

Clare Qualmann

Perambulator (2014)



Baby Slow Marathon, 2014. Huntly, Aberdeenshire. Photo by Clare Qualmann.

Clare Qualmann is an artist/researcher with an interdisciplinary performance oriented practice. Her work engages a range of participatory methods, and a breadth of media to explore and reveal the overlooked - the politics and potentials of everyday life. She works at the University of East London and The Cass where her teaching and research connects strongly to walking art practice, working on modules that forefront interdisciplinarity, participation and site specificity. A founder member of the Walking Artists Network, Clare continues to facilitate its occasional events and active online presence. Projects include *walkwalkwalk: stories from the Bethnal Green archive* (2010) a permanent installation in Bethnal Green Old Town Hall, *Perambulator* (2014) a participatory performance/walking project (with prams) for Deveron Arts in Huntly (Aberdeenshire), *East End Jam* (2015) a collaborative walking, foraging and jam-making project for the London Legacy Development Corporation, and *WALKING WOMEN* (2016) at Somerset House and Forest Fringe in collaboration with Amy Sharrocks.

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Borders

On Borders and Perambulator

In 2012, when my son was a few months old, I was invited to make a walk for a project at Lewisham Art House. Initially I ruled this out. My practice before would have required multiple research trips, extensive walking in the area. This now felt entirely unfeasible. Instead of saying no I decided to try to make a piece that would be possible to do with my baby in tow.

Barriers. Boundaries. Edges. Limits.

In the first months of his life, pushing his pram around the area that I had lived in for years, I was struck by the number of detours that I had to take: the route alterations, the impediments to smooth passage. My very familiar routes through and to places were rudely disrupted, forcing a new relationship with the physical details of the urban environment.

Where you have to stop. Past which you cannot move or progress.

A new radar evolves – seeking out the dropped kerbs and the ramps – avoiding steps, narrow gaps, awkward turns: going the long way round becomes the norm. Viewing the city through this new lens feels political. Losing the freedom of easy mobility – a freedom that I hadn't been aware of before – connects me to a massive group of people (predominantly women) in the same position, encumbered by wheels.

Mold. Immobilize. Reduce.⁵

This became the premise for *Perambulator* - making visible these issues through a mass walking with prams. Following the first *Perambulator* walk in Lewisham I went on to make a more extensive version of the project in Huntly, Aberdeenshire, exploring the pram walking cultures of the town in a month-long residency as part of Deveron Arts 'Walking Institute' (2014). Walking in a small town highlighted the borders and boundaries far more than walking in the city. The project became about finding them, testing them, crossing them, and taking others with me.

Thus far and no further.

Clare Qualmann

⁵ Marilyn Frye *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory* (Crossing Press, 1983) p. 2.