

**THE CITY AS AN ANTHOLOGY/  
READING MY TOWN BY WRITING HER A LETTER**

A Thesis presented by

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## SYNOPSIS

In my thesis I approach several ways of reading my hometown of Amsterdam. Motivated by the fascination to expose the unnoticed daily reality in its urban space, I invite fellow-inhabitants to share a non-public part of their personal daily routine. These performative encounters result in 'walks-on-paper', created by letters, drawings and movement scores. Drifting throughout various surfaces of the city, I regard the relationship of the passers-by' daily routines with the traces they leave behind on the floor of the city, as a base for developing my autopsychogeographic method. Through an imagined reality, these traces reveal themselves in sentences and signs on the 'pages' of the city's anthology. The resemblance of writing and drawing on paper, with the way the city-floor is 'filled in' by passers-by, provides an insight into the narrative of an everydayness that takes place on both public and private grounds. In this 'reading' of the town, I uncover the value of imagination, thus allowing a more imaginative discourse with one's own habitat creating awareness for the hidden poetry in the everyday.

The hypothesis postulated in this thesis is that the series of small scale encounters, that were conducted in my research, may contribute to imagination and identification of a hidden poetic quality of routings and routines of urban inhabitants with their everyday surroundings. This identification conveys an awareness of the imaginary space of the everyday that connects to a personal and local urban condition.

My research emphasises the valorisation of imagination as a non-economic but essential potential knowledge that deserves a valuable place in the public and private domain. The potential, as a subtle and alternate mode of working with imagination, that lies in this, is the ability to attend to and respect the uneventful side of the mundane. In that sense, my proposition of the term 'autopsychogeography', can be a method or a tool for anyone interested in poetic grounding in our material world, and attributes and emphasises additional value to the shared community narrative.

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Amsterdam, June 2020

**DECLARATION BY STUDENT**

I, *Mariken Overdijk*, hereby certify that I have personally carried out the work depicted in the thesis entitled, "*The City as an Anthology/Reading my Town by writing her a Letter*."

No part of the thesis has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma prior to this date.

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## INTRODUCTION:

### ON THE UNNOTICED PERFORMANCE OF ASSORTED BODIES IN THE PRIVATE AND PUBLIC URBAN SPACE

Instruction: Put the peas in the water for a night to break the germination rest.

*– (from hearsay)*

This journey started as a walk around the block. A daily walk with my dog. She is guided by her nose and I follow her example by letting my senses guide me. It's amazing how she can endlessly sniff at a seemingly barren spot on the pavement. What does she smell that I don't see? I notice a perfect island of moss which grows on a residue of glue in the form of an old plaster on a lamppost in my street. We are both distracted by a different sensory layer of the public space around us. Through this habitual wandering, I became aware of a multitude of physical and mental manifestations of myself as a human body and of other human and non-human bodies outdoors; bodies that move on the surface of the earth and more specifically on the surface of the public and personal space in my living environment, i.e. the environment where I drift in my daily life.

What do I perceive, if I make the connection of these manifestations with an unconscious spectacle that unfolds daily before 'my feet' and 'my eyes'? And which role does my fellow-inhabitant as passer-by play in this spectacle? Is this character just an extra, or is her/his/its/their role indispensable to expose the layer of a hitherto unnoticed reality? In another way, there is something like a daily recurring ritual of moving bodies which is becoming visible.

A ritual that starts indoors and makes its way outdoors that reveals a choreography of the daily coming and going. And alongside the bodies that appear and disappear in these spaces, the 'assorted bodies' that are addressed here can take various roles to perform. For instance, it can be a daily passer-by, becoming a participant or a spectator, an insignificant character or even a nonhuman character like a slug, a brick-street-corner or a letter. One thing is for sure: there is a habitual motion of all these various bodies outside and inside the private and public space. And when it comes to positioning these bodies as vital instruments of something that I define like the panorama of urban life, whether tactile, visible or audible, I cannot escape an overwhelming sense of togetherness with this propulsion of the body in urban life. And it is not only the ways in which this propulsion is



performed, but the question is also how to visualise and address the aspect of being immersed in a daily routine. An unnoticed daily reality is lying there in wait. A beautiful but unseen routine that takes place every day, laying out an essential sign of zest for life. And this is where I observe that the unnoticed is holding an embodiment of the poetics of the *genius loci*, the spirit of the place, within a highly populated urban habitat of my hometown.<sup>1</sup>

In the search for how this unnoticed daily reality affects me, I will share with you a small trace of my journey of habits. Going on the road is a beginning, but at the same time it is the goal in itself: To be on the road and finding directions and losing the way, to stand still somewhere, perhaps hanging around a bit a too long on a street corner; or when I wonder and ponder about the moving bodies behind the façades that are kept undisclosed from the public eye. Even more triggered by the curtain-free-window view inside the houses here in Amsterdam, my hometown, and my personal and local urban field of research.

It is as well a search for an explanation of the main question: How to lay bare the poetry of the unnoticed day-daily reality? Where is the beauty of everyday life hiding out? And how to gain autonomy for this significant mundane beauty, which seems an underestimated value in the consumer society<sup>2</sup>? With a non-economic goal, I aim to create attention, in an un-digital way of participating. I can define this un-digital, contrasting it to the digital means that are used to upload and share everyday life with everyone everywhere around the globe in need for *likes* of existence. A niche of unnoticed-ness and insignificance is revealing itself here. Its urgency is not far to seek: An imaginary room of one's own, within the shared space we inhabit.

The hypothesis postulated in this thesis is that the series of small scale encounters, that were conducted in my research, may contribute to imagination and identification of a hidden poetic quality of routings and routines of urban inhabitants with their everyday surroundings. This identification conveys an awareness of the imaginary space of the everyday that connects to a personal and local urban condition.

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<sup>1</sup> My argument for using the terms *City* and *Town* interchangeable in referring to Amsterdam, lies in my personal ambivalent relation with my hometown, because of its scale and its village-like character packed in a cosmopolitan f(r)ame.

<sup>2</sup> Mundane is referred to as the daily habitual.

Another question in this thesis: how to connect the unnoticed to a way of 'flaner' and 'dériving' inside and outside the urban plane? I explore and disrupt these binaries: the mundane and the lyrical, the inside and the outside, the physical and the mental, the private and the public, the paper and the digital and in the end the noticed unnoticed.

These concepts will all demand their attention in the upcoming pages of this thesis in several ways of reading my hometown, the city of Amsterdam.

## 1. ON THE FRONT-DOOR OR A THRESHOLD AS A MEMORY CARD

The door opens—one never knows who opens it, from which side he or she enters or leaves.

—Stigmata: Escaping Texts. *Hélène Cixous*.

Returning to the moment of stepping outside: I stand still on the threshold and I wonder what the liminal space or the edge of everyday life is to me. And what does it mean to my neighbouring residents or other fellow participants in the public-urban-social community with whom I share a common space every day? And what about the front door, as an inseparable element of a daily *rite-de-passage* which is hanging from its hinges above the threshold, thus giving access to crossing the border from inside to outside and vice versa. The gesture of opening and closing the door is a beautifully unnoticed gesture. Everyone does it. Every day. But who notices it?

The frontier crossings between outside and inside, between social and personal, between private and public, between Them and Us, doors mark out our moments of truth, our points of contact, on their hinges swing our fates, through them we go from one passage of our lives to another, retreating, arriving, departing, returning... (Clery, 1978, 12)

The front door is an entrance and an exit at the same time. There is a treasure trove of stories in all these threshold-like spaces. If there were an equivalent of a memory card in the door itself or a sensory card, what kind of information would be stored on these cards? I can imagine the front doors as a part of the pages of the life of the city. There, the city becomes an anthology and its pages get filled with vibrant matters: the colours, smells, different velocities of traffic and shreds of conversation that are part of the street-life and door-life. The vibrant matters can be read whilst walking through the street. Instead of scrolling through social media pages, it will be an analogue stroll through the life of fellow-inhabitants. I want to explore a walking tour that halts in front of a front door and gazes at it as a way to 'read' it. Or is this an invasion of privacy?

In Georg Simmel's essay *Bridge and Door* (1909/1994), he attributes the social role of the door (and the bridge) to function in a humanly bonding way, thus becoming a "bordering creature" (10). Simmel compares these architectural constructions with a psychological human need to be dependent, on one hand, to social relations, and on the other hand to a desire of operating individually, to close the door behind, to be alone and

unwatched. Here both the door and the bridge embody and visualize this inevitable concept of being part of a bigger system, a social and public space. To close the door or to leave it open, both positions introduce autonomy to decide who is allowed inside or outside, in order to make way through the maze of a bigger public space. In an article on David Beer's website, *Threshold* (2017), he conveys Simmel's idea on the door, where the door functions as a social hinge to allocate a personal space within a common space. With the mandate to cut-off, to set ajar or to widely open the door to allow others to step inside (Beer, 2017). Here, the autonomy of the door is being identified in its character of shaping a border or liminal edge and at the same time acknowledging an opportunity to step through this portal into freedom (Simmel, 1909/1994, 10). A door like the looking-glass in Alice in Wonderland could be an example.<sup>3</sup> It is not the materiality of the door itself, but its representation of a liminal space. A gate between two worlds: one where there is the sheltered space representing an identity of being the unobserved or private and another world of public exposure, with free space to publicly roam around. Where being unnoticed offers an illusory security.

In a way, the story of a front door reveals a legacy of everyday life. The appearance of a front door is an expression of a personality of the façade, where the door shows its teeth, which can be imagined in the way the nameplate is placed or lacking, the type of doorknob, doorbell, its gloss. A memory-threshold as an historical archive of the many ways it is touched, by hands, by keys, by a body leaning against it, the gentle way it is pushed open, or hastily pulled behind a back, or slammed into a face, or softly closed after a nocturnal homecoming. These gestures also nourish the identity of this door to its user.

To place it in the broader perspective of the metropolitan landscape, front doors connect the personal stories of the inhabitants to a more local scenery which occur on the street. Saskia de Wit argues in *Hidden landscapes: The metropolitan garden and the genius loci* (2014) that, "the metropolitan landscape might be everywhere; but it is not a closed system. It shows gaps, interstices, and seams" (de Wit, 351). These in-between spaces can be experienced as an extended public realm, to play a role in an expression of a particular locality (Ibid.). De Wit demonstrates the secluded garden, as a gateway to the landscape around it, where the interstices can be connected to waste lands and unkempt plantations

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<sup>3</sup> In Lewis Carroll's novel *Through the Looking Glass* (1871), Alice climbs through the mirror door of her closet into a world she sees beyond it, entering a fantastical world.

(Ibid.). For me, the front door is this gateway, an urban threshold-space obtaining its own type of reference point in the urban landscape.

The local and particular aspect of the threshold space brings me back to the doorstep, the physical experience of stepping over the threshold outside, through the front door. In Tehching Hsieh's *One Year Performance 1981–1982*, he embarked onto a one-year-walk and residing outside in the streets of New York by “ruling out most forms of transport other than his own two feet” (Heathfield and Hsieh, 2008, 37). With this durational performance, he disclosed a condition of the site-specific urban environment and a human sense of belonging to a place, “not just with the meanings of home and shelter, inside and outside, but with the movement toward and away from these places” (Ibid.).

A body that moves from a private space, outside into the local, public space, is literally stepping from the sheltered inside, to the outside. There the sky is the roof and the sensory system is exposed by the elements of nature and the gaze of fellow human and non-human beings. The outside space makes me vigilant, just because it is a part of a bigger system. A social and public space, where there is an assumed role to be played by every participant in this common space. Here in Amsterdam, I can see that the public space is overregulated and there is little left-over space to be rambled through or explored. I do perceive that upcoming interventions of locals who occupy tiny margins in this public space, through guerrilla gardening, are making room for a change of perspective of how to inhabit a more shared common ground.<sup>4</sup> In *Common Space as Threshold Space: Urban Commoning in Struggles to Re- appropriate Public Space* (2015), Stavos Stavrides differentiates the concepts of public, private and common space, where “Common spaces are those spaces produced by people in their effort to establish a common world that houses, supports and expresses the community they participate in” (Stavrides, 2015, 11). He defines a differentiation of these specific social grounds: the public space which is designated as such by a certain authority along with its regulations of use and the private space being more in control by “individuals or economic entities that have the right to establish the conditions under which others may use them” (Ibid.).

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<sup>4</sup> Guerrilla Gardening is a way of cultivating empty or neglected spots of ground in the public space. This can be the space of a broken pavement tile at the side of the curb, to a dead end of a forgotten alley.

To revert to the aforementioned 'left-over space', by my own drifting I can see the opportunities that hide in the margin of the urban landscape. There are many dimensions of spaces we can see but do we actually notify them? Where exactly is the 'common' finding an embodiment or visualisation? Is the threshold the overlap area of these three spatial definitions (the public, private and common) that need to find acknowledgement? And how common is common?

## 2. THE FAÇADE OF A HOUSE—THE DISCOURSE OF THE INSIDE AND OUTSIDE

Home need not always correspond to a single dwelling or place. We can choose its form and location but not its meaning. Home is where we know and where we are known, where we love and are beloved. Home is mastery, voice, relationship, and sanctuary: part freedom, part flourishing...  
part refuge, part prospect.

—The Age of Surveillance Capitalism. *Shoshana Zuboff*.

In order to identify further with the public, private and common grounds as defined by Stavrides (2015), a commonality of moving in and inhabiting everyday space should be explored. What is the motivation to settle down somewhere and become familiar with a place? The aforementioned feeling of vigilance is inextricably linked to a sense of survival where living is literally a daily concern. Considering the external forces that could be inflicted on my own place in 2020, from rising sea levels to terrorist attacks, there is always an aspect of insecurity to deal with. And certainly, now with the COVID-19 pandemic, the value of security and mode of use of public space is being reconsidered. It emphasizes once again the importance of a house as an essential shelter as a place for, and with, freedom of movement. Arjun Appadurai argues in his *Housing and Hope* (2013):

Even homes created in the midst of chaos, in the face of ecological disaster or political holocaust, never cease to carry a trace of the human need to expand the meaning of human life by association with elementary forms of shelter. (Appadurai, 2013, 116)

In a way ‘to expand the meaning of (...)life’ is to create a shelter, no matter how rudimentary. It is there, where an everyday routine can take place as a basic foundation for life. The floor plan of the house becomes the conductor of the occupant’s body. The construction initiates a daily routine indoors. Everywhere in the world I can imagine a similarity in the everyday routine that is carried out. The quality of everydayness differs enormously and depends on the circumstances in which people live.

In *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (2019), Shoshana Zuboff introduces the “oldest political questions: Home or exile?”, suggesting for every generation to claim a proper answer to this everlasting “theme of knowledge, authority, and power” (3). Zuboff starts from the question of whether the digital can become a home to us; I would like to

consider a condition of an analogue or postdigital now.<sup>5</sup> And even in the very now, now, where a big part of the world is getting (partially) locked-down due to COVID-19, Zuboff's question becomes a rather unwanted reality. In the current situation, of a digital 'present', most of my fellow-inhabitants communicate, work, teach, go to school and even have dinner with friends across a digital highway. Even when living in the same city, they stay currently at home.

It is in the nature of human attachment that every journey and expulsion sets into motion the search for home. That *nostos*, finding home, is among our most profound needs is evident by the price we are willing to pay for it.<sup>6</sup> There is a universally shared ache to return to the place we left behind to found a new home in which our hopes for the future can nest and grow. We still recount the travails of Odysseus and recall what human beings will endure for the sake of reaching our own shores and entering our own gates (Zuboff, 2019, 5).

And where does this leave me? I drift on an urban ocean where I take the time to observe the architectural constructions in public space. I roam through the city in an analogue way. And at the same time, in this electronic document, through a digital portal on your desktop, I surrender myself to the digital. I share my analogue walking of how I peek inside through windows. And outside, there are (street)corners, which are at the same time a positive/negative space of the inside corner on the other side. The other side is the inner side of the wall of the architectural construction. And there are corners, on both sides; corners of a room inside my house or other architectural constructed spaces and corners of the street. I think inside corners and outside corners in their ability of changing directions and to giving a new perspective on a space, a very over-looked item of daily life.

In *The Poetics of Space* (1957/1994), the philosopher Gaston Bachelard inquires and reveals the mental space of the connection of outside and inside and treats various concepts of a house, as the intimate essence of a shelter, the history or roots of a spot, its intrinsic space and its outdoor context (211). In his chapter on the dialectics of outside and inside, Bachelard compares the way logicians think through drawing: "logicians draw circles that overlap or exclude each other, and all their rules immediately become clear", with the

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<sup>5</sup> In *The Future of Art in a Postdigital Age* (2011), Mel Alexenberg defines the postdigital through various works of art that address the humanisation versus the digital. He treats a switch of various concepts, such as the relation between "autoethnography and community narrative" (11).

<sup>6</sup>Nostos (Ancient Greek: νόστος) This is a theme which is used in Ancient Greek literature, where an epic hero is returning home by sea, like we see in the story of Homer's, *The Odyssey*. "In Homer, *nostos* means first and foremost 'return home from Troy by sea' " (Bonifazi, 2009). The achievement of this quest was the actual return home which represented the greatness of the hero.



philosophers' manner of approaching the inside/outside as a state of "being and non-being" (Ibid., 212). From this perspective, the metaphysical approach becomes an abstract way in which a thought can be represented in a spatial way<sup>7</sup>. Bachelard dives into a discourse with the interactions of "this side" and "beyond" as a quarrel of the inside and the outside in which even infinity can occupy a position (Ibid.). It becomes even more apparent to me that I am not a philosopher, nor theorist. I value the way Bachelard unfolds his stream of thoughts, as a metaphysical ground for the tangible physical world I relate to, when being outside or inside. I have to deal with what is there and with the imagination that is provoked by the *there*-ness. Imagination is becoming a feature of my personal metaphysicality, everything beyond my own physical presence can speak to me and trigger another view on my environment. In another chapter of *The Poetics of Space*, on *Miniature*, Bachelard points at "imagination in miniature is natural imagination which appears at all ages in the daydreams of born dreamers" (Bachelard, 1957/1994, 149). Miniature appears when one is willing to shrink. Imagine being small enough to fit in a keyhole and swing along with the opening and closing of a door.

On criss-crossing the urban space, it is the imagined miniature world I relate to. When kneeling down on the pavement to have a closer look at a rainworm that is crossing the curb, the macro-mode of the camera captures its almost transparent bodice. I can imagine another 'urban' space, happening on a miniature scale, where rainworms and woodlice are the passers-by in the street on the go in their daily routine. Bachelard refers to childhood and children's literature, where we are often "forced to cross the threshold of absurdity", as in the case of *Alice in Wonderland*, where Alice literally shrinks to a miniature size, finding a hidden, maybe odd representation of a parallel society (149).

Representation becomes nothing but a body of expressions with which to communicate our own images to the other(...)The cleverer I am at miniaturising the world, the better I possess it. (Bachelard, 1957/1994, 150)

The representation of this other world is dominated by imagination. A work of art somehow is nothing more than a body of expression, even how tiny its expression might be, it still is in need for communication to the other. The other, being a public member

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<sup>7</sup> The being and non-being form a dialectic distinction of the inside and outside, as an abstract way of defining something metaphysical. *Meta ta physika* derived from Greek meaning 'after the things of nature', it is that which we cannot perceive and therefore needs to be imagined. It shifts from something concrete to something abstract, that which is beyond the physical (Merriam Webster, undated).

somewhere in the public space, either in large or small, not waiting for a peek in my world, but as a potential onlooker who can be 'served' with a renewed look at the mundane that crosses its path.

In the foreword to the 1994 edition of *The Poetics of Space*, John R. Stilgoe brings forth a relevant matter, when relating the childhood to a house and the imagined space:

If the house is the first universe for its young children(...) how does its space shape all subsequent knowledge of other space, of any larger cosmos? Is that house 'group of organic habits' or even something deeper, the shelter of the imagination itself? (Stilgoe, 1994, viii)

The scale and spatiality of memories are to be taken into account when considering the inside and outside of a house. Growing along with the environment in which you live, both indoors and outdoors, provides an unnoticed foothold in everyday life. It is precisely the ability to sail blindly in the way the domicile is inhabited that gives an unsuspected value to everyday life. Where the instinct fulfils a protective function of vigilance in an unfamiliar environment, the 'home front' in many cases calms the senses.

### 3. ON THE ASPECT OF NEGLECTED VALORISATION OF PARTICIPATORY PERFORMANCE

The foundation of my artistic practice is defined by observations and a heightened awareness of the urban space surrounding me. These aspects function as a magnifying glass that focuses on the details I encounter on my daily strolls, becoming the life-practice equalling my performance-practice and artistic research.

In her essay '*An Unfaithful Return to Poetics*' (2019), Bojana Cvejić problematizes the position taken by authority philosophical and critical theories regarding artistic ideas and a supposed lack of conceptual imagination within the arts (1). However, there is a connection with this concept of imagination in my search for the poetry and philosophers/theorists like Bachelard, Cixous or Barthes.

My questions are: How can my own observations of the unnoticed that I define as a poetic margin of everyday life, occupy a position in the arts? I believe their autonomous *raison d'être* is preserved because they stem from the practice of imagination and not from the theory that paves the way before I can feel the sand of the original ground. Or, to compare it with a slogan of the student protests in Paris 1968: *Sous les Pavés la plage!*, uttered as a wish for more freedom for the people in the street.<sup>89</sup> The connection with the '68 protests seem farfetched, but now in 2020, there is still a struggle for the arts in how to deal with neoliberal capitalism and how this society is designed for the hard-to-satisfy consumer. A neoliberal society 'paves' the way for the art to be 'consumed' and framed in a commodified way (e.g. the 'blockbusters' in museums). Although I bypass this 'cultural-political' path, my research project is inextricably linked to public space and a connected participatory performance practice.

I staged an encounter with a city member to meet in a public space. I appeal to the fellow city dweller as both my audience and fellow participant-performer. And through a 1-2-1 performative encounter with this specific person, I exchange a communal mode of crossing our private quarters through a daily routine. As I stated before, my personal relation to my surroundings, which is Amsterdam, is my point of reference. Even more, the

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<sup>8</sup> Translation: Under the pavement, the beach!

<sup>9</sup> The author of this sentence in fact was not a student but a young labourer on strike, laying bare an image of the sand underneath the paved streets, a metaphor of the 'labour' that was done to pave the way for the well-to-do to live their lives by virtue of the labours' hard work. I also see a connection to a hidden layer underneath the streets as a barer image of the 'daily'.

urban space with its dense population and constructions, trigger an imaginative world that lays hidden behind the façades. How you do (re)cognise the space in which to roam unspied within the cracks of a very densely populated area where imagination can take free rein? The habit, to pass thoughtlessly, needs to be addressed here.

According to Cvejić, “it is also thanks to the recent curatorial and performative turns conjoint that art institutions adapt to the mood of experience economy” thus influencing and also directing the way arts should make their outcome consumable for a public (Cvejić, 2019, 1). And here, participation is a way for the public to valorise certain performance art works. Is there no escape from the neoliberal capitalist demand for production or valorisation? Following Cvejić who refers to a Croatian dramaturg and theatre maker, Goran Sergej Pristaš who argued this particular issue, that it is,

not about producing a work of art for a public to valorise it, but rather to reproduce consumer relations with a work of art, to reproduce and exchange its valorisation through performatively monitored participation of the visitors. (Cvejić, 2019, 2)

Returning to the paradox of ‘neglected valorisation’ as claimed in the title: the essence that I am looking for lies in the effort that the consumer has to make in order to perceive or valorise a daily reality.<sup>10 11</sup> This could be effortlessly achieved by drawing attention to the poetic power of the daily; not for the world (wide web), but on a small scale. The poetic power of the daily could be shared with a public member, without any economic purpose. This sharing would not be the outcome of a monitored participation. The ‘practising’ of artistic research can be seen as an alibi to not enter an art-market, but at the same time it's a way of a supposed unremunerated participation, with the research as a commodified activity (Cvejić, 2019, 1). However, the artistic-research-practice becomes a valorised product within a market of its own. There is a need of laziness as a muse to enter a state of non-economic production. This can propel a mode of letting the artwork have a life of its own, without necessarily achieving a rank on a market with a title and a price tag attached to it. Or, it can create a work of art for the sake of the imagination to live somewhere in the

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<sup>10</sup> One explanation of valorisation is the creation of value from knowledge and making knowledge available for economic and/or social use, as well as the translation of this knowledge into entrepreneurial products (de Jong and van Drooge, 2016).

<sup>11</sup> The paradox of these two words are connected to a contemporary struggle of keeping up pace with ‘civilisation’ and at the same time a wish to ignore this pace and appropriate it on my own terms. Compare: Japanese *Kōan*, in Zen Buddhism of Japan, a succinct paradoxical statement or question used as a meditation discipline for novices, particularly in the Rinzai sect. The effort to “solve” a *koan* is intended to exhaust the analytic intellect and the egoistic will, readying the mind to entertain an appropriate response on the intuitive level. Each such exercise constitutes both a communication of some aspect of Zen experience and a test of the novice’s competence (Encyclopaedia Britannica, undated).

world as 'Ready-made'. In that case the wo/man in the street would only have to slow down to make room for the imagination.

#### 4. ON PSYCHOGEOGRAPHY—WALKING DOWN THE URBAN SPINE

Erect on the terrestrial plain  
 of things knowable you  
 sign a pact of solidarity  
 with nature: this is the right angle  
 Vertical facing the sea  
 there you are on your feet.

—Le Poème de l'Angle Droit. *Le Corbusier*.

Drifting and roaming, walking and daydreaming.

Space for thoughts and imagination.

Creating an angle to observe the surrounding world.

In his *Theory of the Dérive* (1956/1958), Guy Debord asserts the notion of psychogeography as the effect of a geographical location on the feelings and behaviour of humankind who pass through different places. Hence, it is more to explore the architecture and spaces of the urban environment than to just leisurely stroll through it, referring to Charles Baudelaire's concept of flâneurs, being the 19<sup>th</sup> century version of urban wanderers. As a Marxist theorist, Debord was one of the founding members of the International Situationist (IS), a revolutionary group of avant-garde artists who wanted to open up to a different way of exploring the urban environment, as an attempt to be more imaginative in merging culture with everyday life and at the same time as a critique on the consumer society. In his *Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography* (1955), Debord reveals the origin of the word *psychogeography*, as “suggested by an illiterate *Kabyle* as a general term for the phenomena a few of us were investigating around the summer of 1953” to which he refers as being something “not too inappropriate” (Debord, 1955). This reference to the *Kabyle*, the Berber people of Algeria, whose bars Debord and his avant-garde group often frequented, is interesting since Emmanuel Guy refers to a similar aspect in his chapter *Their Paris. Our Paris: A Situationist dérive* (2019), where he connects the *dérive* to “an after-the-fact theorization of what began as a way to spend some idle and drunken hours wandering about in the city” (Guy, 2019, 68). This is a remarkable fact, given that Debord's theory was precisely a reaction to “the consumer society”. However, I can imagine that a ‘pub crawl’ is another way of literally and figuratively wandering around the city. Nevertheless, my own drifting through town, which I execute as an

‘autopsychogeographer’, gives space for a formulation of a theoretical framework for the purpose of my artistic research as well.<sup>12</sup>

When looking more closely through the lens of psychogeography, it could be perceived as a vital part of the layout of the habitat in the urban public space. This is a blueprint of how the surface of the urban space, both public and private is actively populated, treaded upon. I envision this space, which is lived daily by the inhabitants, as a canvas or a page which conveys the traces of these inhabitants (I would like to classify the architectural constructions as non-living matter under this heading as well). Often unintentionally, a variety of traces are left behind, which in turn colour the city page with an emotional, psychological layer. This layer arises from the way in which the residents unconsciously mark out their habitat. The relationship between the city and its inhabitants is a recurring subject within psychogeography and after its emergence in the 1950s, there are artist who feel affiliated with the international situationists as a source for many expressions and interventions both in rural and in urban public space. I read the invisible traces that are left by passers-by as a way to re-imagine the urban environment. Through this, I also find other ways to relate to apparent familiar day-to-day environments, which can be re-viewed by pointing out the way these are activated. The consciousness of the inhabited space can be found directly on the street or further through the city and its conurbation. But it is not only limited to this. This consciousness is also turning inwards. It penetrates the room of a house that is regularly crossed.

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<sup>12</sup> Throughout the thesis I use the term *Autopsychogeography*, to define my very personal mode of being a drifter. The *autonomous* and *autobiographical* psychogeography as a frame of reference for my artistic research practice.

Tuesday, 18 February 2020  
 I walk up to the 7<sup>th</sup> floor of the Public Library in Amsterdam. It is not the highest spot in town but still on a clear day the view is good. If it is really clear-clear, you can see the dunes at the coast, 33 km as the crow flies. And since it's not too high, you still get a feel of what is happening on the ground floor of the city. Past the water-front that used to be the shore of 'Het IJ' (an open connection to the Zuidersee), I directly look into the narrow streets of the red-light district.

Figure 1. Notebook page, 18 February 2020, Marien Overdijk.

Amsterdam is a big city and at the same time a small town. It is easy to cross it by foot in just a few hours. From the Dam square in the city centre, it is two hours and a bit to Amsterdam-Zuidoost, one hour and forty-five minutes to Nieuw-Sloten in the far west, one hour and thirty-five minutes to Kadoelen up in Amsterdam-Noord, one hour and ten minutes to the Zuidas, the financial business center, and two hours and a quarter to the rear end of IJburg in the far east.

In *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984/1988), Michel de Certeau describes his view from the 110<sup>th</sup> floor of the World Trade Center: "When one goes up there, he leaves behind the mass that carries off and mixes up in itself any identity of authors or spectators" (92). The comparison of the 110th floor in New York with a 7th floor in Amsterdam may seem irrelevant due to the difference in scale of both the building and the city. Nevertheless, the way of looking down from a panoptic perspective is similar to de Certeau's way of reading the city, by taking a step back and standing atop of it. The ability



to read it from above is also characteristic of a city with its towering constructions. Next to this panoptic aspect of the city, de Certeau relates to a way of reading the city, as an entity written by these 'authors' representing the mass that crosses the streets.

The ordinary practitioners of the city live 'down below,' (...). They walk—an elementary form of this experience of the city; they are walkers, *Wandersmänner*, whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban 'text' they write without being able to read it. (de Certeau, 1984/1988, 93)

Here, de Certeau points at the authority of the people in the street. They write upon this city, not only by inhabiting this urban space, but also by passing through it on a day-to-day basis. This is where I see that the gait of the passers-by, becomes an autobiographical diary. These diaries form a collection and together, shape the city. And the other way around, the city marks the bodies that pass through its streets. These marks rest in the way the pace of the city propels these bodies forward. The infrastructure determines the pathways that need to be taken, and immediately point out the bodies who take the 'goat paths', who deny or side-step the common routes.

By looking at the map of the city centre, it seems as if its canals are circling in an embracement around its city heart. When I walk through the centre, I see the rules in front of me, and, like reading, at the end of a page the page is turned. I go around the corner at the end of each street to continue the road on the next page. Simultaneously, I am filling the lines with my steps whilst wandering on the city map. Other people who pass by fill their own 'letter spaces', and together we write a mundane narrative of the city. The behaviour of the people in the street, how 'free' they are to cross the city and hang-out and expose themselves to their fellow passers-by become a generous way of contributing a personal quote to this town.

In his article, *Sémiologie et Urbanism (1970/1971)*, Roland Barthes pronounces that for someone to be able to sketch the semiotics of the city he must be both a semiotician, a geographer, a historian, an urbanist, an architect and probably a psychoanalyst as well. By declaring himself an "*amateur de signes, celui qui aime les signes, amateur de ville, celui qui aime la ville*" he wonders how to come to a semiotic of the city (Barthes, 1970/1971, 11).<sup>13</sup> Maybe to align with Barthes, in a humble way, I could declare myself an amateur of the city, and here my role as an autopsychogeographer takes

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<sup>13</sup> "An amateur of signs, the one who love signs, an amateur of the city, one who loves the city" (own translation)

shape. By being an amateur of the unnoticed day-daily motions in the city, I include myself in a subcategory of the semiotics, to come to an understanding of what is happening out on the street and inside the architectural constructions. From day-to-day, I observe the tantamount of reoccurring movements of my fellow inhabitants. The Situationists found their modus to cross the town, by giving each other chores, or scores, something like a *Haiku* for a guideline for drifting:

*First street to the right*

*At the third corner, turn left*

*First street to the right.*

They were following this pattern for a whole day, seemingly aimless drifting through town as an undisciplined discipline. This ambiguity is at the heart of a mode of pleasurably drifting through the urban landscape.

In an analogous line of thought with de Certeau, Barthes compares the city and its inhabitants with a “discourse”: the language of the city speaking to its inhabitants and they reply, “simply by inhabiting it, by traversing it, by looking at it” (Barthes, 1970/1988, 193). My way of reading these signals that are emitted by the people in the street, is the way they halt for a traffic light, how facile they turn every corner and avoid bumping into the other bodies in the street. The city 'marks the body in the street', as mentioned earlier in this chapter, by directing their behaviour. This is also part of the 'discourse'. The city is formed by the users of the city and the users in turn bend along with the designed space, both indoors and outdoors. The daily habits shape the city as a body et vice versa. All these movements could be interpreted as an effortless way of traversing the city, without a notion of this actual traverse, effortless and unnoticed. And if I would ask one of these fellow passers, how they actually do this every-day-traversing of the town, they'd probably be disturbed in their thoughtless habitual pursuit.

## 5. ON THE LIFE OF IMAGINATION IN THE MARGINS OF MY TOWN (PERFORMING ARTISTIC RESEARCH)

Habits are the things you do which have been repeated so often that their action is rendered unconscious, and the meanings and feelings attached to them become less visible to you. One way to approach your habits might be to try consciously to break them or push them away. Another approach, however, might be to try to render them visible again, enough that the meanings and feelings are rediscovered and what has been taken for granted is cherished.

—A Choreographer's Handbook, *Jonathan Burrows*.

By taking up the role of the autopsychogeographer, as a self-exploring mode of going through the city, I render visible my way of reading the city's geography, chorography and the inhabitants' choreography.<sup>14</sup> The parts I cannot see need to be imagined. For instance, the simplicity of bodies on the move, who know where, but not always in what way, they go. How is their body transporting them from A to B?

In Greek the public transport is called 'metaphor'. "To go to work or come home, one takes a 'metaphor'", a metaphor as a body of transport (de Certeau, 1984/1988, 115). The body is in itself an entity of transport. But what does it transport? I can perceive the body as a vessel of imagination or narrative. I can, because I imagine it to be a vessel, which floats through the city-scape. Next to a random mode of moving, the body also applies imagination to express a physical way of being on the road. Like when you see, mostly children with a great power of imagination, playing in the street, running, chasing each other, or when my own body makes a little hopscotch on the pavement, a little dance balancing on the curb. Sometimes it can be a slight change of the rhythm, that places the body in the margin of a habitual urban pace.

In my research, imagination is as essential for the walking as for the writing; there appears to be an interconnectedness. Writing requires language in much the same way that walking requires feet. Walking and writing are more affiliated than I could ever imagine. Since it was my own imagination that was wandering passing the façades of the city, I choreographed a way to meet up with a resident, to make a physical snapshot as a part of my performative research. I designed a performative encounter with different

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<sup>14</sup> Someone who describes a place. Chorography comes from Greek, *chōrographia*, a combination of "chōros" ("place") and "graphia" ("writing"). Chorography was distinguished from geography in that the former was concerned with smaller regions and specific locations whereas the latter was concerned with larger regions or with the world in general (Merriam-Webster, undated).

participants (fellow inhabitants), a method emerged. In a 1-2-1 meeting, we executed a *walk on paper*, where, through the drawing of a pencil-line on paper, the daily routine (or routing) was visualised as a score of this narrative.<sup>15</sup>

One of these encounters was with C.

Amsterdam, March 7, 2020  
 I made an appointment on the 6<sup>th</sup> floor  
 of the Public Library of Amsterdam. I  
 brought a letter along with some other  
 writings, an envelope and a blank  
 sheet of paper, some pencils and a  
 sharpener. I staged a walk on paper. A  
 walk inside C's house, where I was  
 guided by him, from his getting out of  
 bed to leaving through the front door.  
 The first, maybe unconscious, steps of  
 the day. I followed with a pencil on a  
 paper, drawing the way, following a  
 trace through a personal space, and in  
 that way, I was joining in his steps.  
 In the end I re-enacted the drawn  
 score of C's routine, a small version  
 of it, next to the table we were  
 sitting at. As if I could re-move this  
 itinerary. Thus, searching for an  
 embodiment of an unnoticed, uneventful  
 aspect of a daily habit or gesture.  
 This was also my way of entering a  
 private part of the floor of my city.  
 A part that normally remains out of my  
 reach. I wrapped up all the drawing  
 and the writings, including an  
 autobiographical chronicle of my feet,  
 in an envelope, and carried the lot  
 through town to be delivered at C's  
 home in my role of 'the  
 Letterbeareress'. The narrative found  
 its' way back to C's house through the  
 letterbox.

Figure 2. A transcript of my notes on the encounter with C. on 7 March 2020. Mariken Overdijk.

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<sup>15</sup> See figure 3.

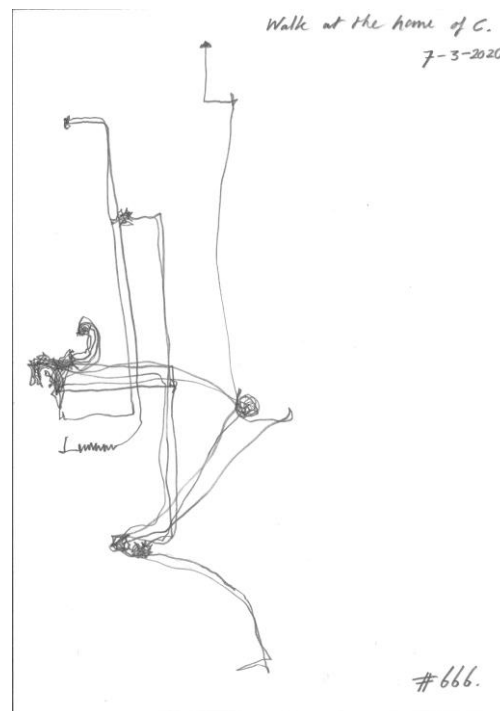


Figure 3. 7 March 2020, the walk on paper with C. Retrieved from the archive of Mariken Overdijk.

Through the remote reimagining of this routine, it became a materialisation of a hitherto unnoticed reality. Imagination thus became a vehicle to insert a poetic notion in daily life; the poetics that connect the concept of the imagination to my autonomous urban roaming and the zooming in on specific elements of the constructed space in which the inhabitants of my city reside; a house with a threshold and its door.

In *Towards a poetics of Imagination* (2018), Bojana Cvejić's distils the power of the poetics in Mette Edvardsen's performance, *No Title* (2014). Cvejić brings forth the way Edvardsen expresses reality in language and how this appears into the real space; "the spectator is presented the generic language of dogs, tables, something and nothing, simple clauses" (Cvejić, 2018, 9). By using simple and generic words as a tool she brings into motion the spectators' imagination. A fascinating evocation is created with nothing more than language and her presence on stage. The presenting of common notions, without embellishing them with glamour or glitter, gives the spectator the opportunity to take up these words as their guide through a narrative they consequently create themselves. Here the words become *le corps de ballet*, they provoke movement through their insignificance. In my encounters, the narrative comes into being, because of the created opportunity to bring the participant/spectator back on their own track, to give them the opportunity to

reimagine an apparent insignificant series of daily executed movements.<sup>16</sup> Cvejić argues that the trivial side of the use of the generic and the use of unembellished, instead of a lush imagery, touches the power of the imagination (Cvejić, 2018, 9). Edvardsen's performance comes across as a way to bring an essence of existence through a minimum of information, where there is "an invincible gap between thought and experience" (Edvardsen, 2014). In my work, I equally imagine the daily life to be as powerful a tool for the imagination. I try not to point at the trivial with a spotlight, but apply a simple directive mentioning or repositioning of the mundane. Through the factual 'drawing' of a line, as the trajectory of the reimagined route on paper, the gap between thoughts and experience becomes visual. Here, the drawing is a tool to define the poetics in the uneventfulness of the daily routine that is executed indoors and outdoors.

When talking about de Certeau's and Barthes' ways of looking at the city as a space for discourse, where the city can be the anthology, I imagine my drifting body to become the pencil, as a tool to write my own research narrative of exploring the city. I become a dotted line indicating my routes taken and the language spoken with my fellows. As a possible imaginative parcourse I branch out like a choreographers' space, leading passed unexpected and un-regarded corners. At the same time there are many expected and noticed directions to be perceived like the rituals I relate to in my encounters. However, the drawings which function as scores (which can be re-activated by a third person), are unexpected, in the sense that their poetic quality could not have been predicted in advance. Neither could I have imagined my peek into my fellow inhabitant's interior to be that captivating, literally giving me a glimpse of the hidden city-floor. How do these reoccurring pathways connect to an imaginary trajectory? It is a narrative of the mundane. The iteration of these pathways is transformed into the drawing of this routine as a walk on paper; a narrated description in words and images. Altogether they shape the reimagination of a daily routine. A routine that can be perceived and reimagined by any passer-by on the road.

Perception is linked to a reality, the here and now, which needs a body to be a subject to realise this reality. It is also an opening towards an imagined poetic space that

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<sup>16</sup> Here I assign both roles to the person I encountered. They are a participant in the 1-2-1 performance, and since it was placed in a public space, they were also 'spectated', like I was. At the same time, they became the spectator of me, performing my role as the artist who guided them by a script devised in advance. And they became their own spectator of the daily role they performed in their own place.

becomes an abstract space to roam and to linger with my own ponderings on this reality. There is a multiplicity of narratives that are happening in the urban space. The awareness of this narrative is affected by the individual narrative that is shaped by the cognitive and sensorial capacities of the body. The inter-action of just passing someone on the street might add to one's own narrative. Here the body of the fellow inhabitant as passer-by enters the framework of my personal unnoticed reality among the visible moving bodies in the street. The game the Situationists played by using a haiku to drift in specific directions through the street, also make me play an imaginative game. In crossing a big warehouse downtown, I try to set foot on parts of the city floor that are designated for customers. I make a simple walk past clothes racks with a detour through a fitting room booth, just for the sake of walking on a hidden piece of city floor. Also, discreetly following a body in the street, without rush or hurry, as a mere stepping into someone's step, is a game as an imaginative way of playing with the populated urban space. Often this body follows a clear direction, but sometimes its steps also seem to correspond to an aimless lawfulness. Where does the moving body in the street become an artwork? For example, both Sophie Calle and Vito Acconci created in the act of following a man in the street, a new narrative of the public space. Consequently, I imagine there is a suggestive discipline of performance evolving by following my own steps in the street and by visualising parallel steps behind the facades of the houses in the streets.<sup>17</sup> Where do I pause and stand still?

Another seemingly unnoticed aspect is the hand movement of the writing. I look at manoeuvring the tip of a pencil over a sheet of paper as a skill once learned and now unnoticed. The body functions as a medium in direct connection with the cognitive and sensorial apparatus. Consequently, it becomes a portal that enables the imagination to iterate through the very tip of this pencil, a manifestation through a line on paper.<sup>18</sup> Even, when writing with a keyboard, there are moments of hesitation in the search for the right word and an acceleration once the train of thought is released, a kind of stuttering. This mechanism of the writing-habit is becoming an expression of the tacit knowledge we possess.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, the mechanism of writing is not innate. There's a long road of

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<sup>17</sup> In Sophie Calle's *Venetian Pursuit* (Taylor, 1980/1996) or Vito Acconci's *Following Piece* (Acconci, 1969), they both deal with a way of following a man in the street and by revealing this as a documented 'performative play', they both turned their 'pursuing actions' into a work of (performance)art.

<sup>18</sup> See figure 4.

<sup>19</sup> Tacit knowledge is knowledge you gain through personal experience. The word 'tacit', implies a 'silent' knowledge, and I see a connection to an aspect of the unnoticed knowledge.

experience behind it that makes this knowledge tacit and perhaps self-evident. I see a parallel of the writing which becomes a stuttering of outgoing thoughts and the moment I become aware of a habit. It is the awareness that causes a stutter in a self-evident act.

*The life of a pencil on paper: a pas-de-deux.*

The guided drawing of a 1-2-1 encounter, becomes a 1-2-1 performative character on itself. Only seeing the hands of both people appearing in the frame, directing together the pencil on the paper, as an actual walk-together gives an intimate insight of what happened there and then.

Draw a line. A clear line. The clear line, being the context of the habit.

The habitual. Habit. Habitat. The habit of positioning a pencil, finding a spot on a blank sheet of paper to start off the line. It starts with a point. A starting point.

From there on, once it starts moving the line will take shape. Will make shape.

A pencil on a paper, meandering, sometimes hesitant, to then rule the world of carbon spreading its trace becoming form, becoming signs, signals, significant.

A pencil, hanging above the paper. Undecided of where it will go, of what will come next.

The food or fuel for its locomotion is still on its way, down from the neurological 'head'-quarter flashing through the body, the neck, shoulder, arm, hand to eventually trigger the fingers.

Casual, unnoticed, they position the pencil in the right angle, let it land on the sheet of paper and start moving forward.

A flow of carbon lines-out, letter by letter in case of language.

Or more abstract, a free line, directed by an undercurrent locomotion, a line following an undisciplined direction, a visual pattern or translation of a movement becoming something.

A map, as a cartographic representation of what is there.

An abstract conglomerate of curves and straights visiting all the sides of the paper, hanging around in its corner or roaming in the middle. Leaving randomly spaces, white, unoccupied.

The life of a pencil on paper. Like a pas-de-deux. The paper gives space for the lines to occur. The pencil takes space, draws, pulls, sets the line, its pace takes place.

Its movement, becoming a choreography looking for its own habitat.

Away from the real, actual moving on the surface of a street, floor or ground it now finds a translation on paper.

Figure 4. Mariken Overdijk, 2020.

In *The Future of Art in a Postdigital Age* (2011) Mel Alexenberg defines the postdigital, mentioning various works of art that address “the humanization of digital technologies” as a shift between various concepts (10). For me the mentioned relation between autoethnography and a form of community narrative, gave me a gist for specifying my own concept on how to approach a contemporary mode of analogue.<sup>20</sup> Here the postdigital advances the relation of tacit knowledge to the postdigital. I can specify the

<sup>20</sup> Autoethnography is an approach to research and to write that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*) (Ellis, 2004) (Holman Jones, 2005).



postdigital as the next step past the analogue and the digital. I realise there is an analogue mode of interacting with my surroundings; e.g. the physicality of the roaming through town, the encountering of inhabitants at a table, the handwritten letters, the drawings and the physical delivering of physical mail to a house on foot. At the same time there is the 'digital' way of distributing the work: the digital filming and photographing, the production of QR codes left on lampposts, as well as the digital recording of the physical encounter which was then translated into an analogue vinyl record.<sup>21</sup>

I think the whole process of repositioning the various aspects of digital and analogue co-shape my own postdigital practice. The analogue dissemination of the whole research project is, in its core, an invitation to hold still. I am asking the potential spectator to take the time and find a spot in a public or a private space. I provide them with a suitcase-record-player and a vinyl record. They can listen to a 30' recording of a past event. Hence, this moment becomes a physical 'post' digital moment; beyond the analogue and the digital. Consequently, by paying attention to another level of reality, I avoid a facilitating of an opportunity to add a 'like' or comment in any other way, directly, at the bottom of the frame of the work. The walking and the writing are unpacked within the performance practices, become the tools to relate to the postdigital reality; this becomes the reading of my town through a correspondence–discourse.

The walking becomes a writing of the discourse between the city and its inhabitants. And I step into this discourse with my own stance on the tacit knowledge and how imagination is connecting to a (postdigital) urban life that needs to be noticed or remembered. Lucebert stated: "*Alles van Waarde is Weerloos*" (1954).<sup>22 23</sup> By pronouncing everything of worth isn't capable of defending itself, it needs something or someone else to take on this task. The first step will be to value a potential knowledge. I think the imagination as a way of exposing the mundane is a potential value that needs to be defended. By not seeing or not recognising what is going on right in front of us, and only paying attention to what is offered to us for consumption, we lose touch with a 'materiality' that enables a bridge to an imaginative reality. Only by taking the imagination out with you as a passer-by can the poetry of the unnoticed be given a place.

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<sup>21</sup> See figure 5 and 6.

<sup>22</sup> Lucebert, one of the first Dutch COBRA artists. This quote is part of the poem, *De zeer oude zingt* (*The very old one sings*).

<sup>23</sup> Translation by Diane Butterman (2011), "*Everything of worth is defenceless*".



Figure 5. On your knees! Mariken Overdijk, 2020.



Figure 6. Autopsychogeographic code. Mariken Overdijk, 2020.

## CONCLUSION—AUTOPSYCHOGEOGRAPHY AS A TOOL FOR POETIC GROUNDING

Perfection.

What reassures me is the fact that everything that exists, exists with absolute precision. The size of a pinhead does not exceed the limits of a pinhead by a fraction of a millimetre. Everything that exists has great accuracy. It's just a pity that the greater part of what exists with that accuracy is technically invisible to us. Good thing, on the other hand, is that the truth comes to us as a secret meaning of things. In the end we guess perfection, confused.

—De ontdekking van de wereld. Kronieken. *Clarice Lispector*.<sup>24</sup>

How *to read my town*, is at the core of my research; the reading as a method of relating to my towns' physical space, including its cracks, which contain an imaginary hidden poetic side of the urban space. In order to come to an understanding of how I and my fellow inhabitants can connect to, and identify with, the poetic power of the daily, I treaded into various pathways, both literal and figurative, on the map of my hometown of Amsterdam.

Imagination is the guide though a hardcore urban reality of, bricks and stones, moving bodies, curbs and traffic lights. Imagination is thus becoming a feature of my personal meta-physicality, it relates to my body and where it borders with what is beyond my physical presence.

The foundation of my artistic practice is defined by observations and a heightened awareness of the urban space surrounding me. The essence of my quest lies in the effort that can be made by the 'consumer' to perceive and valorise a poetic quality in a prosaic reality, where the consumer is a fellow inhabitant, a visitor or a spectator, whom I involve in my staged encounters. There is an everyday reality for and formed by a consumer who only complies with an unconscious duty to consume. This is the place for the arts to add imagination as a vital value to neo-liberal society in a broader perspective.

This research project is inextricably linked to public space and a related participatory performance practice as described in the last chapter. Although the outcome of the intervention was not intended to be provocative, I am aware that there is an aspect of trespassing on private grounds.<sup>25</sup> In my role of interlocutor, I poked into someone's private sphere, by inviting this person into an intimate set-up. On top of that, since I was

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<sup>24</sup> *The discovery of the world. Chronicles.*

<sup>25</sup> Provocation as in 'pro-vocare', a stimulation of speech, which can be defined here as a way of speaking out in public.

also sharing a part of my personal space and pace, I lowered the threshold of the private ground, for the public to peek over my shoulder into this room.

By applying different strategies, I gauged the urban field in the hope to reveal or discover something old or something new. Slowness was one of my strategies. Not to go slow but to observe what the slowness is within the daily racing pace.<sup>26</sup> Through this slowness, I discovered a thus far unnoticed richness in my direct surroundings. Another strategy was to encounter the city as a carrier of signs and signals which are left by its passers. By taking up the role of explorer, my personal drifting through town became a way to discover the engravings on the city-floor as traces left by all kind of occupants.<sup>27</sup> Once I took up this lens of 'reading', the city became an anthology, all kinds of narratives emerged because of the everyday passing. These narratives altogether shape the city as a collection, an anthology, made up by the gait of the passers-by, which occupy the city-floor.

My interaction with this 'city-anthology' enhanced a poetic awareness of *how* all kinds of living entities cope and share the, sometimes scarce, urban space. The imagining of this 'discourse on the street', revealed a bare sense of commonness in the mundane iteration of urban pathways

To be able to enhance further identification with the public, private and common grounds, I focused on the accessibility of these grounds. The floorplan becomes the conductor of the movements of the body and captures the unnoticed way of 'flaner' and 'dériving' on the insides and outsides of the urban plane.

The various strategies lead to my reading of the town and my writing on the discourse it is revealing. I find myself meandering between the poetic-imaginative and the theoretical-academic, where the imagination turns out to be the cornerstone of tacit knowledge, and as such becomes the holder of the conceptualisation of my artistic research. I recognize the value of the imaginative in that form of knowledge, while I give expression to an operationalised artistic practice and the different hierarchies of knowledge in the theoretical and/or philosophical plane. The richness of discourse I referred to in the previous chapters, of Bachelard, de Certeau, Cvejić and Barthes, make me realise that I can only enter this discourse, if I look at it through an idiosyncratic

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<sup>26</sup> The appearance of the COVID-19 into the urban space, advanced this notion in an unexpected way. Many inhabitants were forced to all of a sudden occupy themselves with a kind of 'slowness' in daily life.

<sup>27</sup> I define the city-floor as the whole of the surface within the city, both in the public space and on all floors of urban buildings.

perspective, containing the registers of poetic writing I practice. The correspondence I applied, posits an autoethnographic stance through the collection of drawings, choreographed walks and handwritten testimonies. The filming of this hand-writing-gesture evolves into an amalgam of analogue and digital, which manifests a postdigital mode of lingering. Here, the autoethnography method of research is bent into an afresh identified postdigital realm.

The registers of the different ways of writing (the poetic, the academic, the letter writing) all became vital elements within the practice. They bring the practice forth through the way I read and write about the work and embed poetic writing within the academic, which is relevant because it is directly influencing the practice. The reflection and the practice of the art work, encounter each other in the poetic realm. Through the writing-tool, the practice of the performance and its academic affiliation find a common ground.

I understand there are different aspects of knowledge: the letter to my fellow inhabitant is an artefact within the autoethnographic aspect of the research. It can give significance to the writer, to the act of writing, to the act of reading, and relate to theory. This letter is a thing, a mundane thing, but it can be given more meaning in a poetic perspective. And when considering the spectator and reader of the event, being a witness in the whole dissemination, I am confronted with another relation in the discourse of the performer vis-à-vis the spectator. I resist to take up the role of the sole performer for a reason. If my intervention becomes an attempt to be more imaginative in merging culture with everyday life, and at the same time is a critique of the consumer society, my place will be in the margin. It is exactly there, where there is apparently nothing to find but the margin as a frayed edge of the urban life. And here the autoethnography leads to an autopsychogeography.

The drawing of a line, in my performance encounters, became an imagined routine in the walk on paper. I recognize a parallel with 'reading' my city. There, where the physical walk takes place and makes room for an imaginative direction, as a reader of these lines on the page in front of you, you will also find the space to drift off in your own imagination. Here is the space for the world beneath the written lines, like the hidden world that can be revealed by a simple stepping outside. And in a way, this hidden world takes place on the other side of the looking-glass.

In my own drifting through town, when stepping slightly in the footsteps of psychogeographer Guy Debord, I become an 'autopsychogeographer', which contains a formulation of a theoretical framework for the purpose of my artistic research. Where there is a need for communication, through writing, reading and encountering fellow inhabitants, both artistic research and its practice express a need for a public. I envision this public to be any member within the common space that is shared.

My research emphasises the valorisation of imagination as a non-economic but essential potential knowledge that deserves a valuable place in the public and private domain. The potential, as a subtle, alternate mode of working with imagination, that lies in this, is the ability to attend and respect the uneventful side of the mundane. In that sense, my proposition of the term 'autopsychogeography', can be a method or a tool for anyone interested in poetic grounding in our material world, and attributes and emphasises additional value to the shared community narrative.

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## APPENDIX A





*Figure 7. A Late Pleistocene Human Footprint.*

*Snapshots of human anatomy, locomotion, and behavior from Late Pleistocene footprints at Engare Sero, Tanzania (Hatala et al., 2020).*

## APPENDIX B

The Letterbeareress - Reading my Town by writing her a Letter  
Hereby two links of the same material.

<https://youtu.be/nUErrwGId88>

[https://artezhogeschool-my.sharepoint.com/:v:/g/personal/m\\_overdijk\\_student\\_artez\\_nl/ERPUXxiL2QZLvnVtbfvj3EB-HP1ngPoC-YbjcnGacoCeA?e=NKqwg4](https://artezhogeschool-my.sharepoint.com/:v:/g/personal/m_overdijk_student_artez_nl/ERPUXxiL2QZLvnVtbfvj3EB-HP1ngPoC-YbjcnGacoCeA?e=NKqwg4)

You are about to see a compilation of footage of the  
performance-research  
in the context of the Dissertation-by-Practice  
Master Theatre Practice (cohort 2018-2020)  
Graduate School of the University of Arts, Arnhem-NL  
Spring 2020 © Mariken Overdijk

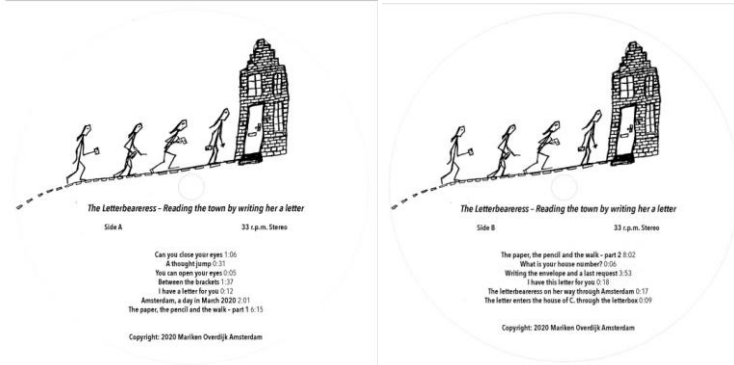
**This is not a video-performance  
Nevertheless,  
some parts were performed**

The footage is of one of the encounters I had with some fellow inhabitants somewhere in a public space in Amsterdam.

Although this meeting was a 1-2-1 performance encounter, for the sake of sharing this with you, I documented this meeting into different kinds of footage. There is audio, video, written letters, envelopes, hand-made stamps and me in the role of the letterbeareress, delivering an envelope at the house of my guest.

The audio material is edited in different tracks on a vinyl record.

These are the centre-labels:

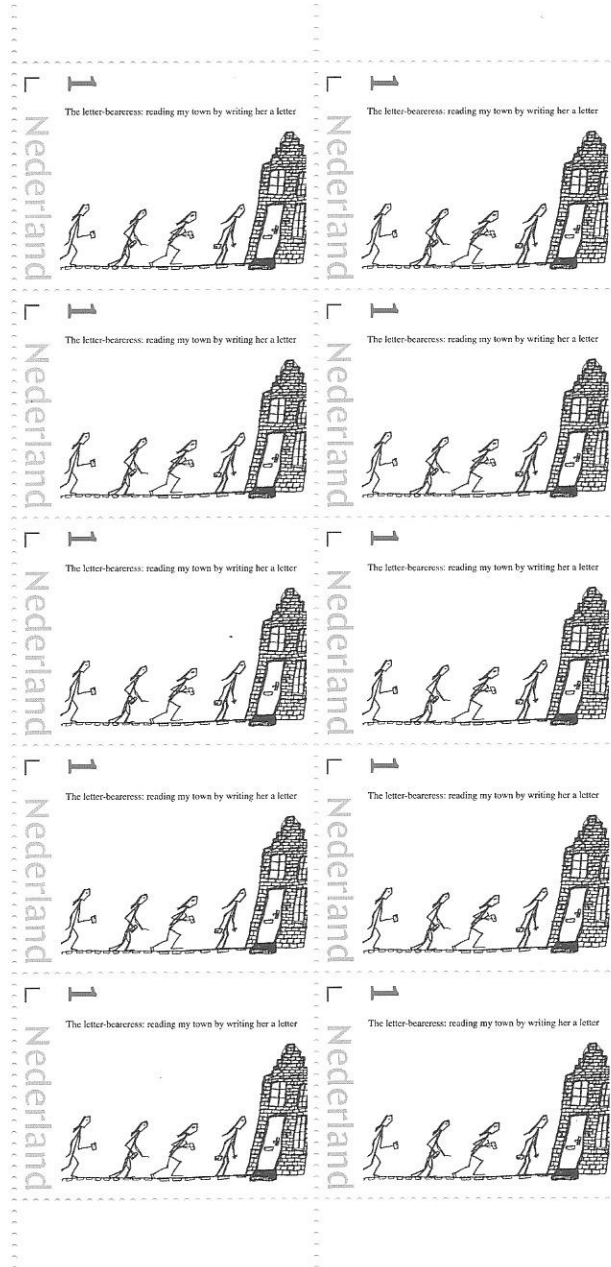


Together with my portable record player, it became a transportable moment, to take be taken out, on a walk and be consumed by someone else on a self-chosen spot.

## APPENDIX C



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## APPENDIX D

The life of a pencil on paper:  
a pas-de-deux.

Draw a line. A clear line, being the context of the habit. The habitual habit. Habit. Habitat. The habit of positioning a pencil, finding a spot on a blank sheet of paper to start-off the line. It starts with a dot. A point. A starting point. From there on, once it starts moving, the line will take shape. Will make shape.

A pencil on a paper, meandering, sometimes hesitant, to then rule the world of cartoon, spreading its traces and becoming form, gaining significance.

A pencil, hanging above the paper. Undecided of where it will go, of what will come next. The food or fuel for its locomotion is still on its way, down from the neurological 'head-quarter', flashing through the body, the

neck, shoulder, arm, hand, to eventually trigger the fingers.

Casual, unnoticed, they position the pencil in the right angle, let it land on the sheet of paper and start moving forward.

A flow of carbon lines-out, letter by letter in case of language. Or, more abstract, a free line, directed by an under current locomotion, a line following an undisciplined direction, a visual pattern or translation of a movement becoming something visible, tangible. Becoming.

A map, as a cartographic representation of what is there. An abstract conglomeration of curves, straights, visiting all the sides of the paper, hanging around in its corner or roaming in the middle. And randomly leaving some space white, unoccupied. The life of a pencil on

paper Like a pas-de-deux. The paper gives space for the lines to occur. The pencil takes space, draws, pulls, sets the line in motion.

Its movement, becoming a choreography looking for its own habitat. Away from the real actual moving on the surface of a street, floor or ground, it now finds a translation on paper.

Martien Broedijk  
2020.

**APPENDIX E**

*The Dog and her Nose.* Mariken Overdijk 2020.