

A pocket guide to getting lost



A pocket guide to getting lost

postwar urban quarters in Rotterdam

*"Not to find one's way around a city does not mean much.
But to lose one's way in a city, as one loses one's way in a
forest, requires some schooling."*

Walter Benjamin

Introduction

This is a pocket guide to getting lost. It is addressed to anyone who studies the city and aims to collect qualitative data on a specific district or neighborhood, both with research as an objective in itself or with the objective of bringing about change in practice. By walking, we can get an image of the everyday experience of a district or neighborhood. With this inductive approach, walking can complement other methods for qualitative research.

The pocket guide contains two layers in which my double position regarding walking as a research method becomes clear. Firstly, as a student/participant of 'Dirty Old Town' at the Independent School for the City I have actively applied the research method. I have explored three post war urban quarters in Rotterdam (110-Morgen, Lombardijen and Pendrecht) by getting lost. Areas where, according to the

Introduction

rules of postwar and modern urban planning, you are not supposed to get lost. The visual material extracted from these walks forms the underlayer of the pocket guide and an example of how theory can be put into practice.

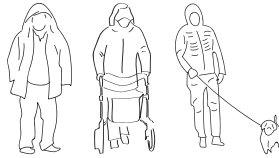
The second layer consists of practical guidelines on how to get lost, based on the principle that anyone can get lost, but you have to become receptive for the information that surrounds you. These guidelines are influenced by walking theorists such as Alan Jacobs, Jane Jacobs and Jan Gehl and information was extracted both from my own walks in Rotterdam and from the research course 'A peripheral journey of discovery' (University of Antwerp) in which 14 students explore nine districts in the postwar 20th century-belt of Antwerp by walking.



Choose a strategic starting point. A place you expect to play a central role for the neighborhood, without investigating too much further.

Then get lost. **Accept that the journey is the destination.** To optimize the experience between you and the environment, walk solo.

Communicate on the external factors that have an impact on your journey, such as a possible walking companion (a dog, music), the weather conditions, the day of the week and time.



Walking distance is a relative notion. It is not the same experience for a parent with a child, a walker with a dog, an elderly person and someone with full shopping bags. On average, most people are willing to walk 500 meters to reach daily amenities (Gehl, 2010).

Walking distance thus has an impact on what someone perceives as the natural boundary to his/her neighborhood. Without taking this too literally, a radius of 500 meters from the starting point is the minimum journey you should take to get an idea of one's everyday experience of the neighborhood. Generally, this results into walks of 1 to 3 hours.

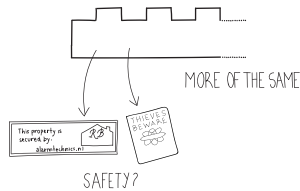
How to get lost?

« WOOF WOOF
« SOUP »
HIP-HOP
PRIVATE GARDENS
LARGE DETACHED HOUSES

Walking is a sensory experience. Therefore use all your senses.

Look, listen, smell, feel, wonder. Detect change (Jacobs, 1985).

Imagine who lives and used to live here. Wonder how this place has become what it is today and what it could become. How determining is the physical side of the district or neighborhood for the way people organize their lives in it?



Walking is a first hand experience. With this, it stands out from most other methods for qualitative research. Compared to reading or being told about a certain district or neighborhood, observing it with your own eyes is much more powerful. 'It helps to recall places and triggers ideas about possible ways to bring about desired change' (Jacobs, 1985). By walking we can identify changes earlier than through other research methods. It has the power to describe the reality not from how it ought to be, but from how it is (Jacobs, 1965).

DISCOMFORT

BELONGING



Walking is subjective. Your observations will be guided by your own background, experiences, prior knowledge, values and expectations. Take full advantage of it. What role do you take as a walker-researcher? The role you take may determine the focus of your journeys. Communicate this role to your audience. When did you feel at home in a certain place? When did you feel uncomfortable? Would it have been different when your background, experiences, prior knowledge, values and expectations were different?

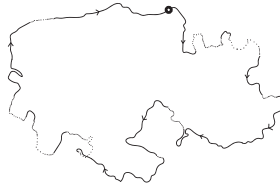
If possible, have the same district or neighborhood analyzed by several (individual) walkers-researchers, each with their own subjectivity.



Slow down, observe, linger, stay, sit, speed up, wonder, get lost, return. Getting lost entails slowness. **You will observe more than you can process.** Don't worry, a focus or theme will develop gradually. Your focus or theme doesn't have to be the same for each walk. Compare, repeat, create sequences, zoom in, zoom out, look for patterns and then eventually *kill your darlings*.

IMAGEABILITY ++

How easily can you recall a mental image of the district or neighborhood you got lost in? In addition to direct indicators such as physical, perceptible objects of the build environment (with reference to Lynch, 1985: districts, paths, edges, nodes and landmarks) and the physical characteristics of urbanites, indirect indicators such as human-human and human-environment interaction play a role in the imageability of the neighborhood or district.



Forget about top-down. At least during your walk. However, it may be usefull to track your walk for analysis afterwards. Instead of trying to get a grip on the spatial organization of the district or neighborhood as a whole, you will have to accept that you can only observe the situation around you. This is the exact intention. Capture the moment. You will complete a journey. It allows you to make a mental map or story board of successive situations. It is by this inductive approach, that walking can complement other methods for qualitative research.

FEMALE SITE MANAGER
EXPLAINS TO MOTHER & DAUGHTER
WHAT A FOUNDATION IS



Most importantly, stay amazed. The power is in the repetition and the experience. Stay attentive to the everyday and apparent trivialities.

Walking has the power to make the invisible visible. Can you discover places, routes, situations, informal uses, public or parochial domains that you could not have found on any map or behind your computer? Which socio-spatial experiences contribute to the social capital of the district or neighborhood?



a place of one's own

110-Morgen

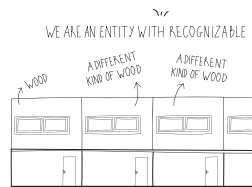
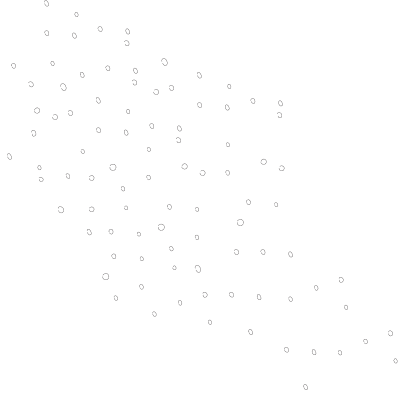
110-MORGEN

APRIL 5, 2021

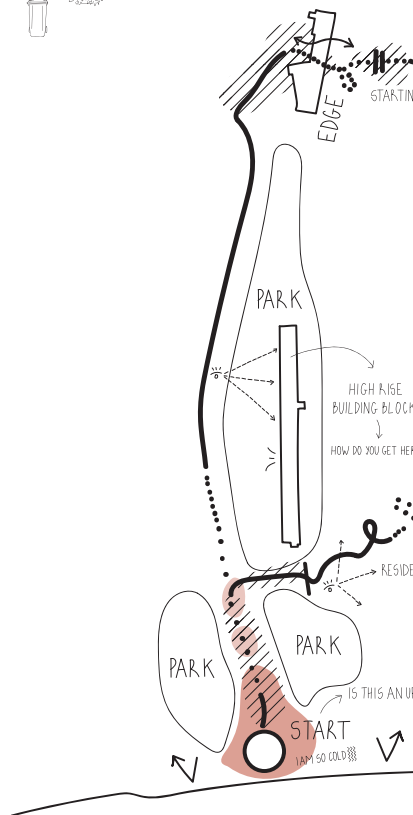
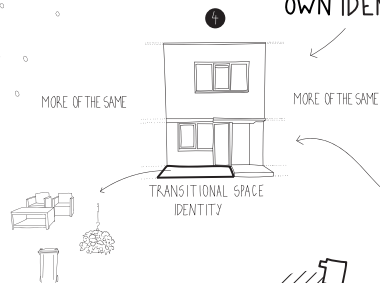
EASTER MONDAY

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ICE STORM, 2°



EXPRESSING OUR OWN IDENTITY



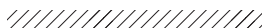
IMAGEABILITY +++

I SLOW DOWN

I ACCELERATE



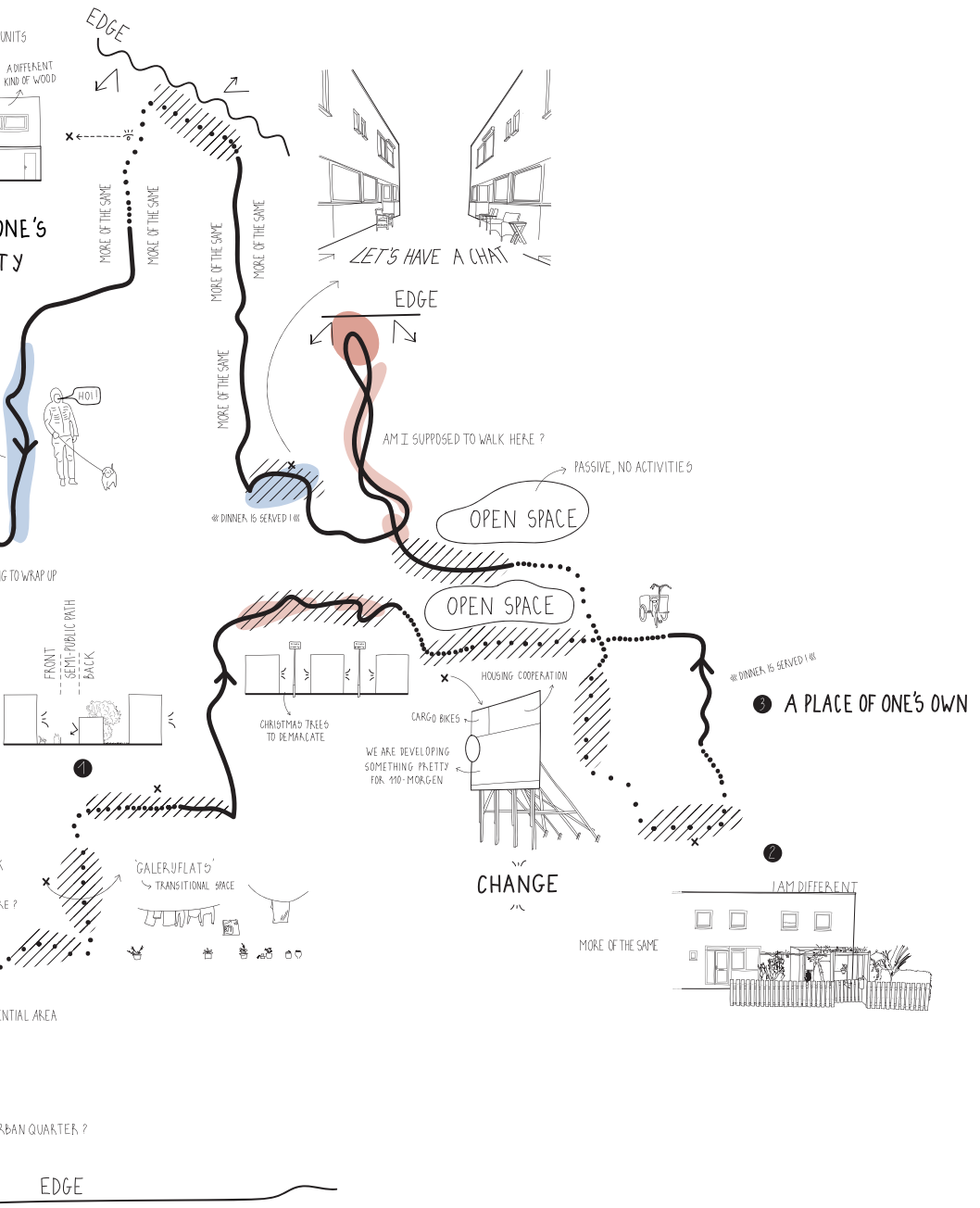
OFF ROAD



DISCOMFORT

BELONGING

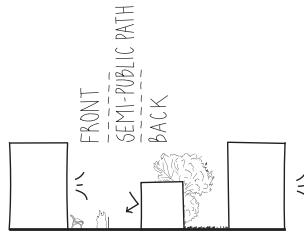




URBAN QUARTER ?

EDGE

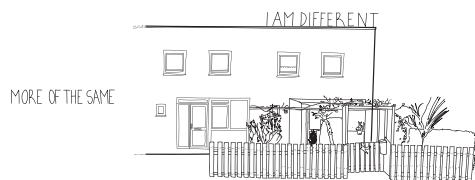
postwar urban quarters in Rotterdam



1

semi-public path

110-Morgen



postwar urban quarters in Rotterdam





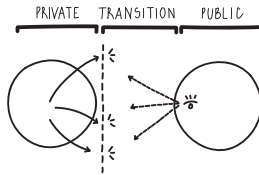
postwar urban quarters in Rotterdam



CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR SOCIAL CONTACT



110-Morgen



4

transitional space



The quality of informal paths

Lombardijen

SNOW-SUN-SNOW, 4°



SHOUTS TO AN APPROACHING NEIGHBOR.



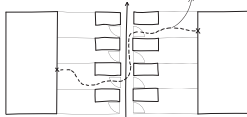
START



CHILDREN ARE PICKED UP BY CAR

THE QUALITIES OF INFORMAL PATHS

A RESIDENT USES THE PATH TO BRING SOMETHING TO A NEIGHBOR



SUBURBAN LIFESTYLE?

WILL LOCALS NOTICE ME?

BACK BACK
GARDEN HOUSES GARDEN HOUSES
BLOCK VIEWS
CANDY AND SHOOTER, WRAPPERS (CHILDREN?)

EXPRESSING ONE'S OWN IDENTITY



IDENTITY CRISIS?

NEW URBAN DEVELOPMENT



CERVANTES STREET

QUOTE DON QUIXOTE
"Hij opende de aanval op de eerste de beste molen die voor hem stond"

APARTMENT BLOCKS

APARTMENT BLOCKS

EDGE

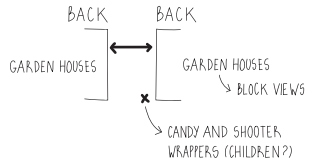
PRIVATE GARDENS

LARGE DETACHED HOUSES

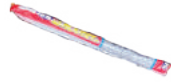
PRIVATE GARDENS

DETACHED HOUSES

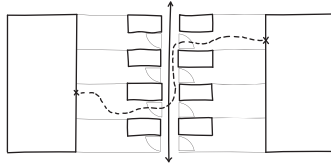
postwar urban quarters in Rotterdam



WILL LOCALS NOTICE ME ?



Lombardijen



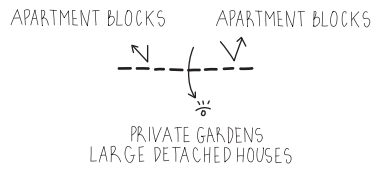
A RESIDENT USES THE PATH
TO BRING SOMETHING
TO A NEIGHBOR



1

the qualities of informal paths

postwar urban quarters in Rotterdam



Lombardijen



2

a change of urban tissue

postwar urban quarters in Rotterdam



SHOUTS TO AN APPROACHING NEIGHBOR



Lombardijen

WHAT A NICE ENVIRONMENT
VS
IDON'T BELONG HERE



3

a hidden community

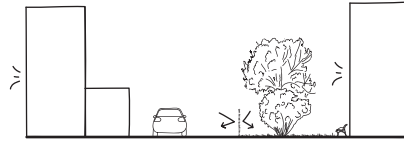


Lombardijen

EACH HOUSE IN THE ROW
WANTS TO EXPRESS
ITS OWN IDENTITY



postwar urban quarters in Rotterdam







a city within the city

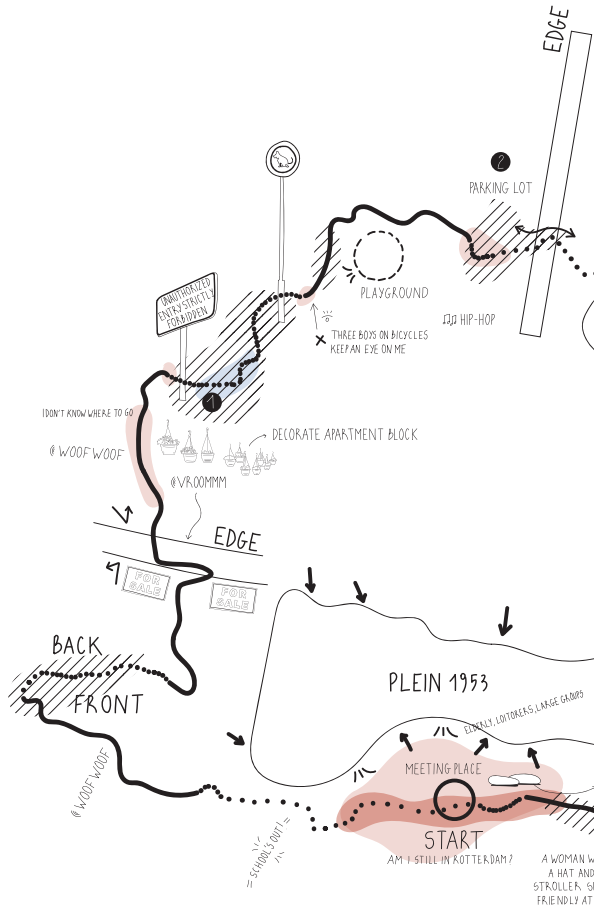
Pendrecht

PENDRECHT

APRIL 8, 2021

15:00 PM

CLOUDY, 8°



STARTING TO

FIXED PONG PONG TA

N

CREATE TOGETHER

IMAGEABILITY +

1 SLOW DOWN

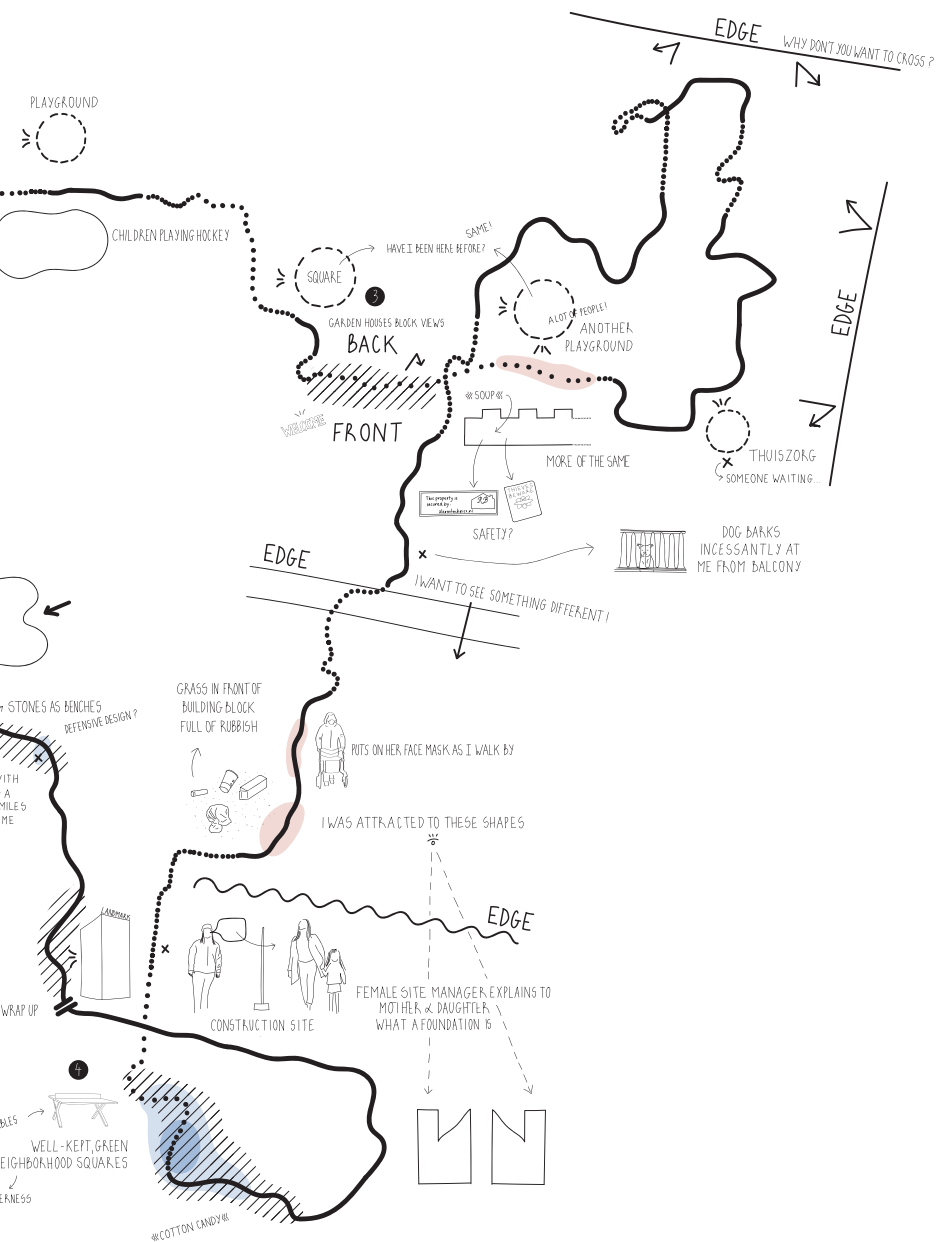
I ACCELERATE

OFF ROAD

DISCOMFORT

BELONGING





postwar urban quarters in Rotterdam

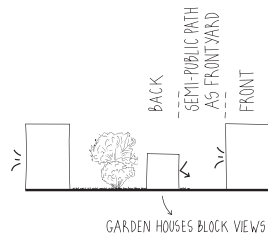




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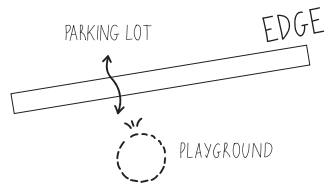
no entry - welcome

postwar urban quarters in Rotterdam





postwar urban quarters in Rotterdam



2

behind the edge

Pendrecht

WELL-KEPT, GREEN
NEIGHBORHOOD SQUARES

↙
CREATE TOGETHERNESS



4

a sense of belonging

Outro: what's next?

This pocket guide to getting lost can be considered as the first Volume of a set of two. It is focused on practical guidelines on how to get lost and how to communicate to an audience on what you've experienced during your walks. Ideally, you only get lost once. Then you can of course return for more in-depth observation of specific places or situations. In order to be able to extract concrete and more objective qualitative information from these walking experiences, you can have the same district or neighborhood walked and observed by several (individual) walkers-researchers, each with their own focus and subjectivity. This can bring you to the next step and a potential second volume: creating a pattern language. A pattern describes a problem that occurs over and over again and the core of the solution to that problem, but in such a way that you can use this solution a million times over, without ever doing it the same way twice (Alexander, 1977). Can we define such patterns of postwar urban quarters?

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Dirty Old Town, April 2021

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