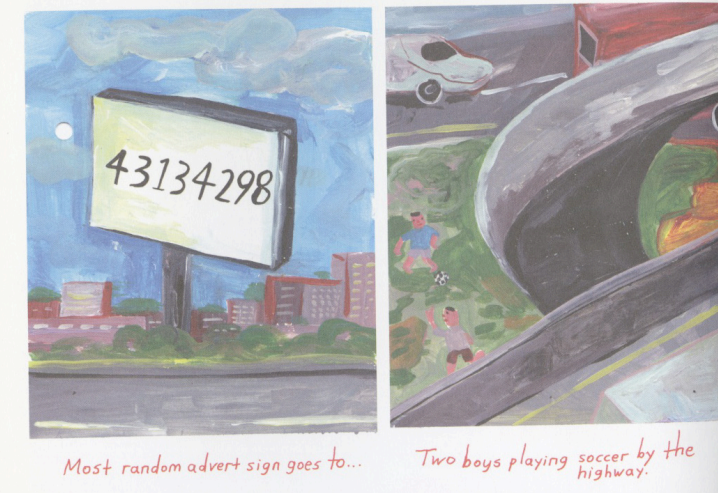
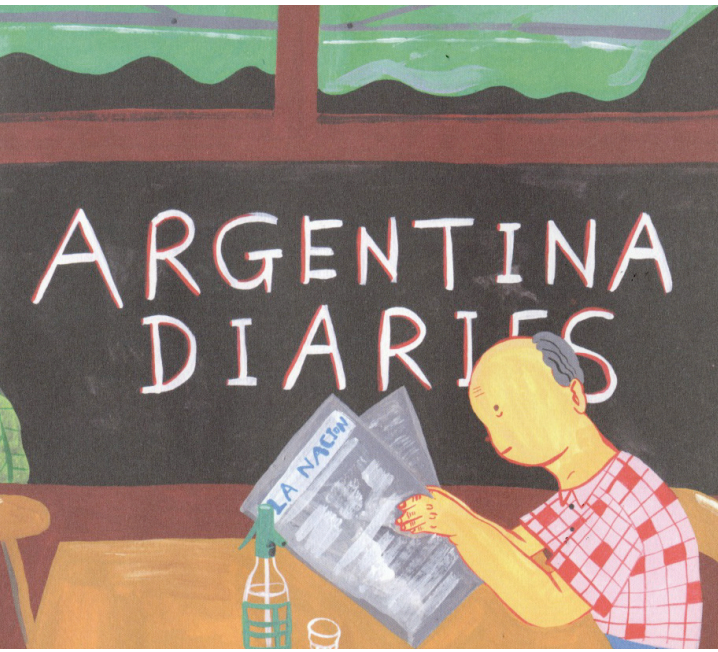
IN DREAMS IT IS ONLY THE
FEAR OF FALLING THAT
PREVENTS YOU FROM FLYING.

6 Please note, Weng is Pixin’s surname.

7 Schulz, “The Rabbit-Hole Rabbit Hole.”

8 Jaleen Grove, “Towards Illustration Theory: Harold Rosenberg, Robert Weaver, and the ‘Action Illustrator?’” *Art Criticism*, vol. 24, issue 1 (Spring 2009): 80.

9 Alexander Roob, “Inside the Reactor,” in *Robert Weaver: A Pedestrian View: The Vogelman Diary*, ed. Alexander Roob and Melton Prior Institute, (Böhen: Verlag Kettler, 2012), 112.



"Argentina Diaries"

Moving from fictional pedestrian to real-life traveler, we can turn to Weng Pixin's "Argentina Diaries." This autobiographical excerpt comes from *Sweet Time*, a compilation of a decade of work built in bright layers of acrylic, watercolor, and paper remnants. While Weng calls her work "short comics (or short stories),"¹⁰ the format is not bound to the standard panel format we've come to expect of comics. Instead, Weng's work harkens more to the "split-level"¹¹ arrangement of Weaver's "picture cycles," with image and text relegated to their separate floors. This separation of image and text mirrors the distance of a traveler, seeing a place with new eyes. The text exists outside the image, commenting back on it.

I would like to note, however, a distinction between "traveler" (connoting frequency of movement) and "tourist" (perhaps more singular or surface level in nature). In a 2021 podcast, Weng speaks of her frequent visits to Argentina over the past decade and the strong ties she has fostered within a tight-knit community of female comics creators.¹² Perhaps it is through this repetition and return that her work focuses on quieter elements of everyday experience, rather than touristic spectacles. But that is speculation.

"Argentina Diaries" by Weng Pixin unfolds across (aptly named) landscape format in a series of visual snapshots.

10 Nathan Scott McNamara, "Marking the Passage of Growth: Talking with Cartoonist Weng Pixin," *BLARB*, September 10, 2021, <https://blog.lareviewofbooks.org/interviews/mark-ing-passage-growth-conversation-cartoonist-weng-pixin/>.

11 A comics aficionado (which I am not) might point out the "father of comic strips" Rodolphe Töpffer also favored the "split-level" formation of text and image in his mid-19th century illustrated books, often considered the first European comics. This is also not to say that comics are bound to a particular panel structure—comics are known for their innovative treatment of the panel, playing with its scale, breaking its boundaries, or simply forgoing their existence. Credit for this aside goes to DB Dowd's 2022 Illustrated Periodical class and Bill Kartalopoulos's 2024 Comics History class at Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts at Washington University in St. Louis.

12 Gil Roth, "Weng Pixin / Pix," July 6, 2021, in *Virtual Memories Show*, podcast, MP3 audio, 01:11:37, <https://chimeraobscura.com/vm/episode-442-weng-pixin>.

Dreaming on the 349

Situated between Weng's travel diaries and Weaver's pedestrian view is Peter Arkle's *Dreaming on the 349*. Documenting his route from apartment to art school, Arkle presents "a collection of NOTES made while sitting on a LONDON BUS in 1992." Arkle is both the traveler—a Scot studying in England—and the everyman caught in the flow of the daily commute. He introduces the 349 bus as remarkable not for where its journey begins or ends, but for what it travels through: "On the way it passed through CLAPHAM."

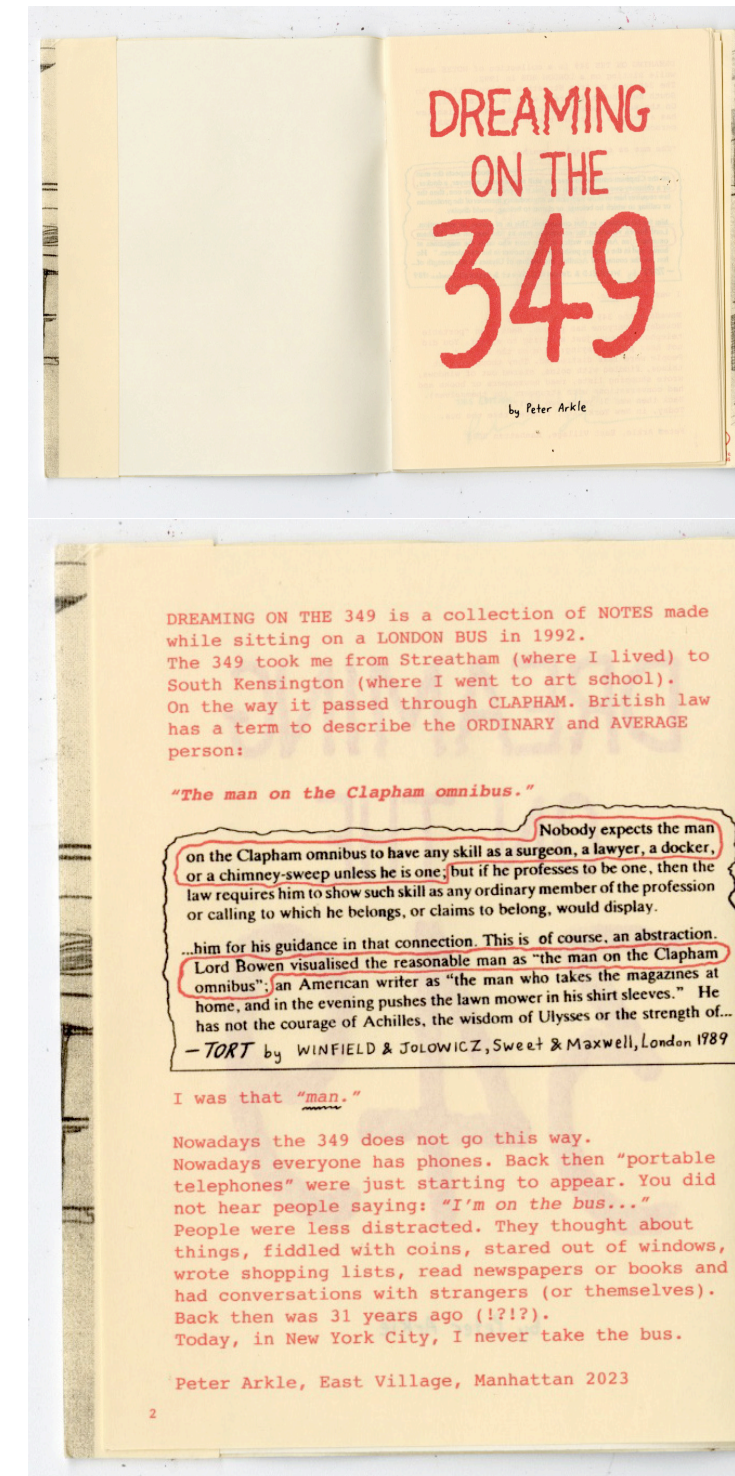
This is remarkable—mark-worthy or note-worthy—namely in its profound everydayness. "British law," Arkle explains, "has a term to describe the ORDINARY and AVERAGE person: 'the man on the Clapham omnibus.'" Arkle situates himself clearly and emphatically: "I was that man."¹³

Like Weng and Weaver's "diaries," *Dreaming on the 349* pairs observational drawings of everyday experience with self-reflective text. In contrast with the others' "split-level" compositions, however, Arkle metronomes between image and text in shifting measures of emphasis across the page. A split view, however, is achieved in other ways.

The primarily handwritten book is divided into two sections introduced by typeset text. The first section presents a seeming stream-of-consciousness journey in jotted notes and energetic scribbles. He is on the bus route, looking out. The second section, meanwhile, provides a more subdued rumination on the Streatham Garage ("where 349s come from") through quiet, atmospheric, observational sketches. Granted access to "the backstage world of the 349s," he is on the outside, looking in.¹⁴

13 Peter Arkle, *Dreaming on the 349*, (New York: Self-Published, 2023), 2. Edition 11 of 22.

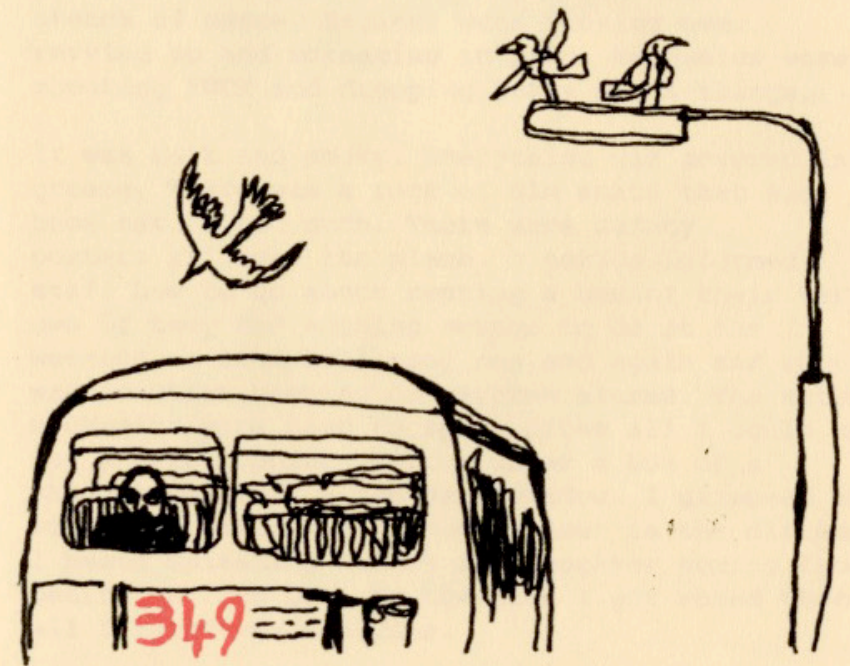
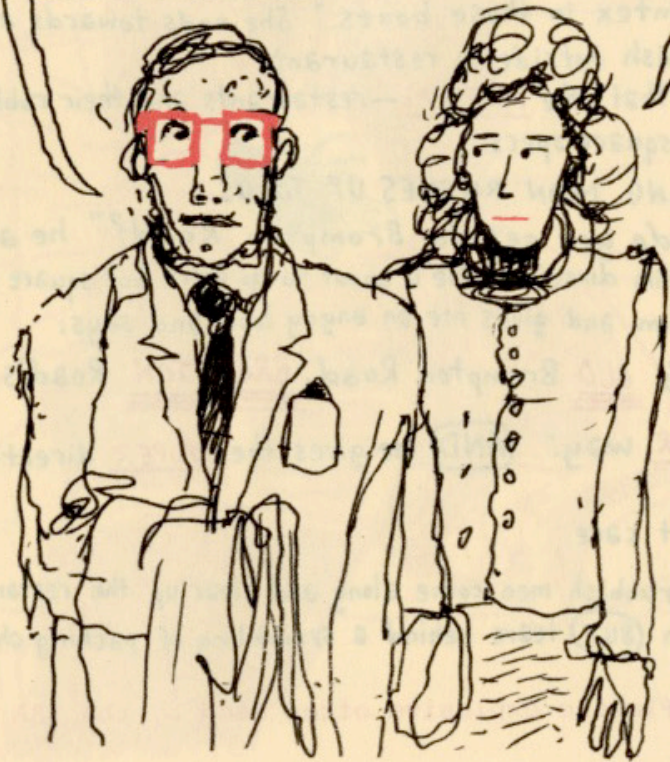
14 Arkle, *Dreaming on the 349*, 25-26.



...and a few styrofoam containers.
 "Littering the streets, **tu!**" - SAYS SQUARE SPECS.
 Then the bus comes. I sit upstairs. They sit downstairs.
 I am **HAPPY** to have provided them with a conversation topic:

Sorry, I just could not
 stand by and let that
 idiot send that chap off
 on a **WILD GOOSE CHASE!**

INDEED, but I also
 thought Brompton Road.
 and Old Brompton Road
 were joined.



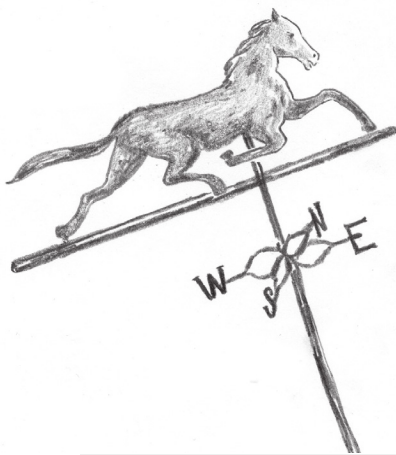
(goose spit included)

Fellow passengers in Arkle's *Dreaming on the 349* complain about Arkle's misguided directions. But imagine all that could be found on a wild goose chase! At the very least... a goose.

Are We There Yet?

You've been introduced. We've started the journey. But still, there's some ground to cover before a full discussion gets underway.¹⁵ Why put these particular works in conversation? My gut response, to say, "they *feel* similar," is neither satisfying nor helpful. Categorization (to my dismay) plays an important role in the life of artistic works. When interviewed about Robert Weaver's picture cycles in 2012, photographer Saul Leiter spoke to the faults of categorization—how easy it is to fall between the cracks.

"The trouble with art history," he explains, is that "when someone comes along who does not fit in their categories, then they don't know where to put him."¹⁶ Still, the works I've chosen do seem to defy straightforward categorization.¹⁷ They are sketchy, but not sketchbooks. They are observed, but also abstracted. They offer perspective, but not clarity. They portray the everyday, yet also exist outside it. They are semi-autobiographical, yet also part fiction. They are flowing, yet fragmented. Sphinx-like ruminations aside: what the hell are they? We can pass by a series of possible exits, but none of them seem quite right.



15 Perhaps I am stalling here. But what would a journey be without car trouble? Ok, these are the footnotes of a back-seat driver's meta-commentary. Moving along.

16 Saul Leiter, "Actually A Fine Artist," interview by Alexander Roob, Robert Weaver: A Pedestrian View: The Vogelmann Diary, ed. Alexander Roob and Melton Prior Institute, (Bönen: Verlag Kettler, 2012), 123.

17 Albeit it's probably simplistic to say anything fits neatly within any category.

Exit 1: Observational Drawing

As a family of objects, these works are the cousins of observational sketches—or more specifically, of on-site drawing. They are all preoccupied with the act of looking closely at and recording the world around them. Peter Arkle's *Dreaming on the 349*, "made while sitting on a London bus," is the closest relative to on-site drawing in its occupation with time ("made while"), space ("on a London bus"), and medium (pencil and pen to paper). The other works, I would argue, still find a kindred spirit in on-site drawing despite their painterly medium. They have a gestural looseness of their washes, a mark-making quality to their textures, and an eye trained towards everyday life. Even if not drawn directly on-site, their roots grow from site (and sight), as well as experience.

Exit 2: Reportage Illustration

This visual recording of on-site experience through image and text also points to a shared lineage with reportage illustration—a form often identified with Robert Weaver. Reportage illustration documents events through art, or can be described as "art applied to things of significance happening in the world." It is an art that conveys the duration of time ("capturing the dynamics of unfolding events"), immediacy of place ("sketching the appearance of a scene"), and translation of experiences into visual communication ("striving to understand and communicate a story through visual language").¹⁸ Weaver, Weng, and Arkle's works, however, portray no named events, no grand affairs, but rather passing moments within the everyday.

Exit 3: Journal

Perhaps it is most apt, then, to compare them to the humble record of everyday experience: the journal. Similarities emerge in name (Weaver's *Pedestrian View: The Vogelmann Diary*; Weng's "Argentina Diaries"; and Arkle's "NOTES"), appearance (handwritten text, gestural marks, intimate scale) and language (personal, informal, stream-of-conscious). They are reflective in process (imbued with the visual immediacy of daily record) and retroactive in publication (each created at a particular moment, yet compiled years later for publication¹⁹). Whether they look like a journal or not is beside the point. "A journal," explains Alexandra Johnson, author of *Leaving a Trace: On Keeping a Journal*, "is as much an intention to record and save as it is a physical form."²⁰

18 Gary Embury and Mario Minichiello, *Reportage Illustration: Visual Journalism* (London; New York, NY: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2018), 1.

19 Weaver's was created 1982, published 2012; Arkle's in 1992, published in 2023; and Weng's between 2008-2017, published in 2020.

20 As quoted by Jennifer New in *Drawing from Life: The Journal as Art* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2005), 12.

So, back to the forms at hand: what are they? Of people, it is often more edifying to learn the complexities of who they are than the banalities of what they do. But for art, perhaps asking what they are is the wrong question entirely. W.J.T. Mitchell, theorist of visual culture, explains, "we want to know what pictures *mean* and what they *do*." This is to say, we want to know "how they communicate as signs and symbols" and the ways in which they "affect human emotions and behavior." Mitchell argues that we might go one step further, asking "what pictures *want*." This shifts the question from categorization (what they are) to "power" ("what they do") to "desire" ("what they want").²¹ Considering what the images (and text) in Weaver, Weng, and Arkle's work "want" reveals a tension. They want both to wander and to wonder—both to move through spaces and to hold them for a moment longer.



And here we go!

Let's talk about wandering and...hopefully not get too off track.

21 W. J. T. Mitchell, "What Do Pictures 'Really' Want?," October 77 (1996): 71, 74. <https://doi.org/10.2307/778960>.





Wandering Parallel Paths in Image & Text

While wandering need not be limited to the rhythm of one's two feet, it is easiest to enter a discussion of wandering by way of walking. Rebecca Solnit, itinerant author of *Wanderlust* (2001) and *A Field Guide to Getting Lost* (2005), explains, "Most of the time, walking is merely practical." It is simply a movement between point A and point B, or the "unconsidered locomotive means between two sites."

Wandering, by contrast, has the potential to transform walking "into an investigation, a ritual, a meditation."²² It is the "indeterminacy of a ramble, on which much may be discovered...The random, the unscreened, allows you to find what you don't know you are looking for."²³ Wandering is tied as much to looking as it is to movement. Harkening back, then, to Mitchell's question (what images "want")—in saying images "want"²⁴ to wander, I perhaps point less to their depiction of movement through space, and more to wandering as a path towards noticing.

How does noticing take form in Weaver's *A Pedestrian View*? Weaver presents the world through the lens of a walker, with all roadside landmarks on display. He leads our eyes to follow the energetic strokes of street lines; to traverse the thick diagonals of zebra crossings; and to scan the ever-shifting road in textured gray washes. He places obstacles in our path—policed "Do Not Cross" signs, striped traffic barricades, bright orange construction flags—only to have us transgress them naturally by the forward momentum of the page turn. The picture plane is pushed up. With no horizon line in sight, our focus is trained towards the concrete ground. This flattens and disorients space, removing any context that would imply a particular place.

The pedestrians in motion are often bisected by the top of the page, depicted as feet and legs or the occasional abstracted face. Some lack shadows—they are disembodied beings, floating in space rather than tethered to ground. Weaver presents a view of humanity (the flow of passerbys along a city street), but denies individual recognition (the pause of meeting face-to-face). Familiarity is conveyed not through people, but through signs (a laundromat, a psychic, a menu board, an antique store, a watch repair, "post no bills," "store available"). We are given a sense of where we are (the city), but no definition of where (which city).

(Above & Below) In A Pedestrian View

signs, vehicles, and legs are fragmented, dissolving the separation between the walking and the walked by.

²² Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), 3.

²³ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

²⁴ To be honest, I think I'm just positing what I want, but then again, artists are no strangers to speaking through images.

Noticing Noticings

In "Argentina Diaries," Weng provides a series of snapshots of visual and textual noticing. Through her images, we watch the watched watching—a boy looks at a leaf. Through her text, she names looking as a space for creativity ("He kept looking (rather intently) at the leaf, as if he was trying to figure out how this leaf is going to fit into an imaginative play"). She juxtaposes child and parent. While the child is central, engaging fully in the possibilities of observation, the father is absent ("his dad, who's on the phone"). Merely a fragment of a leg, the father is oblivious to the ongoings at his feet.

* I realize that "noticings" is not a word, but if "happenings" became a word to denote art that is performance or situation-based, why not "noticings" for the performance of observation-based art. This is all to say, I'm being stubborn and respectfully ask that you pardon my use of a verb as a noun.



A boy held a large maple leaf. He kept looking (rather intently) at the leaf, as if he was trying to figure out how this leaf is going to fit into an imaginative play he had, going on, while waiting for his dad, who's on the phone.





Robert Weaver offers shifting perspectives

The vantage point is always changing in *A Pedestrian View*, and yet there is never a sense of being lost. Text and image operate with a definitive ambiguity—moving from one place to another.



MOVING FROM ONE PLACE TO

ANOTHER —



In Weaver's work, we are never truly lost. He guides the reader, alternating between image sequences that lead us through space and those that arrest our gaze. Perspective shifts as pedestrians move down stairs (a view from above) and up stairs (a view from below). The receding stairs further an illusion of depth and yet, a disconnection remains—we enter somewhere unknown, exit elsewhere unknown. Meanwhile, moments of repetition emphasize movement. In some instances, he repeats objects, but shifts their position and scale—a bright orange construction flag directs our view (first, it is small in the top-most edge of the page; then large in the foreground, overlapping a small pedestrian). In other instances, Weaver halts our view (our walking movement), filling the page with a succession of trucks—gray moving van, orange garbage truck, and blue police van.

This dichotomy of movement and stillness is significant in observing, recording, and relating to the world. Cultural geographer Yi-Fu Tuan explains “what begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value.”²⁵ Space and place are interrelated—their relationship is porous. He draws a distinction between the two, however, through that very language of movement and stillness.

(Above) A sequence of circles draws visual connections between disparate elements in *A Pedestrian View*.

Gaining knowledge, or finding value, is a product of time, or as Tuan puts it, “a pause.” “If we think of space as that which allows movement,” he explains, “then place is pause” and “each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place.”²⁶ Recording space—taking the initial moment to notice, and then lingering longer by way of drawing—is one form of building meaning, through pause.

Weaver holds our gaze with images of the everyday, zooming in on moments like the spokes of a bike wheel or the underside of a discarded umbrella. Stephen Johnston, editor of *Everyday*, an anthology of essays exploring “the everyday” in contemporary art, defines the term as a “vast reservoir of normally unnoticed, trivial and repetitive actions comprising the common ground of daily life.”²⁷ Weaver brings the everyday to view through a succession of images that mirror each other in patterned repetition.

The circle of a tree grate on one page is substituted by the cyclical shape of a manhole²⁸ cover. The manhole repeats—one checkered with pigeons, another surveilled by police, and a third opened and entered by ladder—and is then replaced by a series of oval shapes: a millet-filled bucket, the seat of a stool, a round painting on a laundromat window, and the rim of a garbage can (its painted wire mesh repeated by a photograph of painted net on the following page). These visual connections between disparate elements create a pattern of logical, yet dreamlike associations.

²⁶ Tuan, *Space and Place*, 6.

²⁷ *The Everyday*, edited by Stephen Johnstone (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2008), 12.

²⁸ I really did not expect the term “manhole” to be in my thesis paper. But its synonyms “maintenance hole” and “sewer hole” seemed equally lackluster.

Wandering, Not Lost

Even when disoriented, it is a feeling of confidence that separates wandering from being lost. In *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*, Rebecca Solnit explains, “to lose oneself in a city...is to be fully present, and to be fully present is to be capable of being in uncertainty and mystery.”

The terms “lost” and “found” go hand and hand, but together (lost & found) they connote a repository of the discarded, rather than the potential of seeking. Solnit writes “that...which is totally unknown to you is usually what you need to find, and finding it is a matter of getting lost.” In the image on page 4, Weng gets lost in the city, yet finds herself “exactly where [she] ought to be.”

Meanwhile, in Arkle's train (bus) of thoughts, a lost traveler seeks directions. Arkle provides erroneous directions to “Old Brompton Road,” while a fellow bus passenger “gives the PROPER directions.” Arkle concludes, “I don't care.” Directions only matter when there's a need for a singular destination.

Stories with ambiguous paths allow for multiple destinations of meaning.

* Rebecca Solnit, *A Field Guide to Getting Lost* (Penguin Random House, 2005), 6-7

Everyday Wonder

There's nothing particularly profound about the moments depicted by these artists—Arkle underscores this by captioning a box as “Boring Old Quaker Oats.” And yet, something happens to commonplace objects when their existence is noticed (“What is that box...doing underneath the seat in front of me?” Arkle asks). In *Space & Place*, Yi-Fu Tuan speaks to this phenomenon. “Art,” he explains, “draws attention to areas of experience that we may otherwise fail to notice....A single inanimate object, useless in itself, can be the focus of a world.”

Tuan describes our relationship to ordinary objects as something formed “through use”—that “they are almost a part of ourselves, too close to be seen.” He continues, however, that seeing “has the effect of putting a distance between self and object.” When things are drawn, they transform from object to image, and can be known differently. It's hard to say whether this leads to seeing things more clearly, but at least, things are seen at all. And despite the adage “seeing is believing,” seeing is a site of skepticism. In seeing something, we can better interrogate its meaning

* Tuan, *Space and Place*, 144, 162.

THE TWO PEOPLE who are waiting at the 349 bus stop in South Kensington are probably work colleagues. They know each other but not that well. He has square specs. She has thin lips. They are struggling to find SOMETHING to talk about. He, eventually, says that he is only a ten minute walk away from his home. She does not say anything in response to this. SILENCE. I do not know what she is thinking. I am jealous. I wish I had only a ten minute walk to get home. The woman breaks the silence first: “Semtex...” she says “...I hope there's no Semtex in those boxes.” She nods towards a pile of rubbish outside a restaurant. “Mmm, that's the PROBLEM—restaurants and their rubbish.” says square specs.

A YOUNG MAN RUSHES UP TO US. “How do you get to Brompton Road?” he asks. I give him directions. He is about to go there but square specs stops him and gives me an angry look and says: “That's OLD Brompton Road. BROMPTON Road's the OTHER way.” (AND) he gives the PROPER directions.

I don't care.

Some rubbish men come along and clear up the restaurant rubbish (BUT) leave behind a sprinkling of packing chips...

*Plastic explosive often used by the IRA

WHAT IS THAT BOX OF QUAKER OATS DOING UNDERNEATH THE SEAT IN FRONT OF ME?



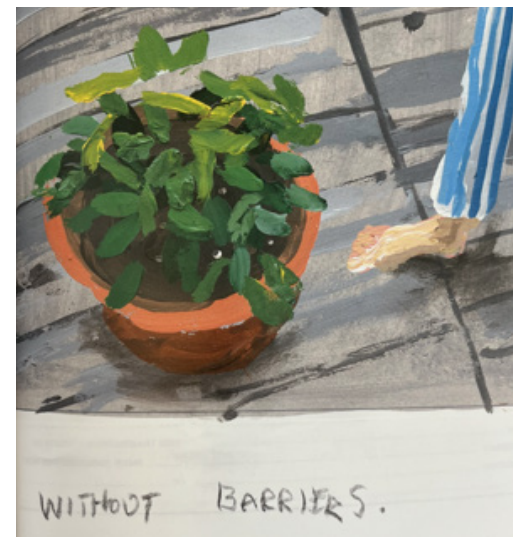
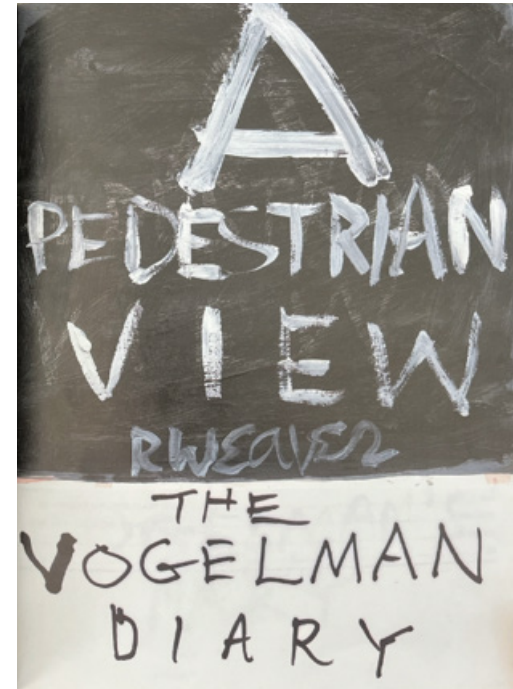
Weaver's text is all about dreams. The first page notes, "dreaming begins with the act of falling." It then continues on a ruminating journey of dream flight ("You begin your sail across town, ignoring its grid..."). The text wanders above the city past a range of scenarios—from "tar beach sunbathers," "clogged traffic arteries," and "afternoon baseball" to "prison yards, high-security weapons plants, and game preserves." Alexander Roob²⁹ describes the relationship between image and text as an expansion of meaning. The birds-eye view (text) offers vision beyond the limitations of the pedestrian's perception (image)—together they form a fuller picture. Roob goes on to explain that Weaver's image and text do not translate one another, but rather transform each other. Text becomes "an expressive image-form" and image a "meta-language."³⁰

Let's consider a bit more what it means for image and text to live parallel lives—separate, yet complementary. We might think of image as walking (observing and perspective) and text as thinking (stream-of-consciousness and story). This would really just be discussing two sides of the same coin, since walking and thinking go hand-in-hand. In *Wanderlust*, Rebecca Solnit explains, "the rhythm of walking generates a kind of rhythm of thinking, and the passage through a landscape echoes or stimulates the passage through a series of thoughts."³¹ Just as Solnit describes walking and thinking as a cyclical relationship, Roob describes image and text as an expansion of each other's meaning. Image and text do not simply correspond, they converse.

In "The Spirit of Mapping Through Writing," Anne West speaks to the "meshing image and language" as "poetic logic." She defines "poetic logic" as a form of "artistic knowing," or a strategy for artists looking to understand their visual work through writing. Through the "expressive potential...of the visual field" and the "imaginative capacity" of "linguistic form," she explains, one can seek knowledge that stems "not from reason but from imagination." This isn't to say that "poetic logic" is the search for something unreal, but instead seeking meaning in "the space between *poesis* (the making)" and *logos* (the speaking).³²

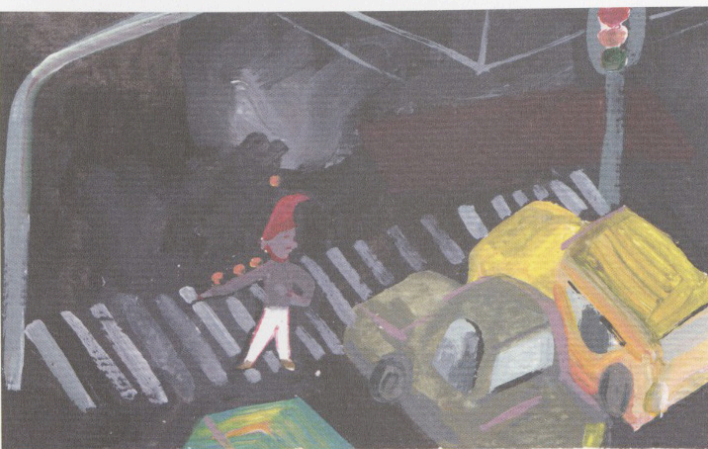
A Pedestrian View, itself a rumination on artistic process and book form (Weaver equates of dreaming to the scroll, and waking to the bound book), similarly benefits from reading the space between. In "Towards Illustration Theory," Jaleen Grove notes that "illustration traditionally clarifies." She continues, however, to explain that Weaver subverted this clarifying role, quoting him as saying: "It is possible to be ambiguous *clearly*." As Weaver's image and text wander alongside one another in *A Pedestrian View*, the gap between them allows for associative meaning to form. Grove explains, it is the book's split-level format, the division of the page into two independent narratives that invites "the reader to synthesize a third meaning."³³

This space for seeking a third meaning is created both by the division of image and text and the continuity of sequence. West explains that "when images are strung together forming a group of interrelated elements, they acquire cohesion—a field of vision."³⁴ This visual cohesion (we know where we are), in turn, allows for artistic exploration (where else could we go). Artist Aidan Koch explains a similar phenomenon in *A Field Guide to Graphic Literature*, when discussing comics that present fragmented narratives and abstracted visuals. When "text, image, and sequence" move together simultaneously, she explains, "the continuity of one element can work to compensate for the abstraction of another." Reading, then, becomes more of an interpretive experience—a "search for connecting threads."³⁵ The wandering of image and text yields to wayfinding for meaning.



(Above) In *A Pedestrian View*

The title page sets up two layers of narrative through separate media (paint versus pen/pencil) and inverted colors. At the same time, the separation between the two is dissolved by similar gestural treatment. As Weaver intimates on one of the final pages, barriers between the two are removed.



A juggler performed for drivers during the brief stop-light. The bus driver watched the juggler and mumbled something under his breath.

Make the Familiar Strange

In *Slow Looking*, Shari Tishman describes a type of observation that counters scanning "visual environments rapidly, unreflectively." Slow looking, she explains, can be practiced through "strategies to guide and focus the eye."^{**} One strategy is to shift physical vantage point, changing one's point of view, and by extension causing one to "see things in a new way."

Weng depicts an image of a juggler from a birds-eye view. This floating perspective is an out of body vantage point, which emphasizes the extraordinary nature of the performance. At the same time, it is a moment that may not have been given a second glance ("the bus driver watched...and mumbled" as if exasperated) if not for the forced standstill of the traffic light.

Rebecca Solnit uses the same phrase as Tishman ("making the familiar strange"), yet applies it to storytelling: "stories that make the familiar strange again" create a feeling of "getting lost...that seems like the beginning of finding your way or finding another way."^{***}

"Finding one's way," of course, is a natural segue to mapping.

* Shari Tishman, *Slow Looking*, (New York: Routledge, 2018), 5, 58.

** Solnit, *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*, 13.

31 Solnit, *Wanderlust*, 5-6.

29 Just a reminder that Roob is the editor of the 2012 publication of *A Pedestrian View*. If I was a reader, I would have forgotten that by now.

30 Roob, "Inside the Reactor," 114-115.

32 West, "The Spirit of Mapping Through Writing," 251.

33 Grove, "Towards Illustration Theory," 77.

34 West, "The Spirit of Mapping Through Writing," 250.

35 Aidan Koch, "The Fragmented Narrative" in *A Field Guide to Graphic Literature* (Brookline, MA: Rose Metal Press, 2023), 85-86.

Wayfinding Meaning

Wandering and wayfinding walk the same path—both respond to the surrounding environment, yet ask different questions of what they see. Wandering wonders: where are we? Wayfinding analyzes: where are we going? Although they approach place from different angles, their perspectives are not at odds. They enhance one another, magnifying the possibilities of each. Wandering provides a space for wayfinding, and wayfinding, purpose to wandering.

If wandering can be described as an art, wayfinding, meanwhile, is a design system. Coined by urban theorist Kevin Lynch in his 1960 *The Image of the City*, “wayfinding” describes “the process of forming a mental picture³⁶ of one’s surroundings based on sensation and memory.” In *The Wayfinding Handbook*, David Gibson describes the term’s current use as “the process and profession dedicated to helping people navigate.” While wandering is often an individual experience, wayfinding tends to be audience centric.³⁷

The bound book, itself, exemplifies a type of wayfinding structure. It is designed in a way to facilitate movement (page-turns), provides a road map (table of contents or chapter headings), and marks progress along the journey (page numbers). There is an entrance and exit: a beginning and end. It is designed with audience in mind, especially in consideration of content and language (accessibility, age range, translation, and direction of reading experience). There are designated rest areas (paragraph and page breaks). Typographic decisions are made for purposes of legibility and communication.

While the book form and wayfinding systems are similar in providing information through visual means prefaced on spatial awareness, they yield different relationships with their viewers. A map or system of signs provides a sense of space in

Questioning Signs

Wayfinding is described as linking “people together, even if they do not share a common language or destination, by guiding all of them through the same space with a single system of communication.”³⁸

I would note, however, that (idealism aside) communication is not universal. What signals something for one person, may have a very different connotation for another. Signs can also be wrapped up in normative systems (with the potential of providing directive, rather than direction). A lack of direction, need not be a negative, as it holds potential for openness.

Applying this idea to image and text, I find narratives that question more interesting than those that prescribe. Openness, in this case, might mean a work is receptive to multiple interpretations (open-ended). Or, perhaps, might refer to transparency, be it revealing process (the visibility of the artist’s marks) or signalling an artist’s position (that this is a particular artist’s viewpoint).

* Gibson, *The Wayfinding Handbook*, 14.



I'm in a cafe, looking for the toilet.
I see a picture of a lion for the men's
toilet, and a picture of a daisy for the
women's toilet. Why not a picture of
a lioness, perhaps?

an informational sense. A book, meanwhile, holds the potential to provide a sense of closeness. By drawing an image, we bring something closer to the eye (to clarity of attention). In turn, by making a book, we bring something closer to the hand (to intimacy of scale).

Mouni Feddag speaks to this idea of closeness in *Illustration: What's the Point?*³⁸ Feddag outlines that “illustration is good for bringing people closer to things” by way of: “attracting, engaging, delighting, informing, contextualizing, showing, shifting, soothing, sympathizing, [and] staying.” My favorite of these modes of illustrative purpose is “shifting” or “what we notice again, differently.”³⁹

If wandering is, in part, a process of exploring what you notice in the previously unknown, wayfinding is discerning your position towards what you notice. They represent collecting versus digesting, experiencing versus deciphering, noticing versus knowing. Wayfinding is not about the simple act of following directions, but the complex process of making choices. Rather than following a singular prescribed path, one deciphers meaning from visual and textual cues to make decisions on how to move forward.

To merge lanes and carry this idea over to illustrated works, Anne West describes visual language as “speculative and indeterminate.” Once the “act of interpretation becomes finite...we may draw the life out of it.” In contrast, ambiguity provides the artist and reader space to find their own way towards meaning. “Artistic knowing,” West continues, “does not exist in the domain of direct correlation between fact and meaning...Art serves notice that the world of meaning is an open one that is constantly being created and recreated.”⁴⁰ With uncharacteristically definitive feeling, I empathize deeply with this.

38 What a great name for a book. Thank you to Shreyas RaviKrishnan for the recommendation. Also, if we're in thank you mode: thank you to Heidi Kolk for her guidance on this thesis paper.

39 Mouni Feddag, *Illustration: What's the Point?* (London: Ilex, 2017), no page numbers

40 West, “The Spirit of Mapping Through Writing,” 253.

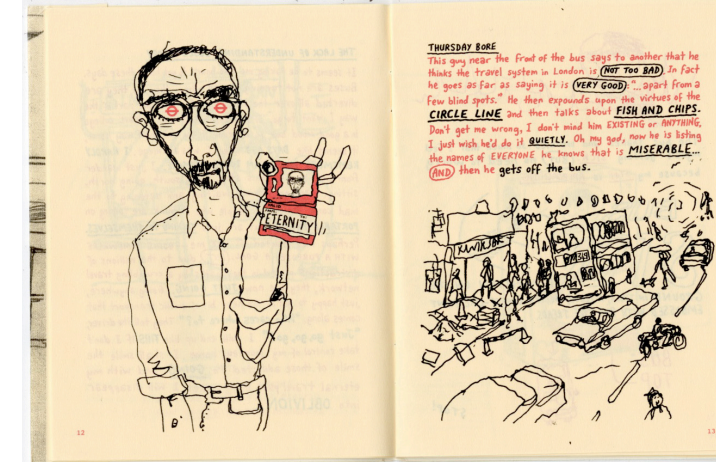
Trapped or Transported?

Before we walked down this long ramble, we fell first into the rabbit hole, asking: are you trapped or transported? Arkle, with red eyes and “eternity” stamped on his ID began *Dreaming on the 349* trapped (sometimes quite literally in a traffic jam) in the mundanity of the bus commute (“Thursday Bore”).

It is through sketching his interminable bus experience, however, that leads Arkle to be transported from “the normal world were buses are simply things that are either coming or not coming” to his behind-the-scenes adventure at the Streatham Garage.

There, his drawings transition from scrawled ink to intricately rendered graphite. They are noticeably quieter observations, devoid of Arkle’s running monologue that shouts its presence (in CAPS, red, underline, circle, bold) across the first section of the book.

The tone has shifted. In his final drawing, an advert on the bus reads: “ALL CHANGE.”



Throughout my two years in the MFA in Illustration & Visual Culture at Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts at Washington University in St. Louis,⁴¹ the most beneficial shift in thinking has been upending my preconceptions of what an illustration should be. Previously, I operated—like many—with the belief that illustration is secondary to words, and that images are conceived only after the spark of an idea. I suppose I believed that logic must be mapped out (as a plot; as a beginning, middle, and end; as a definitive concept; as a set of thumbnails) before drawing begins.

The process of mapping before making, however, has often felt performative and prescribed. How can you know a story before it begins? Mapping mid-making (shifting, readjusting, and figuring things out after collecting visuals) has felt far more intuitive. In my thesis project, the path of making led from experience (observing) to image (drawing) to sequence (arranging) to words (sounding things out) to story (seeking meaning) to book (finding a place in the world—in the physical form of a book and in the mind of the reader). This path is not particularly profound, nor as linear as I've spelled it out to be, but I think it's useful to put into words. If not for someone else, then at least for me (though I hope for someone else! Otherwise, to quote Feddag's title: illustration... what's the point?).

West describes imagination as “the way we make sense of reality” through a mode that “is not a clear-cut rationalist process,” but rather “an immersive, non-linear process directed by images.”⁴² The meaning of words need not direct illustrations; instead, we can find words (and by extension, meaning) in images. West writes, “Artists do not see from a single vantage point but holistically from many angles. Vision, which includes a space for the body, not just the eyes, comes from multiple centers of awareness: visual, visceral, emotional, experiential, abstract, and inquisitory.”

To be frank, at its heart, this paper is a long-winded way of saying: what you notice matters. Noticing has the potential to “alter the field of attention and break the chain of familiar response.” In turn, how you make sense of what you notice is of equal importance. By making, we can interrogate ourselves and our surroundings. It allows “us to see the way we combine, recombine, organize, and reorganize meaning.”⁴³



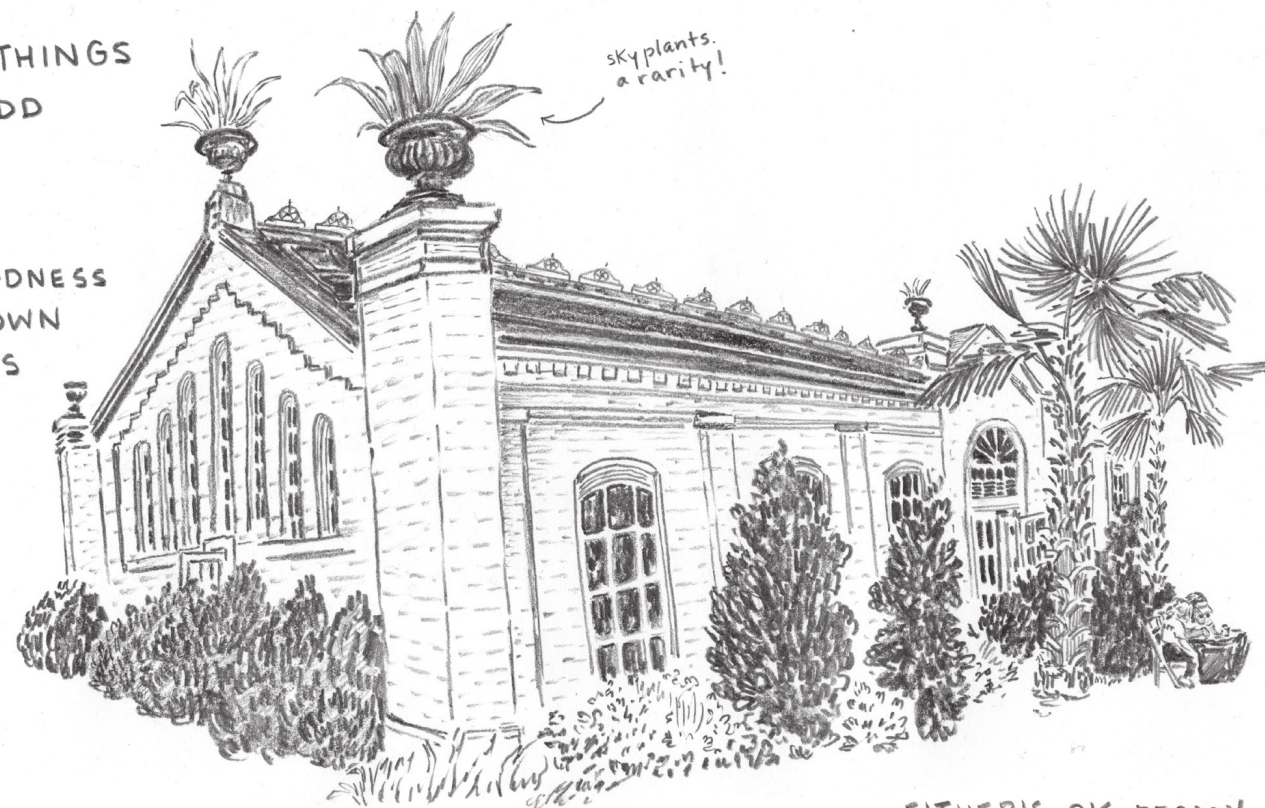
41 This program name is too damn long. Yet I, too, have two middle names—so who am I to judge?

42 *Ibid*, 248.

43 West, *Mapping the Intelligence of Artistic Work*, 249.

AND SOME THINGS
GROW IN ODD
PLACES.

OR MAYBE ODDNESS
JUST SITS DOWN
AND DECIDES
TO STAY.



EITHER'S OK, REALLY.





A TOWN IS NO LONGER A SERIES OF FIXED-PERSPECTIVE VIEWS BUT IS ABSTRACT SCULPTURE.



IF THERE WERE NO UNSOLVED MYSTERIES—THERE WOULD NO LONGER BE A NEED FOR ART.



Before we end this paper, let's have one last look at *A Pedestrian View*. Below a bright orange umbrella, Robert Weaver writes, "A town is no longer a series of fixed-perspective views but is abstract sculpture." This page is reflective. While the ground continues to be pushed up with no horizon line, the puddle grants us a rare view to the sky. The page is also self-reflective: *A Pedestrian View* is, itself, an abstract sculpture. Despite its linear sequence (the inevitable momentum of the page turn), there is no one way to read it. It is the sort of narrative that provides the space for return and change.

On another page, Weaver paints a knocked-down sign. At first glance, it is straightforward. The sign points "one way." At second glance, however, the sign mirrors and mocks itself—two "one ways" are stacked atop one another. The bottom sign remains intact: "one way" points forward towards the right-most edge of the page. Meanwhile, the other bends. "One" is bifurcated from "way" as it points askew to the topmost edge of the page. Meaning has shifted. The reality of "one way" does not exist, and even if it did where would that leave us? Weaver muses: "if there were no unsolved mysteries—there would no longer be a need for art."



A dinosaur at the Museo de La Plata, heading for the exit.

And while there were probably many other better ways to conclude this paper. The image above by Weng Pixin seemed most fitting. Which is to say in the most ambiguous, unambiguous terms...

THE END.

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A Note on Other Works of Interest (Inspiration!)

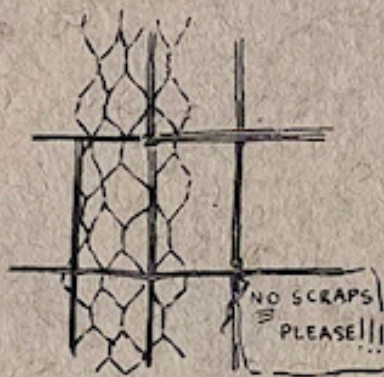
Although he is not quoted directly in this paper, I also want to acknowledge art critic John Berger, whose writings—*About Looking* (1980) and *Berger On Drawing* (2007)—have been informative in thinking through this paper. For tender ruminations on noticing, I would suggest his essay "Field" from *About Looking*. A similar sort of spirit, can also be found in Yi-Fu Tuan's *Passing Strange and Wonderful: Aesthetics, Nature, and Culture* (1993).





This book was created at Washington University in St. Louis, in the MFA Illustration and Visual Culture program in the Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts, in the spring of 2024.

The body text is set in Dolly Pro, designed by Underware. The title text is set in Maple Black, designed by Eric Olsen. The book was designed and typeset by Charlotte Fleming based on a page design by Ben Kiel. Text editing by Heidi Kolk. Production and binding was completed by the Done Department, St. Louis, Missouri. This book is printed on Cougar and 80lb text.



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