*Memory is peculiar in the fierce hold with which it will fix the most insignificant-seeming scenes.*

*Whole tracts of my life have fallen away like a cliff in the sea, yet I cling to seeming trivia with a pop-eyed tenacity.*

*John Banville1*

Walking drawing Making Memory

I like to make what you could call *walking drawings*. Drawings made quickly, sometimes frantically, while moving or caught up in movement. Apart from the sensual pleasure of moving a soft pencil across paper, walking drawing evokes a sense of freedom; the drawing is free from any expectation of strict likeness or worth, objectivity or narrow purpose.

The drawings are immediate, not concerned with the distancing, static, photographic sense of space, but with energy and movement. They are sketchy and littered with personal notation. Many of these drawings are drawn in small pocket-sized hardback sketchbooks.Their pages recount, among other subjects, boat trips, keeping company with friends (and animals) as well as journeys made through urban, mountain and coastal environments. Making them is a way of connecting with the event, a way of constructing and preserving memory, and memory is precious.

Walking drawing, for me, is a way of expressing a relationship with the landscape, an intense cognitive and physical involvement with the terrain. Drawing is like mapping. It is a sort of journey. When you set out to make a drawing you set out on a journey through space and memory, towards the source of the drawing.

Working rapidly, on the move, with the full instrumentality of the body, while trying to map an environment and your experience of it, as it changes from minute to minute, is exhilarating in the same way as a fast-moving sport is.   
The concentration needed for the continuing struggle intensifies the experience of the present. Drawing is a way of constructing the present.   
Book and pencil in hand, trying to note down with a code of marks and lines the river’s endlessly changing flow or the energy and movement of foliage, or the sweep and scale of mountains, is a way of conversing with an event in the landscape, as you experience it, making it memorable.

Each moment is new, transient. You keep missing, but you keep going. You are not sure what exactly you are trying to do, but whatever it is it’s almost there, just beyond your grasp. You try to draw the un-drawable.

Working in this way you can produce interesting drawings. The drawings were not designed particularly to be looked at (by others), but they may contain ideas not recognized or conscious at the time. The drawings were done rapidly, but the residual traces of the experience are retained; they are stable and can be revisited later. Many of the ideas latent in these sketchy drawings have found their way into more considered work: ideas of how to organize space, compress time, draw the weather, suggest vast areas of space or mass with minimum effort. While struggling with the exigencies of the moment, solutions to as yet unspecified problems can make an appearance and remain latent in the drawing awaiting retrieval. The drawing becomes the container for ideas and thoughts and memories evoked by the experience. Reflecting the relationship between the work and the artist, it can embody time - an ingredient, if not the medium of its creation -and that’s important because as the American painter R.B. Kitaj wrote, “of course failure is a constant, breakthroughs are rare and time is running out...”2

David Lilburn

1. Banville, John*, ‘Eclipse’*, Picador, 2000, p.74
2. Kitaj, R.B., ‘Interview with Richard Morphet’*, ‘R.B.Kitaj: A retrospective’*, Tate Gallery. Ed. By Richard Morphet

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