

(In)justice in the City. A performative walking tour through the city of Gothenburg

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This article deals with a city walk, (In)Justice in the city, which took place in the Haga neighborhood of Sweden's second-largest city, Gothenburg, in 2016 and was conducted within the symposia Exploiting Justice. The walk started from Haga's peripheral areas and gradually approached its center, in order to provide space for narratives other than the dominant public image of Haga. Various conceptual and perceptive entrances were used for the participants' physical encounters with the five sites visited. At each location, complex layers of history, urban planning, and people's intersecting interests became visible. Although the walking tour generated responses from participants who spoke of abandonment, secrecy, order, and lack of encounters, it simultaneously opened the possibility for a variety of different interpretations of the sites. In this way, the walk can be seen as a critical performative practice that awakens many different voices and narratives, all of which can be included in a complex exercise of democratic society.

Keywords: walking; physical performance; public space.

Introduction

I open the door and walk out, through the front door and up the sidewalk, on my way through the city as part of my daily routine. I continue along the avenue, past trees with a few leaves still remaining and past people going in all possible directions, on the way to their own business. What else is there to do, though the air is full of worry and we're warned on the radio of new potential terror threats, an unstable economy and maybe a storm that's heading our

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way. Yet I follow my habitual route with my senses disengaged, waiting to get where I'm going. I walk in oblivion, not seeing the things I'm being encouraged to be wary of (threats, suspects, unknown people) but also not anything else, either, the things we would rather ignore (people begging, sitting, waiting). I walk steadily and quickly, without hesitation. I walk despite knowing that at this very moment, others are being stopped at a border and not allowed to go further, that the world is fluid yet full of stopping points and boundaries. When I arrive at my goal, I enter the building, and only then do I open my eyes.²

I want to move the seeing-listening-thinking body I experienced in the theater studio out into my everyday walks in the city, dissolve the discrepancy I so often felt between my daily life in the studio and my daily life on the street. The project GångART (2013-2016) evolved from this goal, in which techniques and strategies from the theater were applied to walking acts in urban spaces. The aim was to develop an imaginative attentiveness and observant moments while encountering the city. When, in the fall of 2016, I was invited by the Center of Gender Research at Gothenburg University to conduct a city walking tour, a wandering seminar, for participants of the Exploiting Justice symposium, this became the final subproject of GångART.³ The symposium focused on the theme of justice/injustice, and my planned walking tour dealt with questions of who had the right to the city and how. Which types of movements do different places invite, and what does this mean in terms of people's use of city spaces? With the help of a theatrical perspective, we would together approach and create knowledge and understanding surrounding a number of sites in Gothenburg.⁴ Six months later, I did the same walking tour with a group of performing arts students from Gothenburg University's Academy of Music and Drama. In the following descriptions, I have chosen to weave together the two different walks and the participants' responses in order to

2 This article is published in a somewhat different version in Swedish as part of the book *Konsten att gå. Övningar i uppmärksamt gående* (The Art of Walking. Exercises in attentive walking), which is being published by Gidlunds in the Spring of 2019 (Lagerström 2019).

3 The title (In) Justice in the City was suggested by the conference when commissioning the city walking tour. Exploiting Justice – Processes, Performances and Politics took place October 27-28, 2016 at Gothenburg University.

4 Gothenburg is Sweden's second-largest city, located on the West Coast: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gothenburg>.

give a more vivid depiction of the walking tour and the questions raised in its footsteps.⁵

In many ways, the cultural practice of walking has, historically, been a reaction against alienation and the fast pace of our industrialized world. In recent years, both activists and city planners have viewed walking as a subversive act that enables the transformation of order and power structures in society (Solnit 2002). Walking has also emerged as an interdisciplinary artistic, as well as theoretical, field. Both artists and scholars are today using walking as a means to perceive, view and construct the world. This city walk takes place in such a context, based in performing arts with connections to sensory ethnography, cultural and urban studies and psychogeography. Above all, it is anchored in the field of artistic research, which has developed and expanded widely during the last decades.

The question of who has the right to the city is complex, just as that of which events and stories are meaningful in the general image of a city. In GångART, like in the walking tour, the focus lay on small, seemingly invisible details and observations in the mundane. What can we find out through what we hear, see on the ground, or feel in our bodies, when we test a certain place? The body is the bearer of patterns, norms, and conceptions, but can also notice and resist things that might irritate it. It can sense contradictions.⁶ In the classical *flâneur* position, it is a (white male) individual moving through the streets and observing the world.⁷ Here, we were a group of conference participants with disparate backgrounds, moving within the framework of a defined shared activity, a guided walking tour of the city, and at least partly with the protection of the group, we could dedicate ourselves to physical examination of public space. In the walking tour, we visited squares, streets, and a park area, but also vegetation on the border and an inner courtyard of a residential area. This means that boundaries or thresholds between public and private were tread upon.

⁵ I captured participants' responses immediately after the tour in a shared conversation. I also took my own notes. The tour began with an introduction indoors. For the student group, the walking tour was the preamble to a week's work dealing with site-specific questions after which they then created their own suggestions for tours in which different sites around the city were investigated via the senses and from various perspectives.

⁶ This refers to Henri Lefebvre's thoughts about the social production of space (Lefebvre 1991).

⁷ Janet Wolff requests, for example, a feminist sociology about modernity that complements the male story of modernity expressed through the *flâneur* and that dominates texts about walking (Wolff 1985).

The question of rights is activated as soon as we begin talking about the significance of the concept of public space. A typical view of public space in the context of the Swedish authorities is that it should be accessible for everyone in society and a common space in which opinions can be expressed freely.⁸ Public space can be seen both as a physical fact and as a socially-produced reality (Gabrielsson 2006). Public spaces are often viewed as important for life in urban spaces and for meetings between citizens. They are also general meeting places and social engines of democracies, and are therefore often connected to beliefs about democracy. But it is not always unproblematic that various groups of people with different belongings and expressions are blended in the public spheres. Obscure social norms and collisions between differing interests can create unrest and instability in the city, in society (Listerborn 2010).



The walking tour took place in the district of Haga, in the center of Gothenburg, which through its history clearly connects to questions of gentrification, a transforming city, and public space. It is also a district with many different ongoing discourses. I wanted to invite the participants to explore how Haga could be interpreted as a public space, as a common meeting place and accessible area. This type of work can contribute to new

⁸ Such a view is discernible in municipal writings like those from the National Board of Housing or from local examples in work environments or city development. It tends toward a very old understanding of common spaces as places in which democracy can be exercised, as in political debate, for example. The Swedish National Encyclopedia defines public spaces as “the part of an inhabited environment that is accessible to the general public, e.g., streets, passageways, shopping malls, squares, and parks” (*Nationalencyklopedin*, <http://www.ne.se.ezproxy.ub.gu.se/uppslagsverk/encyklopedi/lång/offentligt-rum>.)

ways of creating knowledge and understanding of urban environments and highlight some of the most important challenges of our time in terms of urban transformations. The work's main contribution lies above all in its way of using bodily, spatial and imaginative strategies from the practice of the theater, an area that is underrepresented in research on walking.

In this article, which is written in an essayistic manner, I wish to give a taste of and reenact the different parts of the city walk, and its way of activating various sites, methods and responses. My purpose is to reflect upon the understanding that was created in the group about each site and to make visible how the walking assignment was performed in the tension between providing a reading based on a selection of historical facts, proposing a sensory bodily task and directing the investigation through a specific topic connected to each place. Underlying this way of working are methods from the theater, used to both explore and claim space. While social norms and urban planning policies may in this way be scrutinized and resisted, I also point out the importance of adopting a pluralistic stance. It is, in fact, the competence to perceive several perspectives and voices in the experience of a place that contribute to a more complex and rich way of understanding it. This is made possible through embodied listening and imaginative attention, through a wanderer who engage and invest herself in the act of walking, far from the position of a distant flâneur.

Images of Haga

The tour began in the periphery, on the “back” side, of Haga in order to later approach Haga’s center or “front” side. The concept of a back side and front side is related to how a city markets itself and the view of attractive and less-attractive places. A hierarchy of places exists in a city, and also within each district.⁹ Conceptions also exist about more and less attractive residents, whose presence can be rejected in different ways (and with the help of various city planning strategies). Approaching Haga from its periphery means coming in “from the side” and first encountering these demarcations and outer edges. We find the presence of something not

⁹ Ingrid Martins Holmberg calls this a “geography of attraction” in her dissertation *On the City’s Surface: The historicization of Haga* (Martins Holmberg 2016).

prioritized, made invisible in these places on which I want to focus and examine.

Downtown Gothenburg, which Haga is now considered part of, also has a particular value as a public arena because different groups of people often come to the city center to meet up and do things together. This argument also lay behind the efforts to create a general-purpose building in Haga in the early 1970s, with the notable purpose of Hagahuset: that people, regardless of background, should be able to meet in a shared location in the city center (Thörn 2013).

In people's encounters with places, various aspects that impact the experience must be considered. City planning and the physical shaping of the place make a difference, but also how the spatial practices look in the area, i.e., how people act and how the city space functions in practice. Besides, public discourses about the place in question (the narrative of the place) have an effect on people's perceptions.

In and of itself, Haga is an interesting part of the city in this context, because its history is connected to discussions of gentrification, segregation, a city in a time of change, and public space. Haga has been the subject of debate in recent decades, not least in conjunction with the great wave of demolition that took place in several locations in Sweden from the 1960s onward. The plan was that Haga would basically be levelled, but powerful protests from citizens finally stopped the demolition. Afterwards, it became clear that the previous inhabitants of Haga had begun to shift into a considerably more well-off variant (Thörn 2013).

At the same time, it is impossible to give a unified picture of Haga; several discourses and narratives are being circulated simultaneously (Martins Holmberg 2016). Some are directly contradictory. Some people emphasize the socializing and political engagement of times gone by, others label past eras as deplorable and miserable. Certain sources talk about Haga as tattered by the demolitions, while others claim that the majority has been preserved; some evidence suggests a great exodus at the same time as others show many inhabitants remained and that Haga is, as a result, diversified. Ingrid Martins Holmberg describes Haga's continuous recreation as different places over a long period. She uses *imaginary*

geographies as a central concept in her dissertation to emphasize the idea of the place.¹⁰

Acknowledging the many different conceptions that often exist about a place, but also the different layers of history and time periods, laid an important foundation for the city tour. My idea was to offer a number of different entry points and examination tools, to *open up* these places for the participants by maintaining incomplete pictures or histories as well as by using methods that employ the body and its senses.

The tour took place in five different sites in the district: Skanstorget, the wood's edge up toward Skansen Kronan, an inner courtyard, the open area next to the Soldaten playground, and the Haga Nygata shopping area. The sites were chosen because they represented different types of places within a relatively small perimeter and raised a variety of questions and approaches. That the tour began on the border of Haga, on the periphery or back side, means places that could be seen as forgotten, low-priority, or invisible are emphasized in the participants' first encounter with the district. The goal was to approach the area with new eyes, to see beyond the more official, popular picture of "cozy shopping and fika."¹¹ At every site, the participants received an introduction to the site with some of its historical impact that also touched upon geographical aspects and observations from a city-planning perspective. Then, participants received a task with a central question to carry out in the site. It might be about how one could visualize the neighborhood socializing in a courtyard, to examine the use of a square with the help of the soundscape, or the possibility of interactions based on the placement of seating in an open area. In all tasks, the participants were able to encounter the site directly through their own bodily and sensual presence, by walking, sitting, writing, or listening. In every place, various historical contexts were also linked and different perspectives or positions were tested.¹²

¹⁰ Martins Holmberg stresses that the word *imaginary* is used here in the sense of "‘idea’, ‘in the mind’ (and not as ‘fanciful’, ‘fictional’)." (Martins Holmberg 2016, 42).

¹¹ This phrase is used as a slogan to advertise Haga, by the district itself as well as the city's tourist agency. "Fika" is the Swedish word for having coffee, often with friends or colleagues and with a small bite to eat. See <https://www.goteborg.com/haga/>.

¹² Historical facts relating to Haga's history in this article have been gathered from several sources: Thörn 2013, Martins Holmberg 2016, Lo Gillefalk 2010, Gillberg 2012, webpage about old Gothenburg: <http://gamlagoteborg.se/2018/05/22/haga/>, and webpage about Gothenburg's history: www.goteborgshistoria.se.

Hearing the Place

In Skanstorget's grassy circle, today a park in miniature format which once housed a market, we listen with closed eyes for the square's auditory resonances. In contrast to the inner images that could be evoked by the speakers of the workers' movement, who in the early part of the last century chanted on the stairs of the market building in the middle of a lively marketplace, today's sea of parked cars appear against a background of traffic noise from the adjacent avenue as a barely-populated place. Only a few dogs with their owners in tow accompanied us on the small lawn in the middle of the sea of cars.



We began, then, in the grassy circle that could be defined as a very petite park, situated in the middle of Skanstorget, hidden by parked cars. I have always wondered about the peculiar form of this grass pancake, and before the city tour, I learned that it was the shape of a previous market (called "Spottkoppen", the Spitoon) that left its mark on the ground.

I chose to juxtapose a few different historical levels:

- Skansberget's 17th-century fortification Skansen Kronan (Skansen Crown) up on the top.
- The importance for the military of an open area at the bottom of the mountain for the sake of visibility and how the area had therefore consisted of pastures for a long time.
- From pastures, hagar in Swedish, to the name Haga and an open square.
- The square as a lively marketplace and later a market building.

- The square as an important space for political meetings and a site for the workers' movement
- Political speakers holding speeches on the stairs of the market building
- Car parking and a mini-park

My choices of which historical points to highlight undeniably create a certain narrative. How do we experience this place today? How it is used? Closing our eyes, and with the help of our hearing, we listened to the place, standing and walking around on the lawn, on a weekday afternoon. Our experiences of the place were reflected in a sort of micro- and macro-perspective, or different circles of attention (Merlin 2007), in which some focused on the very closest stimuli, that is on their perceptions in their own bodies and the occasional canine rhythms in the place, while others turned their ears toward the outer ring of traffic. In the interstices between individual dog-owners' wanderings and the constant traffic of Övre Husargatan, between dog pee and traffic noise, a sort of desolation arose for many participants: "a quiet, depressing parking lot." For many, the traffic noise transformed into an experience of silence, indicating some correspondence between these seemingly dichotomous sound levels.

Some gradually began to sense new details in the ostensibly empty, quiet environment. They could make out individual sounds in the noise that were evidence of small activities from people, animals, other participants. One was struck by the realization that it was the first time this participant had been in a square without headphones on. What is listening like then, one might wonder. Another who couldn't resist looking asked themselves: who waters the flowers in the flowerbed here? Who ever sits on that bench? In a world of oblivion, silence, noise, and metal machines on roads and squares, details rise out of the fog and make themselves visible. To the ears, to the senses, to those who peek.

We had been standing in the footsteps of a torn-down market, listening for political messages from the past that could no longer be heard, feeling observed by the fortlet up on the mountain (called "Ryssåsen") that is now a museum, and marveling how cars can imperceptibly take over a place. Today, Skanstorget is an inconspicuous place in many ways, a place that has fallen into oblivion, but it is even more important, then, that some everyday spies take on the task of standing witness to it. In this case, they witness

primarily with the help of their hearing. The City Planning Authority in Gothenburg says in a report that:

Skanstorget's unilateral use and provisional expression gives the feeling of a peripheral place, despite its central placement, and makes the site anonymous. The square lacks a clear identity and multifunctionality. (...) The history of the old boundary between city and country, the once-lively market square, the important meeting place for inhabitants of different city districts and a gathering place for the workers' movement is today obscure. The site today communicates the opposite of the vibrant, crowded square it once was. (Lo Gillefalk, 2010)

It is also said that: "The park's wild and untended appearance emphasizes this impression." This takes us to our next site.

Walking in Terrain Vague

On the tour's next stop, a smaller park area up toward the edge of Skansberget's thickets, the area for us to tread was considerably larger, which meant that some participants walked far away and disappeared from view among the trees while others stayed more still in the grassy meadow. The task, therefore, looked like it would take on a more individual form than the previous one.



It is said that at one point, small, provisional cottages existed there, reaching up toward the mountain, before Haga was constructed at its foot. The military presence in Haga long demanded that residences be destroyed in case of war, in order to render it impossible for the enemy to establish itself at the base of the fort. Maybe this means that there has been something provisional about this whole area for a long time? Details of the different places on our tour were connected to each other. The military connection of Haga, for example, recurred at several sites. The word *provisional* resonated in Skanstorget's inconspicuous present-day existence, and the authorities' long-term inaction regarding the square and its park environment resembled the conditions for building at the edge of the mountain almost 400 years ago. Gradually, the idea of provisionality with the Haga settlement disappeared and proper workers' residences were built, some of them by well-meaning patrons in the 1800s. In the early 1900s, a large sum of money was invested to give the crowded blue-collar families in Haga a park on the mountain. This park began at the edge of Skansberget, and this is where we headed now.

Today, you can experience the edge of the mountain mostly as thickets and forgotten land. Not many walk here. I've seen traces of concealed activities, such as abandoned needles, beer cans, and blankets. And often, you can see children playing in the area. This place, just below the edge, I experienced as somewhat vague yet a bit organized. Here and there you find paths that people have trampled.¹³

The area is difficult to associate with our mental image of an organized city park. At one point in time, it was home to a stately park, but today it's hard to find any trace of that. The area seems a bit forgotten. The concept of *terrain vague* means a place that is abandoned and unproductive; it's often a neglected area between developed and exploited areas (Solà-Morales 1995). There is a general tendency in society to incorporate this type of place into the productive logic and image of a successful city so that it is transformed and completely rebuilt. The concept of gentrification enters into the picture here. Parts of this edge of Skansberget, which many have

¹³ Excerpt from the city walking tour (unpublished manuscript). Lagerström 2016.

fought for the chance to develop in recent years, can be seen as a form of *terrain vague* because the area is partially undefined, abandoned, and uncontrolled.

Go around the site and notice how it impacts you and how you impact it. Assume the perspective of a small child, i.e., experience the place from hip height. Think about what might be *terrain vague* and what might be more organized sections. Find a path and follow it to its end. Where does it lead?¹⁴

The site was large and lacked clear boundaries. It was possible to follow paths (created by whose repeated footsteps?), wind around the trees, stop in a grassy meadow, or walk along the edge of the mountain. The participants needed to orient themselves in the place and in the terrain, and had to choose their own way. Thrown into an unknown place in a *terrain vague*—since in the context, the place became new and unknown even for those who might already be familiar with the area—different ways of orienting and approaching the place had to be created. Some participants tested the boundaries the assignment established for the place: how far could they get into the terrain before regrouping? Others stayed near the starting point. Some concentrated on the wooded areas, others on the grassy lawn and flat lands. Maybe it was the suggested perspective from a child’s height that made several feel like children, remembering childhood hikes with grandma, and they began searching for imaginary things. The feeling of neglected land, failure, and concealment settled over some of the participants: “It’s as if they don’t want people to use the place.” “It’s fascinating and scary at the same time.” Others experienced a dangerous place among impenetrable bushes while some played archeologist and collected human artifacts or established a sort of children’s fantasy land with litter they found.

Hans Lind takes up the concept of “*ambiterritory*,” with reference to Alexander Ståhle, in his text “Buildings and Building.” The term encompasses land where it is unclear who can use it and what it actually is; these are “incongruous (ambivalent) territories” (Lind 2010, 81). A park is generally publicly accessible in Sweden, open to all, but our site, an old park

¹⁴ Quotes from the instructions given to participants at this site. From the city tour (unpublished manuscript). Lagerström 2016.

area, placed across from residences, was slipping into a tangled forest area. Paths seemingly without logic that didn't seem to lead anywhere snaked through the grass. Few people seemed to be utilizing the place, and it lay quite well hidden right at the foot of the mountain. Thoughts of *terrain vague* and “ambivalent territories” were strengthened on one tour when we found a transient person had pitched a tent in the middle of the site from one night to the next. It is exactly these types of *terrain vague* that can invite transient people and others on the periphery of society to take refuge there. These are areas that seem like they aren't yet controlled and watched over, through mowing, cleaning crews, park authorities, security companies, and building or housing agencies.

So-called “wild and untended” places, as the City Planning Authority terms them, can also decrease the accessibility for visitors by instilling fear, malaise, or insecurity, but on the other hand they can also invite the joy of discovery, freedom, or permission to dwell. There are few places in the center of a city that invite people to pitch a tent. These aspects, highlighted in Skanstorget as peripheral, anonymous, and lacking identity, qualities the untended park may emphasize, can for others generate permission and the freedom to dwell.

Different ways of moving within and understanding a place are dependent on how we orient ourselves. It's not only how we orient ourselves *within* a place, but also the orientation we *assume* that will determine how the body will move in the place. How we orient ourselves impacts how the space and the relationship between bodies will take shape, as Sara Ahmed discusses in her book *Queer Phenomenology*. Are we walking toward something or from something? How far does my energy reach? How we orient ourselves impacts how we understand the world as well as toward what and whom we turn our attention.

The body provides us with a perspective: the body is “here” as a point from which we begin, and from which the world unfolds.
(Ahmed 2006, 8)

Ahmed describes the movement between the unfamiliar and the familiar; how we are constantly engaged in the attempt to make the unfamiliar into something familiar. We are always relating to the unknown: objects, spaces, people, gestures, language. It is when we fail to make the unfamiliar

recognizable that we become disoriented, “out of place.” We grow lost and new things can emerge. By understanding what we do when we are disoriented, we understand how we orient ourselves. We face things. We can only know which path we should choose when we know where we stand. But also, there is always something we can recognize in the unfamiliar. Even in a completely unfamiliar place, we can still find a path. Even with our eyes blindfolded, we can always follow the contours of the walls. It is reminiscent of an actor’s—and a theater ensemble’s—process of constantly expanding upon the conflicting task of managing both recognition and alienation, and *how* is dependent on the place our acting originates. The “I” becomes a geographical marker, a “here” more than a “self,” it becomes a positional possibility (Pelias 2014).

It struck me that the *terrain vague* gave rise to a vague wanderer, e.g. a pedestrian who was useless, unproductive, ineffective, who wandered in circles. Solà-Morales, who coined the term *terrain vague*, insists on the value of the dilapidated and non-productive as a way of manifesting zones of freedom in capitalist society. Maybe Skansberget was, therefore, a free zone, and maybe the vague wanderer could have a corresponding function? Someone who is embarking on a physically sensual examination of places has the tendency to linger in a place. It creates an inertness that works against the daily, automated process of movements through a city, in which effectivity and goal-orientedness are often at the wheel. A person walking in *terrain vague* must sharpen their ability to orient themselves even further, because the place is seen as vague and unclear. The feeling of disorientation can emerge as well as the opportunity to see something in a new way. Maybe the vague wanderer can provide a position to work from.

Belonging to a Place

We continued down to the corner of Frigångsgatan and Skolgatan, which faces Skanstorget. We looked back out at Skanstorget, toward our imaginary marketplace, at those who once agitated on the steps, heard the echoes from the political meetings that took place there, and then again toward the building we stood outside. The building that used to stand here had housed the workers’ movement, symbolized in the community center (Folkets hus) and *Ny Tid* newspaper. It is said to be one of the first buildings that was torn down in the wave of demolition in the 1980s. The new construction has

attempted to preserve an open layout in which people can move between different yards and buildings. In times past, the courtyards were important social centers where people met.

How can people meet here today? Do the yards invite social gatherings? How? Do neighbors talk with each other? Can visitors dwell here?¹⁵

We wandered into the courtyard and took a sightseeing tour with me in the lead. Past the plantings, some artistic adornments, a work vehicle, signs, the orderly laundry room from which a strong scent of clean laundry or at least laundry detergent wafted. We gathered around our goal: a message painted on a tile wall against one of the building façades, which fortunately still remained that day. In capital letters, it said:



For a walking tour guide like me, this is the type of object you dream of finding. Someone has problematized existence here with graffiti on the wall. In this relatively newly-constructed, attractive, polished area. With discussion of Haga as a segregated place ringing in our ears. It was almost too good to be true, as if I'd planted it there.

The participants were given the task of writing their own message to the place, as an answer to what was painted there, and then post it on the wall next to the original message. *See how your response resonates in the place.*

¹⁵ Excerpt from the city tour (unpublished manuscript). Lagerström 2016.

Many questioned the ordered coziness, the cute and confined, in their messages: “is there space to be messy here?” And they posed questions about who gets to live here and whether anyone is home: “Helloooo!” Silence and stillness were mentioned. A “structure of detachment and detached orderliness” were identified. But there was also talk about contact and space for possibilities. One person knew one of the residents and left a greeting. A momentary encounter with a little girl in purple, dressed like a dragon, was like a crack in a well-oiled machine. “Let it be!” The messages on the wall became like a chorus of voices that spoke both to the place and to the person who claimed not to belong. Experiences of the place were presented through different forms of expression: encouragement, analysis, description, declarations. “Of course you belong!”

With images of present-day segregation and a communal past era, it is easy to provoke answers that align with these. I was conscious that it was partly because of the framing I’d provided of the place. But I also wanted for us to sincerely seek community in the yard—or yards, rather, because it was actually several adjacent ones. In other words, there was an open structure as if made for community across boundaries, several outdoor spaces that were connected. But what met us was a still afternoon, with many people surely at work, and a configuration experienced by many as tidy and organized. We as a group also did not begin socializing with each other in the space.

Of the two groups that the tour brought together, the student group dug more deeply and questioned who wrote the message. Was it placed there by authorities, a visitor, or a resident? Is it an order? “I recognized the tag. It’s a template,” someone said, identifying it as graffiti, subculture, and having an attitude. Someone was worried that we might be trespassing illegally on a private courtyard and felt like she maybe didn’t belong in that nice an area.

Seeing possible social spaces in a courtyard doesn’t necessarily mean there are established collective places, such as a grill area or a playground. It can also mean individual initiatives and activities, like someone starting a garden, someone painting in a corner, a person watching their playing child and someone else repairing their bicycle. Spontaneous activities taking place in a courtyard can lead to social encounters and can impact how the space takes shape. A social collective situation in actuality consists of a

group of individuals who each take their own path through a place and, in the process, relate to one another—if we create an analogy with the physical actor’s work, at least. People’s activities can be communal or individual, but it is their specific paths in relation to others (people, objects, nature) that forms communality. In this shared space, encounters can occur. But not even such traces were discoverable in these courtyards. The few arranged spaces—such as a sitting corner, a sandbox, and a commissioned planter box with flowers—were clearly organized by the landlord, but evidence of spontaneous individual initiatives or activities was missing.

I, who lived in Haga for many years in a different courtyard, recognized this way of communicating ownership to residents because, besides appearing here, it is so common in the public housing sector. I recognized the type of gate leading in toward the yard, the messages from the landlord, the organized walkways. I began thinking about the public profile of these municipally-owned buildings and simultaneously the experience of private land that a closed inner courtyard and locked doors gives. In his article “Buildings and Building,” Hans Lind writes:

We don’t need to go back more than 40 years to find a time where doors to apartment buildings and condos weren’t locked. Bit by bit, these buildings were locked, first at night and then around-the-clock. It is a way of marking that the only ones who have the right to be there are those who live there or who were let in by people who live there. (Lind 2010, 81)

It was only thanks to the courtyards’ open structure, which left a gap out toward the street in one spot, and the fact that the building manager’s office lay by one of the gates, that we could enter that address, which otherwise would have been locked to outsiders. The open courtyards left an aftertaste of picturesque order, desolation, and secrecy. When we wandered out on the neighborhood’s other side, after having marched past a number of similar yards, it was like the question of community and belonging that I’d thrown into the game ebbed out. We were now on the locked side of the neighborhood and the feeling of secrecy was what remained.

Sitting in a Place

The question of public and private followed us into the next place. We now approached Haga's more central area, called Soldaten (The Soldier). It is a large, open place that often gathers a large number of people. When people say they'll meet at Soldaten, they may mean the playground, but they could also mean the soccer fields, the two small cobblestone streets that frame the site, or a bench next to it. What does the place invite people to?

Further off in the large, open area lies what was the first building of the Haga district, now a communal preschool. It is an interesting area because the preschool's play surface borders the public playground, and this raises questions about where the boundary between public playground and the preschool actually lies. Which areas are open and which are closed? Where is a person allowed or not allowed to be? It isn't completely clear for a first-time visitor.

Around the playground and the open gravel pitch in the middle, a number of benches have been placed. Some are wide wooden benches and others are the more standard variety. They are positioned seemingly haphazardly around the space. Delimiting the playground surface with its "attractions" runs a low, concrete wall that can also be used as a very low bench to sit on. By one of the entrances to the gravel pitch, we pass two archaic stone pillars on which "Gothenburg City Limits" is engraved. This site seems to contain many historical layers that are visible and tangible. How can a person dwell in this place? How does the place make me act?

Examine the possibilities and limitations of the place in regards to standing, sitting, and meeting.

It is a grey and cloudy day, and I wrap my coat more tightly around myself while I look around. The others have already wandered away over the gravel, some alone and others in small groups. The feeling of desolation sets in. Some magpies strut around nearby. It is fairly empty besides my colleagues who persistently examine the site. They don't go where I'd expected, and I think about that while I begin moving forward. Weight, gravity, the tilt of the head. The gaze is working. The gaze seeks answers in the place, but I know I have to wait and listen more carefully before any choices can be made. My feet have already made the choice before the

thought really connects. I'm already standing at the wide wooden benches. I'm struck with the understanding that all the benches are strangely underutilized, that all of the others are more interested in the playground and crossings, that I need to balance our game plan. So I set about the benches. All the benches. Wood against bottom and thighs, the lack of back support makes me tired after a moment, the longing to be able to lean back. I'm struck by how the benches lack contact, that they make conversation difficult because of their distance and direction. It's not a place where people are expected to sit for long, to have picnics or lean back and rest. It's a place to flow through, a place for activity. You feel it with your whole body.

One participant states that on the playground, there are specially-designed, colorful, playful benches for children, benches with comfortable back supports where conversations can easily be had because they face each other. There are also many other objects that can be leaned against or sat on halfway. It wasn't only benches that provided possible places to rest the body. Yet again, I wonder why everything but the benches seems to capture the participants' attention. Would I rather lean against something than sit on a real bench? How come? Theater director Ingemar Lindh says that the actor's listening engages the entire person and that it is more a question of perception than understanding (Lindh 2010). What's essential is that the actor perceives that something has occurred. We don't always know the causes behind it, but that we catch sight of something, that something happened, that something opened up. Then we can gradually begin to unravel what it means.

I understand something is not right with the benches in this place, with the placement, format, design, and relationship between them. Maybe there are more levels of the problem that would be possible to sniff out, such as the relationship between activity and sitting, between windy gravel and resting on a bench and between different interests in the place. I perceive that something has revealed itself even though I still don't have the entire picture.



The placement of objects and how a place is shaped is not only the result of urban planning and its execution but also of different layers of time making themselves visible. Places bear traces of previous arrangements where one piece is carried on to the next. A gate, a bench, a merry-go-round, a passage has often come along later and therefore might lack a clear logic or relationship to the other objects nearby. This can lend an arbitrary feeling to the place, a sense that things don't go together, that they complicate contact, but it can also communicate a feeling of liberating disorder in the middle of all of this orderliness. It can mean that people's movements in the place go in other paths than what would be most effective, that steps are stretched and that the body must bridge the gaps in the place.

The site's many layers and areas also reflect people's varied interests as well as the presence of different groupings in a place. Different activities meet in the uninterrupted process of negotiation between shifting interests, norms, and behaviors, as discussed earlier in this text. When we, as a group of people from the university, occupy places in Haga, we also participate in this negotiation of space. A preschool is playing outside in the same place where a few people eat their lunch, passers-by are on their way somewhere, maybe in a hurry, and a man is sitting on a bench drinking a beer while a few kids play soccer nearby. Different rhythms, dynamics, and goals take place simultaneously. Space is tested, shared, taken, and given.

The relationship between person and place can also be observed as a negotiation. When I test how I can sit on the benches and find that I need to lie down when my back becomes tired, it is the answer to the bench's shape, the impulses I receive from the place, and the norms I abide by in regard to different behaviors. How I position myself. A bench and a place and I are in constant dialogue, and we can negotiate different strategies.

Breaking Patterns

From the back side to the front. Haga Nygata with its walking and shopping stretches, cutting straight through Haga, can be considered Haga's absolute front side. This is often where people go when they visit Haga, and this is what the tourist office means when they send tourists hungry for experiences to this district. It is a long, cobbled street with mostly older, low, wooden buildings. The only entrance is the one that faces the open Soldaten area. Haga Nygata is seen as a particularly well-preserved street (with many buildings constructed before 1900), and today it features businesses of various sorts. Primarily, it is boutiques and cafés. The boutiques mostly sell clothes, design items, and home furnishings; not many of the small, old businesses remain. One exception is the bicycle repair shop. It is interesting to study the rhetoric of signs and signage. And people's conversations. What patterns can be discerned in this place?

Examine Haga Nygata and think about what you believe is missing from this place. Add an activity, an event, a pattern, a tempo, or anything you think is lacking, or interrupt existing patterns. See how it impacts the place's rhythm and people's actions. Go on your own or in a group.

The entry point to this last station of the walking tour was to make yourself available and be pulled into the street's atmosphere. It sounds much like a situationist beginning, to follow the current and become pulling into the specificity of the terrain.¹⁶ What happens when I enter the current of a place and am colored by it? What happens to my body, perceptions, thoughts,

¹⁶ This alludes, of course, to the situationists' concept of *derivé*, to drift, which was a technique to examine urban landscapes to analyse their impact on people and to develop constructive strategies. In a *dérive*, one or several people go out into the city and let themselves be pulled along by the surroundings and terrain. (See, for example, Mcdonough 2009).

language, pace? And what happens when I later depart from the pattern? Artist and architectural researcher Monica Sand writes:

The rhythmic forces, within which walking gains meaning, like language, music, and dance; they must be learned from within in order to gain meaning. Entering a culture means adopting and adapting to rhythms and becoming one with them. Even the speed of walking creates rhythmic order: following the current becomes almost a cultural and social necessity; breaking or departing from it isn't about conscious rupture, but concealed conflicts between different perceptions of space and time and creating meaning through improvisation. (Sand 2011)

In our activity is a duty to both identify patterns and work with conscious rupture, but this could of course also happen unconsciously or involuntarily. Patterns, furthermore, are seldom homogenous and universal. My tempo, for example, can both follow along with and depart from that of the place, my behavior can follow overarching systems of norms but also deviate in the details. I am conscious of some, not of others. The question also asks the origin of the perspective. My actions can follow patterns for some people, break them for others. For whom and from what perspective does something form a pattern? It is a complex and refined activity, walking along a street and following or breaking patterns. What area I should limit myself to, and where are its boundaries? Should I see the whole street as a single entity, or only the smallest little surface where I'm setting my foot right now?

The participants' different descriptions of Haga Nygata are characterized even more clearly by heterogeneity and plurality than previous places, even if that tendency has existed in all of the places. The observations from Haga Nygata painted the place with great variation, a plurality of voices that I invited to an imaginary walk through the place.¹⁷

Imagine you come walking along Haga Nygata on a normal day; you've never walked here before. It is a picturesque milieu where people stroll, but some also walk or bike quickly, and some have to navigate among the flâneurs. You move slowly, to be able to drink in the logic of the street but also because you've

¹⁷ As a basis, I used feedback from the participants (including my own) around the exercise and the place.

become a flâneur amongst other flâneurs. The street seems like a romantic destination reminiscent of Italy, you can see couples holding hands as they stroll along, maybe on their way to the cinema. The boutiques often have their products displayed outside, giving a cozy and accessible feeling. The items are accessible, you are accessible to them. You stop at a boutique that sells signs with funny messages. There are many different messages, some of them funny and others a bit clever. The signs make people happy. Many stop and laugh. But some don't laugh, it's as if they won't acknowledge them. And when your eyes have also begun to observe the signs, you suddenly notice all the signs outside the boutiques and on the street corners. And you see that they're seldom funny or clever, they simply want to inform, sell, or attract people to something they need. This is when you also now realize signs in English have begun appearing recently, and you think that Haga has become the definitive tourist destination, where Swedish is no longer enough, and you remember when you were last having coffee and a German tourist questioned you for having coffee in a café in your home district when you weren't a stranger, and you think this is a street of spectacles, a party street, a folk fest that goes on and on and never ends. It's at this point you see the broken windows of several boutiques, which gives the street a rougher, more violent impression. You fantasize about one day coming along and seeing the windows of all the buildings lying broken on the cobblestones, the whole street consisting of broken glass, and you hear it crunching under your feet. Banners talking about cozy coffee breaks and shopping look like war propaganda over the gaping window frames. Only now do you realize the absence of sound. Yes, you hear the low murmuring of voices and the sounds of movement, but it's the lack of traffic noise that strikes you, the lack of street musicians and speakers, and it's now that you observe that not even beggars sit here, and you wonder why, when they populate most other street corners in the city, and this should be a good spot. It's now, exactly now, that you scream.

The very different statements about Haga Nygata (and also earlier places in the tour, besides) stand witness not only to how different our perspectives of a place are based on who we are and how we see things, but also about the fact that there are many parallel events going on simultaneously in one place. And what we notice varies. Places are moving, multifaceted mini-universes that invite pluralism. This gives rise to a polyphony of stories and

testimonies. There is never just one story of a place, of the world. This can seem obvious. But it is simultaneously apparent how much energy is still constantly being used to describe the world “as it is”: in the theater, in the media, in research, in conversation, in archives.

Living with polyphony and plurality is truly what life has to offer, but it also means difficulties. Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin describes ambivalence and forgetting as a sort of biological function that is what saves the human from the “manifoldness of Being” and “being dissipated in the manifoldness.” But he also emphasizes the significance of “encompass[ing] and retain[ing] the concrete manifoldness of Being, without impoverishing and schematizing it.” And is it, according to Bakhtin, only a “lovingly interested attention” that has the ability to make this possible (Bakhtin 1993, 67).

Examining place using a physical, sensual attitude and an imaginative awareness means investing yourself in the process of walking. Just like in the actor’s case, it is inviting actions and movements in the body itself, testing something through yourself, but also acting in the world and, in a concrete sense, standing there. You can test a perspective, a role, a possible action, but this demands the engagement of your entire being. The playful activity, therefore, has a tangible material aspect that connects action with responsibility. Maybe this is what Mikhail Bakhtin means with the person’s “non-alibi” in being, the one standing there, with the concrete act’s unique duty (Bakhtin 1993, 50-57). Therefore, this wanderer cannot be a flâneur who strolls around and observes the world from a distance. It is a wanderer who invests herself and steps into the place just as the place steps into her. And in every wanderer, many voices are speaking.¹⁸

Conclusion

“The official story of Gothenburg has to do with commerce and geniality, about things that unite rather than break apart,” as Magnus Haglund writes in his book *The Naked City*. It is a city that is “obsessed with money and mercantile calculations” (Haglund 2004, 11). But under the surface, there is another Gothenburg, Haglund continues, full of contradictions and

¹⁸ I point to Karen Barad’s term *intra-action*, where formation occurs in constantly dynamic exchange, impact, and cohabitation (Barad 2007).

different realities. Five places later, when we wander out of Haga, we've tried to grasp Haga from other perspectives than the official story about the cozy district filled with boutiques and coffee shops. For what does Haga have to offer someone who doesn't visit boutiques and cafés but who wants to dwell there for a while? What perspectives of accessibility and meeting were awoken in our interactions with these places? Many of the answers that the walking tour generated in the participants had to do with abandonment, secrecy, order, and lack of encounters. But in every place, there were also other testimonies that spoke of playfulness, attraction, and possibilities.

People's participation in the city's public spaces are described in general as a democratic right, "in which the exchange of opinions and establishment of consensus are observed as foundational conditions for the recreation of a democratic society" (Listerborn 2010, 92). It is a typical perception that democracy must establish consensus, but maybe instead we need to acknowledge the contentious, multifaceted and pluralistic in every situation?¹⁹ There is no absolute, shared understanding of a place; the "we" of a place is constantly in motion and is observed from many different directions. This doesn't mean that "justice" shouldn't be attempted or that opposition can't be offered against the currently ruling hegemony—quite the opposite. Our walks can be seen as a critical performative practice that awakens many different voices, interests, and statements, all of which can be included in a complex exercise of democratic society.

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¹⁹ I would like to refer to political theorist Chantal Mouffe's democratic model she calls *agonistic*. For Mouffe, conflicts are unavoidable in a pluralist society, but these don't need to become "antagonistic," a fight between enemies, but can instead be "agonistic," a respectful struggle between opponents. In this way, she draws a picture of a multipolar world characterized by a strong pluralism in which dissensus rather than consensus rules (Mouffe 2013).

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