

# Allmänningar och Stråk

att göra gemensamma rum

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# Drawing your walk

Roberley Bell

## On Walking

Walking is a way of navigating the world. Walking is at once a personal and shared experience as we move from one place to another. The act of walking takes many forms: pilgrimage, protest, transportation, scientific data collection and the pure delight of wandering amongst others.

The early 20th century history of walking as an artistic practice, including the Surrealist movement, the Dadaist, the Situationist and the rise of psychogeography has been extensively researched and debated. The spatial theories put forth in the 'Production of Space' (Lefebvre, 1974) and 'The Practice of Everyday Life' (de Certeau, 1984) form the basis for the varied contemporary walking practices that have emerged over the past sixty years. Walking has been experienced as a physical act, a performative action, and as the means to an end. A wide range of artists are engaged in the practice of walking, including Richard Long, Janet Cardiff, Franic Alys, Jeremy Wood, Melanie Manchot and many others. Their outcomes vary, yet it is the act of walking in real time and space that remains constant.

The past three decades has brought an increased interest in walking as a creative practice. It is possible to imagine that the digital age is a reason for both driving artists to their feet and supporting artists' practices, as several artists who employ walking utilize digital technologies. Walking has also expanded as a means for data collection for a range of fields within the social sciences. Researchers, including urban planners, architects and community organizers, find walking a valuable tool. According to Careri, there is a need for the architect and landscape architect to put down their pencils and take to their feet:

*The aim is to indicate walking as an aesthetic tool capable of describing and modifying those metropolitan spaces that often have a nature still demanding comprehension, to be filled with meanings rather than designed and filled with things (Careri 2002).*

Whether as a creative practitioner or researcher in the social sciences, walking is an instrumental guide for learning a city. The act of being on the ground in the here and now provides for first hand sensory experiences of place. Walking is a way of interacting with both the human and built environments providing the mechanism for perceiving and experiencing place. Walking with a critical eye, taking in the multiplicity of sensorial perceptions expands our awareness of our surroundings. Walking affords the engaged pedestrian/participant a richer and deeper understanding of how space is shaped and occupied.

## Participatory Walking and Mapping Workshops

Participatory walking and mapping asks participants to imagine and envision their spatial surroundings differently. Even when familiar, the repetition of walking the same path can bring forward the overlooked. Walking past the same house or street corner one might notice something that was always there, yet never seen before. Repetition is a way of remembering with focused attentiveness, repetition offers the opportunity to see anew. What we see does not have to be out of the ordinary, it has just been overlooked.

Participatory experiences provide for a wide range of responses to place. The same walk can generate the sense of calm

for one participant and flux for another. Walking through the same place at the same time on the same path does not mean we experience the same things. Yet, through the sharing of walking and mapping stories, participants are exposed to the diverse sensorial observations of one another. When sharing mapping stories participants connect with place and each other through place. New meanings are formed to the once familiar aspects of the city.

During summer 2021 I offered two walking-and-mapping workshops in Malmö; the first was called *Landmarks of Home* and the second one was called *Drawing your walk. One foot before the other.*



## Landmarks of Home

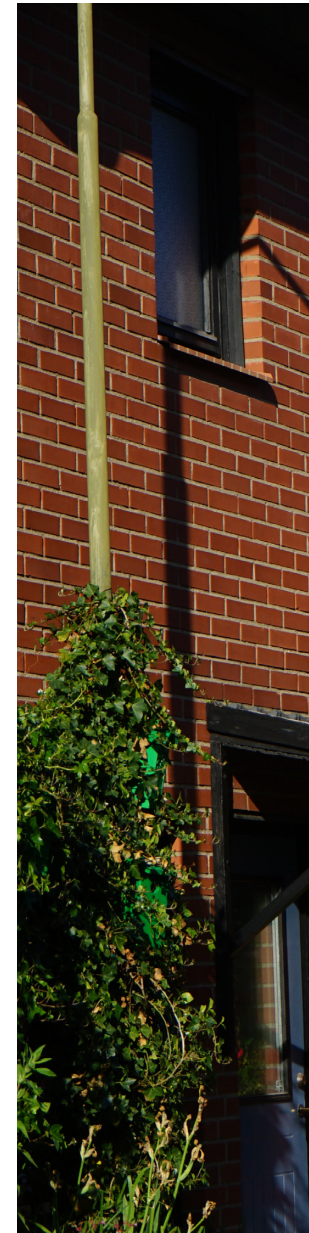
The walking and mapping workshops *Landmarks of Home* was held at Naturmolnet in the Sofielund neighborhood on the southern-central part of Malmö.

Over the course of several days, I walked through Sofielund. The boundaries of the neighborhood spread out a good distance from edge to edge and include former industrial areas that now house developing small businesses, creative industries and voluntary organizations. The remains of small houses which have managed to bypass the seemingly continuous gentrification of the city, are home to a diverse mix of families. The rich built environment along with the people encountered on the streets, in a small middle-eastern cafe and in the library made Sofielund a good neighborhood for participatory walking and mapping.

The pocket park Naturmolnet served as the meeting point for the workshop. Naturmolnet is a green oasis occupying a once vacant lot and is in itself an experiment in self-regulated social space. Opened in 2020, the park has been and continues to be a participatory venture in both its creation and up-keep. Naturmolnet has been co-designed and co-built under the leadership of Växtväcket and through the organization Housing Integration and Dialogue (BID) supported by the city of Malmö and local property owner in collaboration with many other local organizations and schools.

Work shop participants were invited to meet at Naturmolnet to engage with others for a neighborhood walk. The group was diverse in age and included children and pensioners. Additionally, there was a mix of those that lived in the surrounding neighborhood and those that came from outside Sofielund. This allowed for participant voices that are both familiar and unfamiliar with the surroundings

Without a predetermined destination, the participants were asked to acknowledge their surroundings using all of their senses and to allow encounters not yet known to influence their path. I provided an open-ended script, asking only that participants consider the overlooked points of interest in the neighborhood that might be seen as 'landmarks'. I





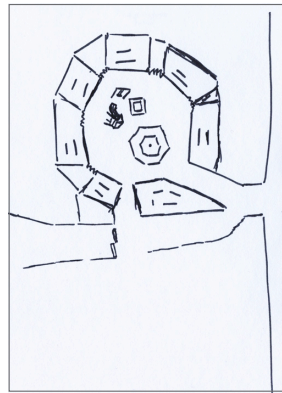
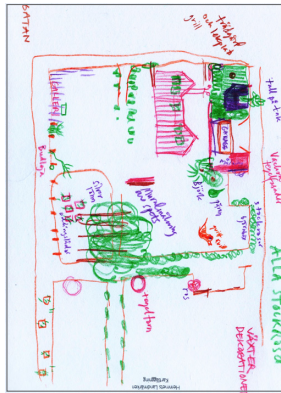
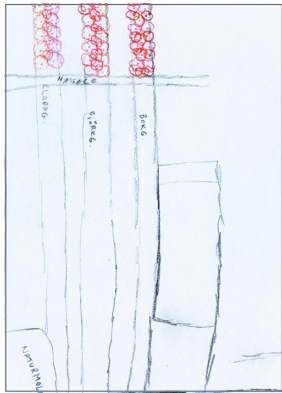
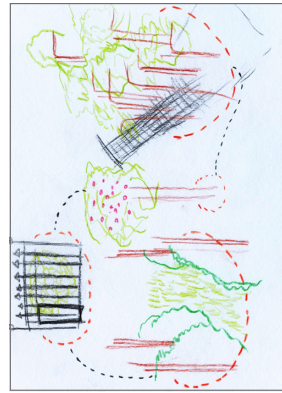
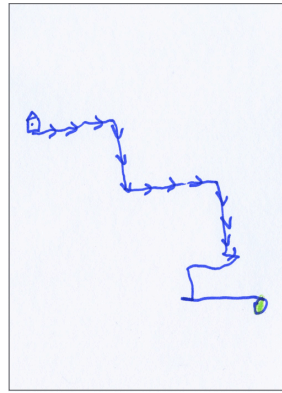
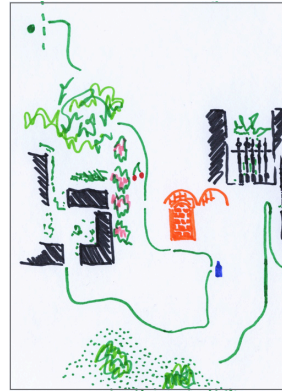
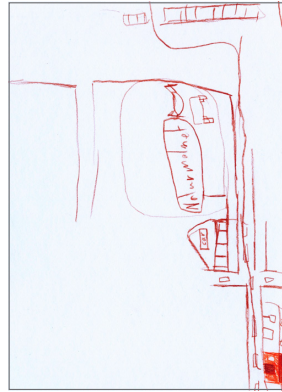
*It is this mosaic of factors that make Sofielund the unique kind of place it is today. This is mirrored in the continuous academic and political interest in the area to study and test new tools and approaches in sustainable urban development and city planning.*

Nicolas Keller, Environmental educator at Växtväcket.

asked them to think about shared space and where they go when they leave their front door. A traditional landmark is something that we can all easily identify — the spire of a church, a civic building, a historic statue or square. The non-traditional landmark is personal and contains stories of place. In contrast to the traditional landmark, the walks were intended to explore how we see our neighborhoods; Where is home? What landmarks define the place where we live? What do you see along your way that others may not? How do these non-traditional landmarks begin to define a place? Participants were asked to walk for one hour, return to the park, and draw their walk as a map of landmarks to be shared with others.

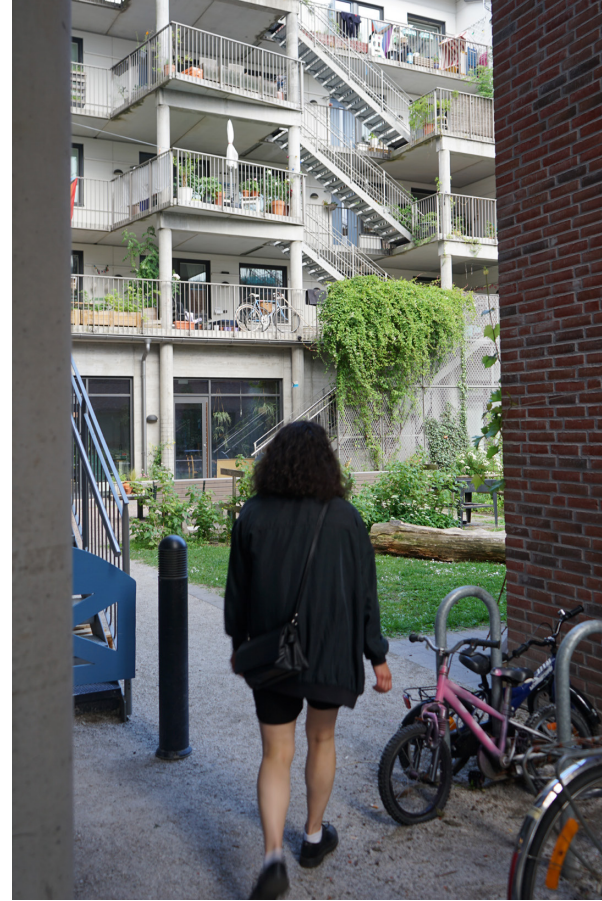
Moving away from the traditional landmark to capture the overlooked, we begin to see with the eyes of those who are familiar with a locale. The 'overlooked' might include a distinctive tree on a street corner, a small house nestled between two larger buildings, or a path along the edge of an abandoned factory. The stories that define those overlooked places as special are important to how we begin to understand what spaces within a neighborhood have importance and to whom. A child mentioned an important building 'the yellow house on the corner' on her path to the local library – which was her favorite place in the neighborhood. Others discovered trees fenced in that seemed to demand attention or brightly patterned murals on the sides of former industrial buildings.

The process of creating a community dialogue and actively questioning how we see the spaces in which we live is a critical link for thinking about how places in a neighborhood can and should be used. The walking and mapping workshop aim to stimulate awareness of place and to provide another layer to the conversation of how we interpret where we live. Using drawing and mapping as visual tools for communication, the participants shared their overlapping points of connection within the neighborhood.









## Drawing your Walk. One Foot before the Other

The walking and mapping workshop 'Drawing your Walk' was held in the inner city of Malmö, leading between the University library and the Pildamm Park.

Walking is immersion into the geography that surrounds us. The physical act of walking takes place in real time. The questions of how we decide to navigate space, and what encounters control those decisions shape our path, moment by moment and step by step.

In this work shop, I presented a script which allowed for decision making along the way. I designed two specific prompts for reasons of slowing the performer /participant down and to heighten their imagination. In addition to the script, participants were given two cards: one for drawing trees and one for drawing their map. The work shop participants were asked to walk for one hour and then to return via the same path. Returning on the same path allows for revisiting and possibly acknowledging something that was not experienced the first time. They were instructed to walk alone and in silence. Participants set off using only the provided script. The script was written for those familiar with the city and for academics aware of the need for the skill of keen sensorial observation as a tool for working in the public realm.

The walk took two hours. Upon returning, participants shared their tree drawings and maps. Reviewing the tree drawings, I mentioned that it was not necessarily about the trees, it was about the possibilities that are accentuated in the process of pausing long enough to experience spatial sensory relationships. Also, the specific prompts in the walk of the stage at Pildamm was meant to provide the occurrence to arouse the participants imagination for envisioning the setting of the stage with their own story.

The maps varied as there were decisions to be made once leaving Gustav Adolfs Torg on how to navigate to Pildamm. The conversation revisited the question: How do we choose to navigate space? What perceptual encounters control our decisions for navigation? Responses were varied. Most often participants were directed by a sudden encounter of

### Script

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Leaving the Orkanen Building head towards Gustav Adolfs Torg. You have been to the square many times.

Find a tree, draw this on your tree card. Mark the time on your map card, on the reverse side write your sensory observations at this moment; what do you hear, taste, smell, touch, see.

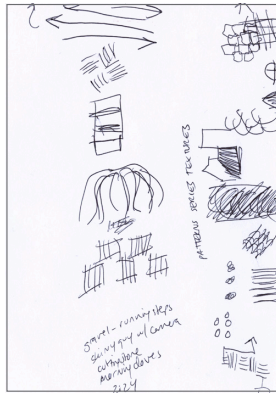
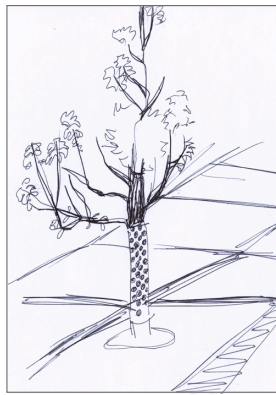
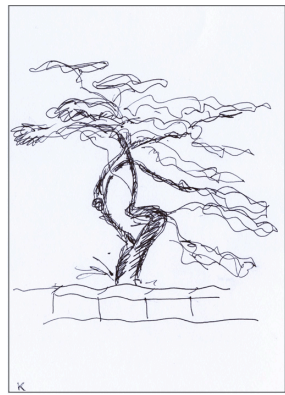
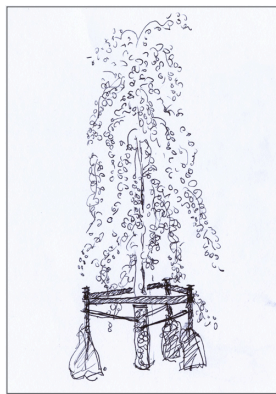
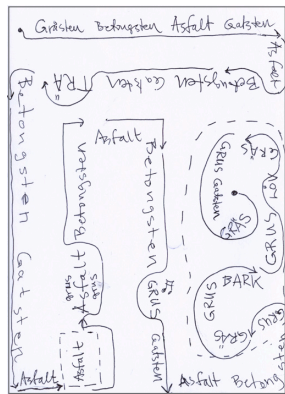
Now walk on to Pildammsparken and enter the park from the intersection of Pildammsvägen and Carl Gustafs väg.

Explore the pathways, find someplace you do not know in the park, sit for a while. Find a tree and draw this tree on the reverse side of the tree card.

Walk to the Pildammsteatern. Mark the time of day on your map. The stage is empty, imagine the stage full, what do you see? What does the air smell like, taste like, what do you hear, what can you touch. Write your responses on the reverse side of your map.

Exit the park onto John Ericssons Väg, return to Pildammsvägen and reverse your steps back to the Orkanen building.

Along the way note on your map what you had not experienced walking to the park.



something seen and navigated towards that. A key question for consideration was expectation versus experience when walking and deciding on direction. One participant reflected on her association to time:

*The feeling of time. I expected to walk much faster. But when prioritizing to experience, and be awake to observe as much as possible, I wanted to move quite slowly. It did not feel at all like I was walking for several hours.*

For another the walk included an unexpected encounter:

*I encountered a park I had not walked through before, I discovered an antiquarian and I heard summer songs played by a group of four young women, practising at the back of the Opera.*

At the conclusion of the walk participants shared their maps. The maps most often serve as notation of the walk and the physical space of the performative action. They render the individual's personal spatial and experiential journey which encapsulates a personal sense of place. Many participants developed a lexicon of images each expressive of an individual interest, consciously or not. One participant focused on the differentiating surfaces of the hardscape. Another on trees and their spatial configurations in various parts of the city. These lexicons reflect personal associations which are embedded in our own individual practice and investigations of the city, collected and recorded for later use.

The documentation from participatory walking and mapping workshops takes many forms and includes maps, drawings, writing and photography. Yet, it is not about finished work or even the need to be visually interesting — the outcome is the willingness for the participant to have performed the act and to have made note of their actions. As a participant commented:

*Even though I didn't like my drawings from an aesthetical standpoint they were a door into observing the environment.*

Walking with a script, following sounds, smells, paths, people and shadows reintroduces us to our surroundings. Walking through the city provides a unique type of engagement with the urban environment creating connections between spaces, people and neighborhoods, allowing one to

absorb the experience of the city on its most personal level, feet first, step by step.

## Concluding comment

The success of the participatory walking and mapping workshops lies between the strategy I present, the participants' willingness to perform and the representation of their actions. My strategies establish the conditions by which the participants perform their walks. I present each group with a script and a set of instructions. Sometimes these instructions are intentionally vague such as:

Go right  
Go right again  
Walk for a ways  
Return via the same path

The vagueness leaves open decisions to be made by the participant as they perform their journey. At other times a more detailed script is offered, as was the case with the workshop at Naturmolnet in Sofielund and the workshop to Pildamm park.

The nature of participation requires the willingness on the part of the participants, without which there would not be any resulting action. Participatory walking and mapping allows individuals to share perceptions and experiences in real time.

We learn a city by walking, whether it is our own city or an unfamiliar one. Sensorial observations that flow as we step one foot before the other, moment by moment offer invaluable insights to space and place. For the architect or urban planner, this approach offers valuable insights to the ways that the local residents reflect on the spaces of their neighborhood; how spaces are used and what they mean.

## Acknowledgment

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