

Walking in search of the commons



This workbook presents a model of sustainable design practice rooted in the commons and acts of commoning.

Recent years have seen a proliferation of work on the commons as a field of 'social study'¹. The concept of reclaiming commons in order to own, use and protect our shared common resources collectively (referencing the history of common lands in feudal Britain, Enclosures, Tragedy of the Commons etc) has much to commend it, in the sense of removing boundaries (literal and metaphorical) to be able to responsibly manage and protect the planet. The marketization and direct theft of land over centuries has eroded the commons² so that they are no longer available to everyone. With a present day raised awareness of the climate crisis and the dangers faced if we no longer have what are seen as essentials to living: land, water, clean air, natural materials etc. the need for this work feels more urgent than ever.

The commons, or commoning, has the potential to become a new social movement and, through new social practices, a route to a sustainable future on earth.

This movement presents itself at the edge of or, even, outside of the existing social paradigm of western societies. It is counter to the widespread exploitation of our global natural resources by the neoliberal establishment and corporate businesses. In other words, the exploitation of the commons. Although most land today (including common land) is privately owned, and therefore, not always accessible to the public, the commons could, or more importantly, should belong to everyone. They are part of our natural inheritance.

Can we begin to find ways to reclaim commons, with acts of commoning, in a time of increased 'enclosure' of public space? The urban commons (which I identify as shared urban public spaces) is the space the walk is principally engaged with. Public spaces, be they squares, civic amenities, footpaths and public access areas in towns and cities (where normally the state has control), can create active social spaces for cultural events, political action and meetings. They can be public or private, but can they be accessible to all?

Walking is the dominant commons in this model. As Gros states "the true direction of walking is towards the edge of civilized worlds... walking is setting oneself apart: at the edge of those that

work, at the edges of high-speed roads, at the edges of producers of profit and poverty, exploiters, labourers, and at the edge of those serious people who always have something better to do than receive the pale gentleness of a winter sun or the freshness of a spring breeze".

Despite increased rights across the globe, women continue to experience life in a man's world (Solnit, Criado-Perez). My aim with the model is to make women in a local community creators in public space as well as potential designers of the future.

The model consists of a walk for women, the objective of which is to identify common land, currently under utilised, in the public domain for the common good, perhaps as community gardening projects. Other aspects of the commons (e.g. water, raw materials) may also be identified.

The walk involves participation, collaboration and information gathering. I want to observe how a group of women interact and 'perform' on the walk.

This model aims to activate women in our social spaces, potentially creating change in the places where they live and work. A strong influence Lefebvre's radical vision for a city in which "users manage urban space for themselves, beyond the control of both the state and capitalism"⁴. For Lefebvre, users have a "right to appropriate what is properly theirs"⁵.

If space is for these commons of social relations, and walking and gardening are social acts and bodily movement, do these elements work well together in a single purpose?

Can this model of 'walking women designers' be widely used to empower women to take ownership and responsibility for areas of public space, to create a support network and shine a light on the importance of land ownership and the commons in general?

1. Ruivenkamp, Guido, and Andy Hilton. Perspectives on Commoning: Autonomist Principles and Practices. 1. London: Zed, 2017,

2. Wall, Derek. Beyond Commons Feudalism and Platform Capitalism, STIR Magazine Issue 20, Winter 2018

3. Gros, Frédéric, John Howe, and Clifford Harper. A Philosophy of Walking. 94. London: Verso, 2015.

4. Purcell, Mark. 2014. "Possible Worlds: Henri Lefebvre and the Right to the City." Journal of Urban Affairs 36 (1): 141

5. Ibid., 149



Commons and community

This model is an experiment in commons and commoning.

There is no single definition of the commons. The multitude of definitions means the commons and commoning are not easy to understand.

In this model I use it to refer to natural resources, urban spaces, as well as social practices.

De Angelis argues for “a new political discourse based on two main coordinates, commons and communities”. Commons suggest non-commodified means to fulfil social needs, and are “necessarily created and sustained by communities, i.e. by social networks of mutual aid, solidarity, and practices of human exchange”.¹

Wall, too, states that the “alternative of a commons-based future is based on collective ownership and participation, is becoming increasingly popular”.²

The commons is now being understood more widely as a concept describing ‘durable, dynamic sets of social relationships for managing resources -- all sorts of resources: digital, urban, natural, indigenous, rural, cultural, scientific, to use some crude categories’.³

Ruivenkamp and Hilton argue that the commons are not just resources, but are an element of what we do, or acts of commoning. This behaviour moves

“beyond the domains of the private and the public, beyond the dichotomy of capitalism versus socialism”.⁴

So given that the commons can be one element or multiple elements of a system. Attempting to tackle all at once is likely to lead to multiple solutions to social, environmental and economic problems and potentially create new challenges.

Land is an essential resource that our society, culture and economy depend upon. It is key to most struggles for social and environmental justice, whether for genuinely affordable housing or food growing, for preserving nature or community space.⁵

We know that historically, there has been resistance to enclosure of land and this resistance has led to the creation of land rights or spaces like national parks being established.

The new enclosures of today (in particular pseudo-public space in new urban developments) expose us to the limitations on where we can go and what we can do with space.

Allotments, gardens and urban farms are popular forms of urban commoning, as people come together to both build communities and grow local food to help enhance sustainable food production.

Many current urban commons projects are combining community growing alongside other land uses e.g.. housing, makers spaces, sustainable transport hubs. One example is the R-Urban

project in Colombes, France.

Once projects like this are delivered they need to be protected and managed so they remain collective assets.

There is a danger that the commons can be further exploited by corporates and businesses without collective ownership models using the same approaches of collective and shared assets leading to platform capitalism (e.g. Uber, AirBNB).

New ‘collective’ businesses (e.g. The Collective, London which charges between £250–£540 a week for a room and shared facilities) offer communal, shared resources and appropriate the language of cooperation, participation and commons (e.g. “challenging the status quo”) while in fact reinforcing the status quo, offering services only to those with sufficient financial means.⁶

The commons can be exclusionary, favouring one group over another. It is important to remain inclusive and open to all ‘commoners’ with a bottom-up intervention where there is real collective benefits.

As Wall states, there remains a need to defend, extend and deepen the commons.⁷

1. De Angelis, Massimo. (2003). Reflections on alternatives, commons and communities. *The Commoner*. 6. 1-14.

2. Wall, Derek. *Beyond Commons Feudalism and Platform Capitalism*, STIR Magazine Issue 20, Winter 2018

3. Bollier, David. n.d. “New to the Commons?” *News and Perspectives on the Commons*. Accessed February 12, 2019. <http://www.bollier.org/new-to-the-commons>.

4. Ruivenkamp, Guido, and Andy Hilton. *Perspectives on Commoning: Autonomist Principles and Practices*. London: Zed, 2017.

5. “Land Justice Network.” n.d. *Land Justice Network*. Accessed February 10, 2019. <https://www.landjustice.uk/>.

6. “The Collective”, Accessed April 14, 2019, <https://www.thecollective.com>

7. *Ibid.*, Wall



Women

Within commons work context matters. All commoners are not equal. It was important to me that women were the main actants in this project.

Rebecca Solnit identifies a 'revitalised feminist movement around the world but also of a new backlash against the feminist movement. She calls out the silencing she sees as specific to women, "If to have a voice, to be allowed to speak, to be heard and believed is essential to being an insider or a person of power, a human being with full membership, then it's important to recognize that silence is the universal condition of oppression".¹

Women need more visibility in public spaces, to address what Criado-Perez perceives as an unintended male bias in our human experience. We need to ensure they are part of the process of designing a world meant for everyone.²



Today, in the UK, despite there being a woman Prime Minister in office, a recent report titled *Sex and Power* (2013) claims that "the number of women in senior levels of the judiciary, education, the arts, finance, the civil service and government is plummeting".³

Women are statistically more vulnerable in public spaces. Rachel Hewitt attempted to walk 'like a man' in the streets of London and discovered how "walking patterns have been shaped in reaction to male power" and that women have been "coerced into adopting submissive, meandering, and powerless pedestrian behaviour".⁴

She acknowledges that "pavements and streets are political spaces: that's why marches, protests, and sit-ins, which deliberately disrupt pedestrian flow or reclaim the streets, are so highly charged and effective."⁵

The filmmaker, Agnes Varda has said that the first feminist act is to gaze, to say, 'I am looked at, but I can also look'.⁶ As a nod to this opinion, the model gives women the role of observer. It gives permission to search for sites in the public space, to take notice.

Elkin tells us that in Varda's film, *Cléo de 5 a 7*, "something inside Cléo herself shifts as she moves through the neighbourhood, as the neighbourhood moves through her".⁷ Elkin adds "space is not neutral. Space is a feminist issue. The space we occupy...is constantly remade and unmade, constructed and wondered at."⁸

Federici claims that historically, as today, women have depended on communal natural resources more than men. She adds that women are the main social force to counter the commercialization of nature and capitalist use of land.⁹

Furthermore, Federici states 'it must be the production of ourselves as a common subject' therefore working as 'community'. This work (and the model) is not to be undertaken in isolation of the group. Elkin confirms "In the street we can stand together in favour of an idea... It makes us feel stronger to be part of a group".¹⁰

Dealing with the issues around climate change and access to spatial resources is challenging. Conversations become difficult and a sense of loss and sadness prevails. Talking is as essential to life as walking, discussed in detail in the next chapter.

It is through the collective actions that we can find ways to overcome this sadness. I propose walking as an activity because of its known benefits to health and well-being. It is an everyday practice that creates a safe and supportive space for positive futures.

However, walking is not always the preferred mode of transport for women as it is shaped by fear, intimidation, exhaustion, and powerlessness.¹¹

In other contexts this model could involve all genders and age groups and still have the similar outcomes. What is likely to be different is the conversations and participants' experience.

1. Solnit, Rebecca, and Paz de la Calzada. 2017. *Mother of All Questions: Further Reports from the Feminist Revolutions*. 24, Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books.

2. Criado-Perez, Caroline. *Invisible Women: Data Bias in a World Designed for Men*. xiii, New York: Abrams Press, 2019.

3. Yvonne Roberts, "Report Finds Shocking Absence of Women from UK Public Life," *The Guardian*, February 24, 2013, accessed Apr 23, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/feb/24/shocking-absence-women-uk-public-life>.

4. Hewitt, Rachel. n.d. "I Decided to Start Walking down the Street like a Man. Spoiler: It Didn't Go Well." *New Statesman*. Accessed March 3, 2019. <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/uk/2018/11/i-decided-start-walking-down-street-man-spoiler-it-didn-t-go-well>.

5. Ibid.,

6. Elkin, Lauren. 2017. *Flaneuse: Women Walk the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice and London*, 242. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux

7. Ibid., 217

8. Ibid., 286

9. Federici, Silvia. *Re-enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of the Commons*. Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2019.

10. Ibid., Elkin, 188

11. Ibid., Hewitt

Walking

Walking is a personal passion of mine, as well as being a highly sustainable mode of transport. It is also an act of communing.

It requires all the senses.¹

As walkers we are part of the environment and actors within the space. Walking is a pleasure pursuit and creates time for reflection, close observation and slowing down. Rebecca Solnit claims that a walk is 'a life in miniature' and writes that "walking the streets is what links up reading the map with living one's life, the personal microcosm with the public macrocosm".² A walk can be a reflection of a life or lead to the creation of a new life.

Walking is a social activity as Ingold and Vergunst state "the feet respond as much as does the voice to the presence and activity of others. Social relations... are not enacted in situ but are paced out along the ground".³

In groups walkers may fall into step, creating a shared rhythm. There is an opportunity for deep conversation. A longer walk builds to a collective sense of achievement.

Flâneurie

An early nineteenth century invention, the flâneur, was a male voyeur of the urban scene of Paris. He is a symbol of privilege with the freedom to move around the city streets, observing

without interacting. Women didn't have the freedom of incognito instead they are often the object of the flâneur's gaze, "a sign, a fiction, a confection of means and fantasies".⁴

As previously noted, for women, walking can present problems, either around access, visibility or safety. But we can view walking as a way to protect, as Solnit states "walking maintains the publicness and viability of public space".⁵ The more people walk and use public space the safer it can feel.

Unlike the flâneur, who appears to wander aimlessly and in a detached manner, the walkers in this model are invested in the space. They will question the environments they walk in and seek new urban spaces as a ritual.

Psychogeography

Psychogeography is also widely understood to have started on the streets of Paris this time in the 1950s. It formed part in the works of the Letterist Group, a pre-situationist movement and concerned itself with observing and transforming urban life, aesthetically and, later, politically. As cities became more hostile to pedestrians, it became an act of subversion.⁶ Although, according to Coverley, it failed in any way to measure the emotional impact of urban space.⁷

The walking model sits neatly into a more contemporary interpretation of psychogeography, acting as political critique e.g.. redevelopment in cities like

Paris and London.

It brings women into a practice more normally occupied by men (Defoe, de Quincey, Sinclair, Ackroyd and many more). The walks and writings of these authors are rooted in a literary tradition and are not presented as models for social reproduction.

It also gives women the opportunity to challenge the representation of urban space, exploring marginal and forgotten areas often overlooked.



1. Robert MacFarlane writes of Nan Shepherd's book "a hymn to 'living all the way through':touching, tasting, smelling and hearing the world". Shepherd, Nan. *The Living Mountain*. Canongate Books, 2011. First published 1977, Aberdeen University Press p.xxxi (Introduction by Robert MacFarlane).

2. Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*. 138. London: Verso, 2001.

3. Tim Ingold and Jo Lee Vergunst. *Ways of Walking: Ethnography and Practice on Foot*. 1. London: Routledge, 2016.

4. Pollock, Griselda. 2003. *Vision and Difference*. 3rd ed. 100. London, New York: Routledge.

5. *Ibid.*, Solnit, 176

6. Coverley, Merlin. 2018. *Psychogeography*. 12. Harpenden, Herts: Oldcastle Books.

7. *Ibid.*, 24

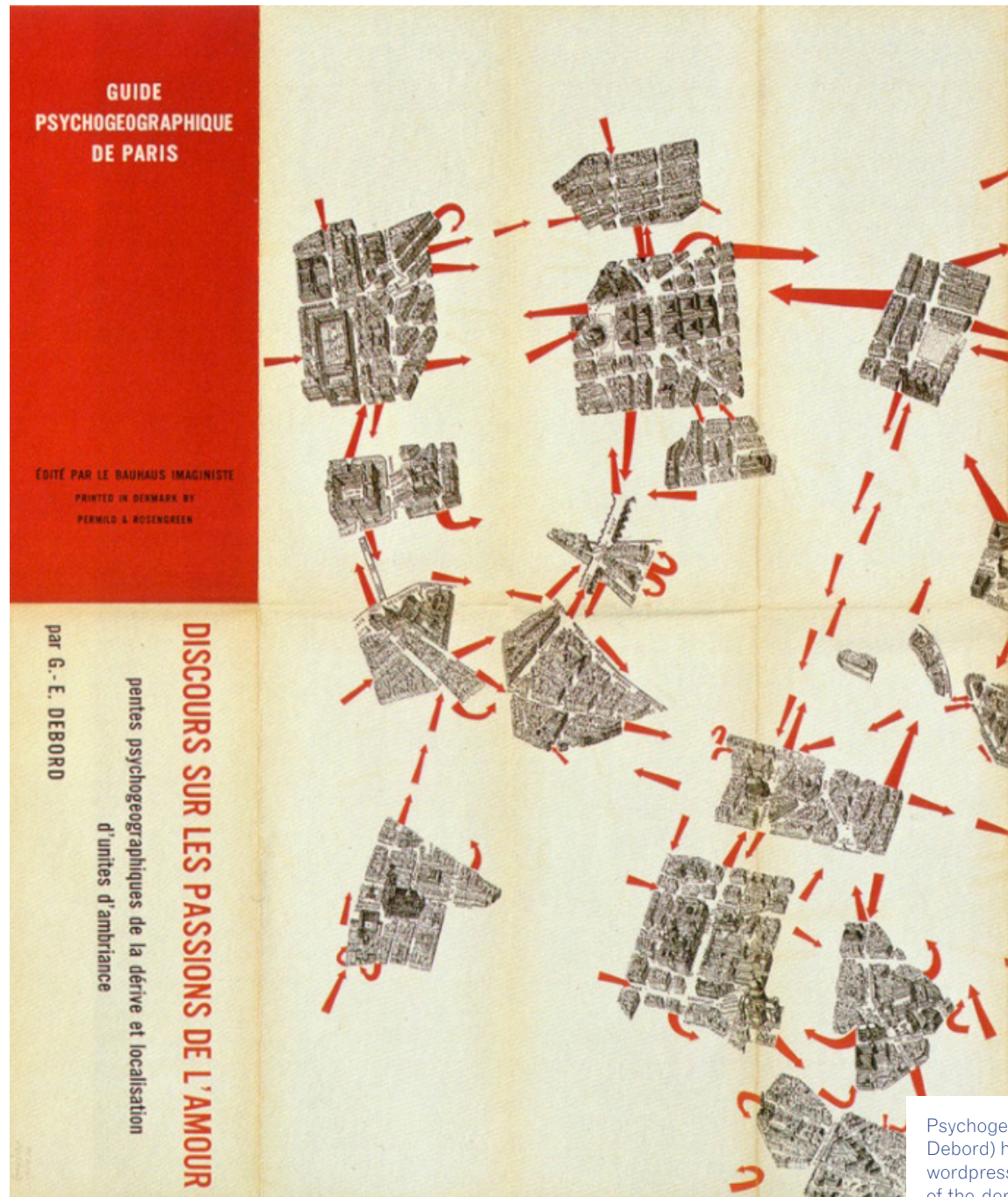
Drifting

The derive was a predominant technique of psychogeography.¹ In *Theory of the Dérive*, Guy Debord (a member of the Letterist Group) defines the *dérive* (literally: 'drifting') as "a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances. *Dérives* involve playful constructive behavior and awareness of psychogeographical effects, and are thus quite different from the classic notions of journey or stroll".²

Debord attempted to move away from the whimsical excesses of the early psychogeography exercises by weaving the study of the "specific effects of the geographical environment...on the emotions and behaviour of individuals"³

His definitions of the *dérive* remained vague, allowing for so many others to adopt it in their own way. Despite Debord considering it a pure science⁴, it remained an unplanned journey with actors being drawn to attractions and encounters but with no particular outcome or destination. He suggests groups of two or three people who have reached the same level of awareness as the best arrangement, "since cross-checking these different groups' impressions makes it possible to arrive at more objective conclusions".⁵

The walking model is a form of *dérive*, a drifting walk in urban space with no set route and no required outcome. The participants can walk where they chose. The model adopts the small sized group to aid decision making and conversation.



Psychogeography De Paris (Guy Debord) <https://thedesignedplace.wordpress.com/2012/10/23/theory-of-the-derive/>

1. Coverley, Merlin. 2018. *Psychogeography*. 85. Harpenden, Herts: Oldcastle Books
2. Debord, Guy. 1956. "Theory of the *Dérive*." *Theory of the Dérive*.
3. Ibid., Coverley, 88
4. Ibid., Coverley, 90
5. Ibid., Debord

The intention of the walk is to inspire women to participate in reclamation and creation in public space. Pink states that walking is a practice involved in the constitution or making of place.¹ Pink cites Mayol who defines the 'neighbourhood as a locality that is experienced by walking'.²

It is my hope that once a group has completed the walk they will never see their locality in the same way.

Women walkers

Women are almost invisible in the history of walking. However, there are notable walking women in the arts world and events such as *Women Walking* (July 2016)³ that are attempting to redress this. Sophie Calle walked the seedier streets of New York asking strangers to take her to a special place, while Janet Cardiff's interactive, audio walks that gives out directions overlaid with a pre recorded soundtrack from the same space and a narrative to prompt the listener to continue and finish the walk. For Cardiff walking is a reinterpretation of space and an extending of time.⁴

I recently attended the exhibition *Fantastic Cities* by Penny Woolcock at Modern Art Oxford. Woolcock presented walking videos that explore issues of social inequality. Her work attempts to bring together a diverse range of people, to show us that 'so much more binds us than divides us'.⁵

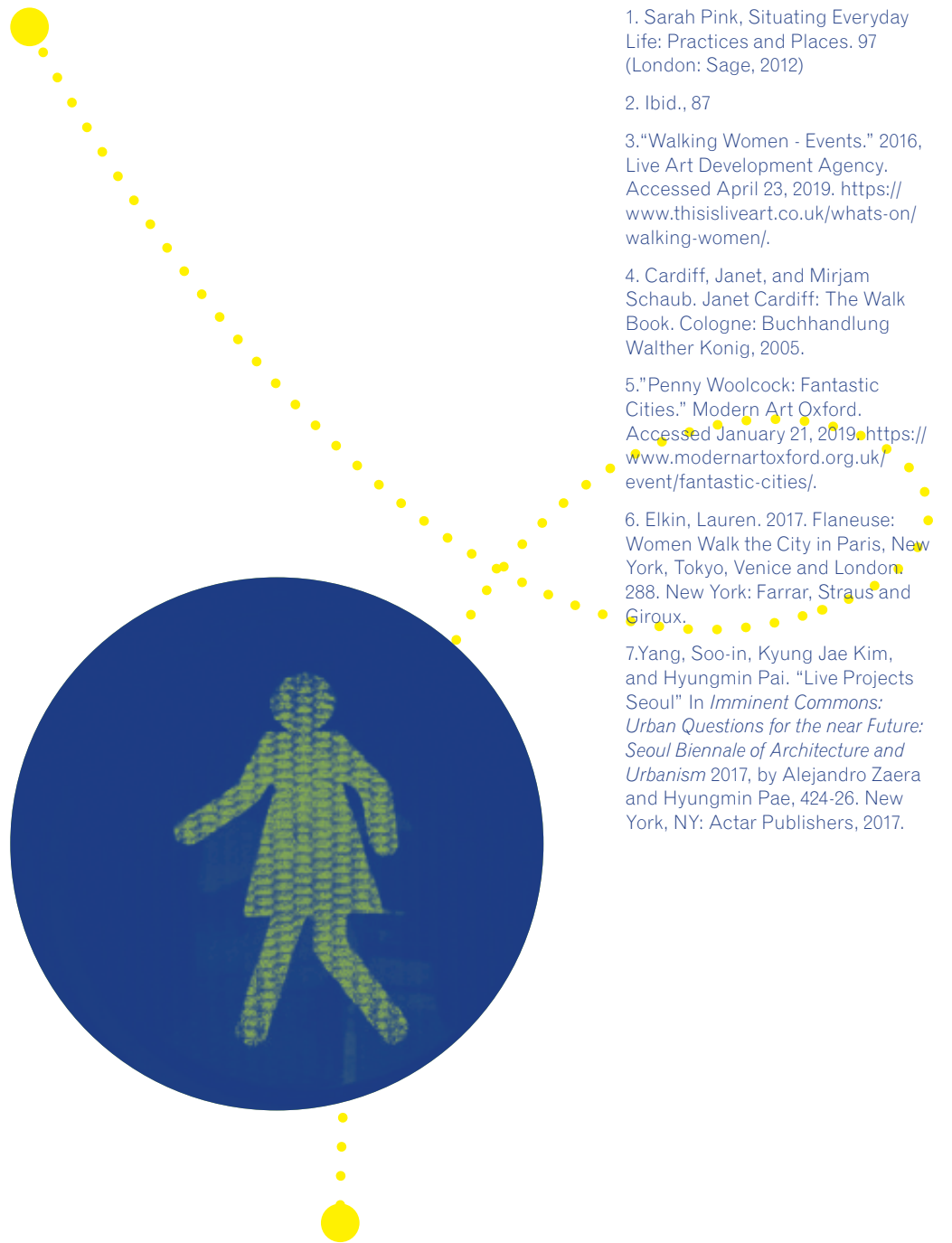
Virginia Woolf walked the streets of London, taking solace in the sites

and sounds she encountered. Elkin calls Virginia Woolf's 1927 essay *Street Haunting*, an attempt to claim an ungendered place by walking. "Woolf is telling us that we can integrate ourselves into the world the city by becoming aware of the invisible boundaries of the city that we can challenge them. A female *flânerie* – a *flâneuserie* – not only changes the way we move through space, but intervenes in the organisation of space itself. We claim our right to disturb the peace, to observe (or not observe), to occupy (or not occupy) and to organise (or disorganise) space on our own terms."⁶

Future walking

In the future, changes in personal mobility (such as automated vehicles and smart connections) are likely to impact our walking patterns. We should start to realise new purposes for walking. Walking models, guided walks, perambulatory theatre and performance can all be part of that future. Walking can focus on discovery and play. As we move away from capitalist systems towards more shared economies, peer to peer, renewable energies and technology led solutions etc. can walking keep us alert to our environmental responsibilities?⁷

Overleaf are some examples of art and design practices involving walking challenging assumptions about walking, politics and participation.



1. Sarah Pink, *Situating Everyday Life: Practices and Places*. 97 (London: Sage, 2012)

2. *Ibid.*, 87

3. "Walking Women - Events." 2016, Live Art Development Agency. Accessed April 23, 2019. <https://www.thisisliveart.co.uk/whats-on/walking-women/>.

4. Cardiff, Janet, and Mirjam Schaub. *Janet Cardiff: The Walk Book*. Cologne: Buchhandlung Walther Konig, 2005.

5. "Penny Woolcock: Fantastic Cities." *Modern Art Oxford*. Accessed January 21, 2019. <https://www.modernartoxford.org.uk/event/fantastic-cities/>.

6. Elkin, Lauren. 2017. *Flâneuse: Women Walk the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice and London*. 288. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

7. Yang, Soo-in, Kyung Jae Kim, and Hyungmin Pai. "Live Projects Seoul" In *Imminent Commons: Urban Questions for the near Future: Seoul Biennale of Architecture and Urbanism 2017*, by Alejandro Zaera and Hyungmin Pae, 424-26. New York, NY: Actar Publishers, 2017.



Future Farmers

Future Farmers work facilitates imagining, participating in and initiating change in the places people live.

A Future Farmers project in 2018, *Further On... to Land*, saw masked walkers (baker, beekeeper, chef and activists) complete a five-day trip from the city of Oslo carrying seeds, bread and provisions to a farm via forests (and de-forested zones), meeting farmers, exercising the commons, sleeping in cabins, barns and open fields. This project inspired longer walks: Baker Emmanuel Rang continued walking over two years sharing and collecting his baking knowledge, repairing defunct bake ovens.

Conversely, in 2015 a procession of farmers carried soil from their farms through the city of Oslo to its new home at Losæter. Soil Procession

was a GROUND BUILDING ceremony that used the soil collected from over 50 Norwegian farms, to build the foundation of the Flatbread Society Grain Field and Bakehouse. A procession of soil and people through Oslo drew attention to this historical, symbolic moment of the transition of a piece of land into a permanent stage for art and action related to food production.

These practices raise awareness of our common heritage and the value of natural resources. Movement, both walking and transporting plays an essential role.

<http://www.futurefarmers.com/>



WalkingLab

WalkingLab is an international collaborative network and partnership between artists, arts organisations, activists, scholars and educators. Research projects and events created by the network engage with “feminist new materialisms, posthumanisms, affect theory, trans and queer theory, Indigenous theories, and critical race and disability scholarship”.

WalkingLab regulars Stephanie Springgay and Sarah E. Truman consider place, sensory inquiry, embodiment, and rhythm and ask us to think differently about the politics of walking, movement, and participation.

One WalkingLab project in 2018 included lectures and artistic interventions into the name/place/ concept ‘Lancaster.’ This project covered issues of militarism, migration

and speculative geology.

This work challenges mainstream assumptions about place and gives agency to minority groups and interests. The research work is concerned with the process rather than the outcome.

<https://walkinglab.org/>

Process

So, how then to engage with the urban commons as walkers?

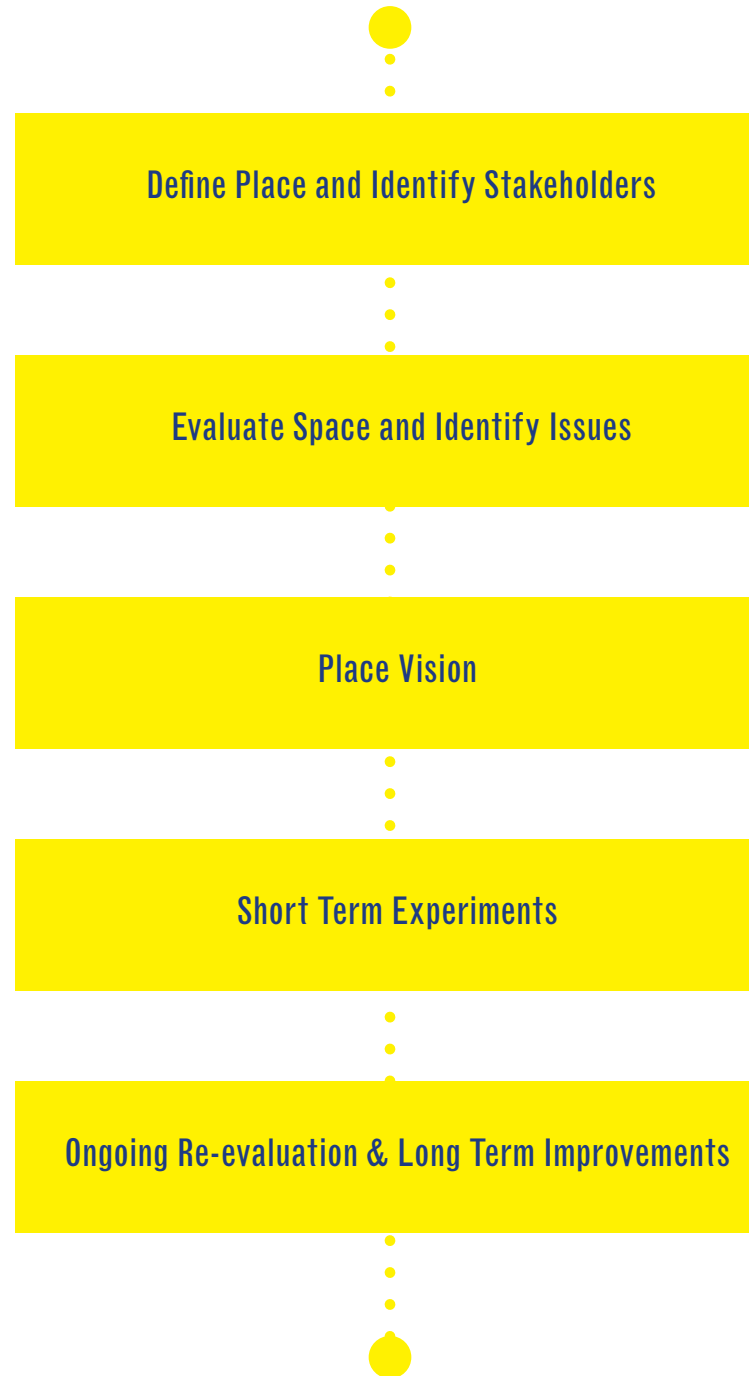
Below are some practices for planning and designing:

Placemaking (see *Presents workbook*) is centred on observing as well as talking to people who use a particular space. This approach aims to understand people's needs and aspirations for that space and for their community as a whole.

The placemaking process used by *Project for Public Spaces*¹ uses the process in the diagram shown here to either retrofit an existing space or plan a new space. It has much in common with *Design Thinking* process of Discovery > Definition > Ideation > Prototype > Test.

Placemaking does have its detractors. Piiparinen claims some efforts to design space collaboratively could be as generic as the dead cityscapes that they aim to improve.²

And Russell makes a valid point that "unique public places are best created by designers who are good listeners, good observers, and are capable of stirring together the sometimes-conflicting wishes of clients and citizens into a transcendent result none could have anticipated."³



1. The Placemaking Process. Dec 21, 2017, RSS. Accessed February 3, 2019. <https://www.pps.org/article/5-steps-to-making-places>.

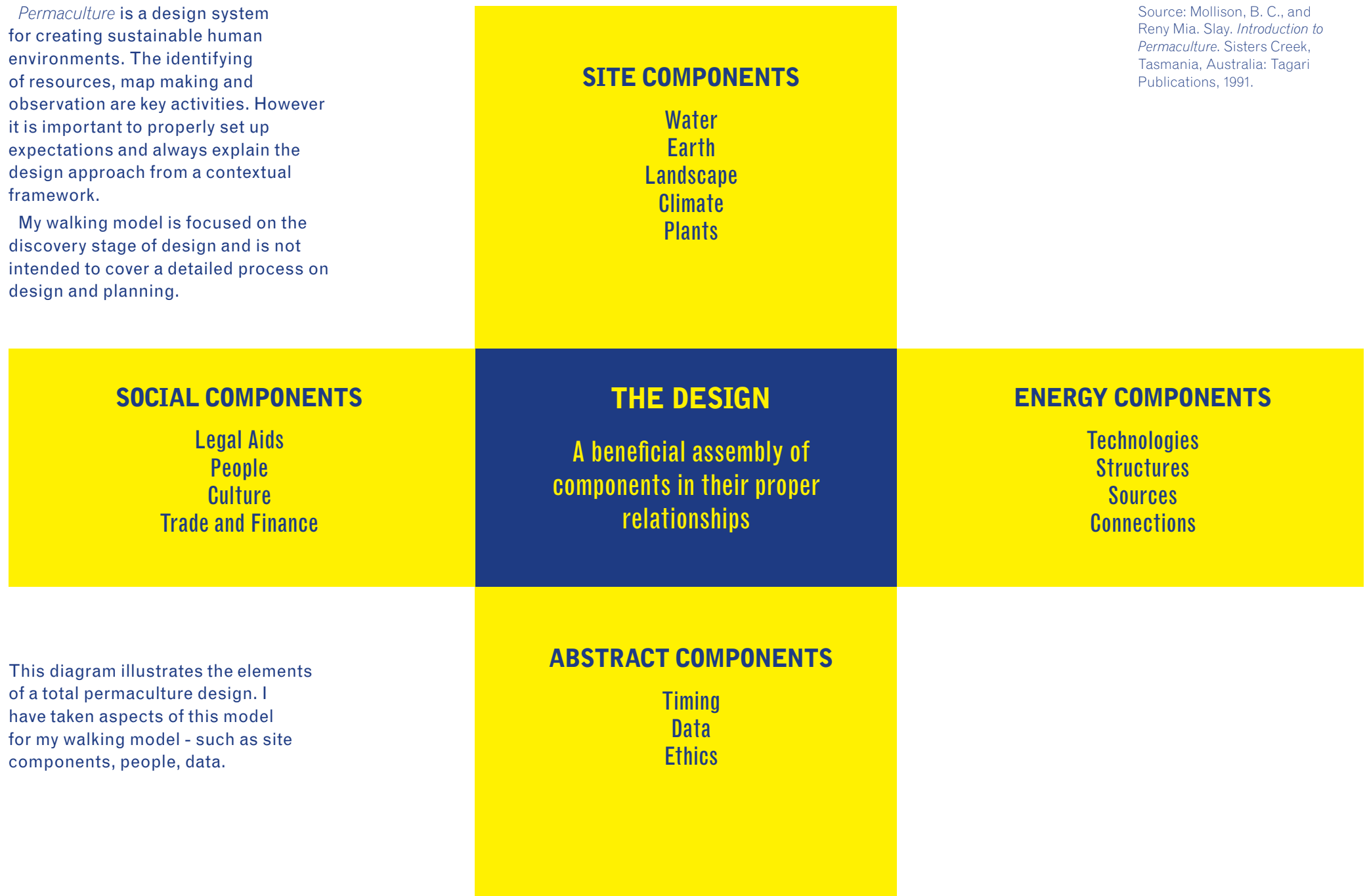
2. Piiparinen, Richey "Faking It: The Happy Messaging of Placemaking." *Newgeography.com*. Accessed March 14, 2019. <http://www.newgeography.com/content/003244-faking-it-the-happy-messaging-placemaking>.

3. Russell, James S. "Blog." James S Russell. April 08, 2015. Accessed March 14, 2019. <http://jamesrussell.net/enough-of-bogus-placemaking>

Permaculture is a design system for creating sustainable human environments. The identifying of resources, map making and observation are key activities. However it is important to properly set up expectations and always explain the design approach from a contextual framework.

My walking model is focused on the discovery stage of design and is not intended to cover a detailed process on design and planning.

Source: Mollison, B. C., and Reny Mia. Slay. *Introduction to Permaculture*. Sisters Creek, Tasmania, Australia: Tagari Publications, 1991.



This diagram illustrates the elements of a total permaculture design. I have taken aspects of this model for my walking model - such as site components, people, data.

Mapping

“Walking is mapping with your feet” says Lauren Elkin.¹

This additional aspect of the model includes the plotting of, and drawing of selected sites.

Schalansky says maps “cannot represent reality, merely one interpretation of it.”²

She adds that “Mapmaking follows on the heels of discovery; and a new place is born with a new name”.³

Historically few people made maps and they were not participatory. Pollock cites Shirley Ardener to state that boundaries on maps were culturally determined, dividing society with invisible fences and platforms.⁴

New maps can create new places and stories. With new maps we can attempt to shift the commons into new terrains.

As Nishat Awan says, maps have a long history of narrating power and they have been instrumental tools for claiming territories. They can present different realities by privileging some information over others. Also “longitude, and latitude do not account for temporality, touch, memory, relations, stories and narratives—in fact, it is experience that is altogether removed”.⁵

To create a complete design of a site selected as a growing space it can also be mapped to show various aspects such as slopes, layout of water, buildings and access, direction from

which the sun and wind come from etc. to enable a design.

Awan states that “mapping can open the imagination to other possible futures and, thus, mapping has both criticality and agency in thinking ‘otherwise’”. Citing James Corner, she writes of the “‘agency of mapping’ as a tool for design in which the focus is on mapping as an activity rather than the map as artefact”.

Tools like OpenStreetMap (OSM) allow anyone to create the maps of the future, alternatives to the commercially focused products from corporations like Google. These ‘commons resources’ are still mainly completed by men with only an estimated 2–5 percent of OSMers being women.⁶

1. Elkin, Lauren. 2017. *Flaneuse: Women Walk the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice and London*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

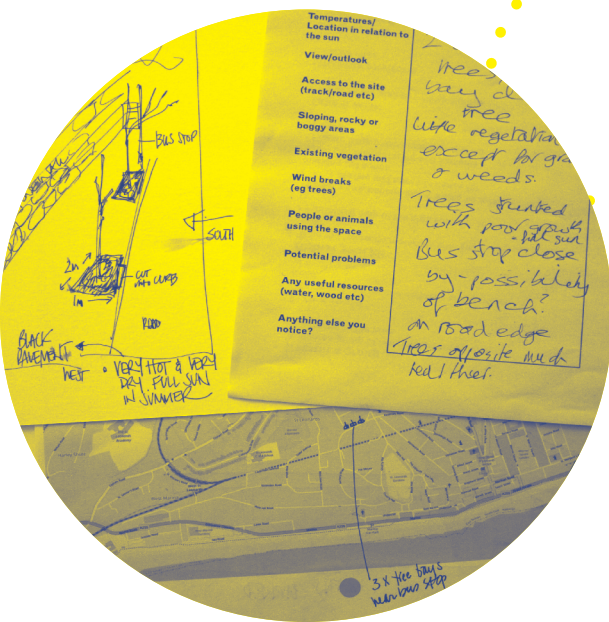
2. Schalansky, Judith, and Christine Lo. 2014. *Pocket Atlas of Remote Islands: Fifty Islands I Have Not Visited and Never Will*. New York: Penguin Books. 14

3. *ibid* 26

4. Pollock, Griselda. 2003. *Vision and Difference*. 3rd ed. London, New York: Routledge. p98

5. Awan, Nishat. “Mapping Otherwise: Imagining Other Possibilities and Other Futures.” In *Feminist Futures of Spatial Practice: Materialism, Activism, Dialogues, Pedagogies, Projections*, by Meike Schalk, Thérèse Kristiansson, and Ramia Mazé. 33-41. Baunach: Spurbuchverlag, 2017.

6. Holder, Sarah, Sarah Holder, and CityLab. 2018. “How Maps Look Different When Women Make Them.” CityLab. March 22, 2018. <https://www.citylab.com/equity/2018/03/who-maps-the-world/555272/>.



Urban gardens

Reclaiming urban commons as urban gardens is becoming increasingly popular across the globe. This can vary from guerrilla gardening or planting across a whole town and can develop into community land trusts or community owned businesses.

The findings of a report: *The true value of community farms and gardens: social, environmental, health and economic*, recognised the contribution made by community gardens in supporting the delivery of government agendas relating to social inclusion, health, climate change, education, regeneration and local economies.¹

Kumar believes “The garden is not only a provider of food, it is also a provider of knowledge and experience”.² For him, nature and culture can live side by side in the city, stating “allotments, roof gardens and water harvesting can all be possible in the city because people live together within the context of mutuality, cooperation and care”.³

Community gardens give local people the opportunity to grow their own organic foods and become less dependant on unsustainable food sources.

A growing project I have been part of in St Leonards on Sea is the Transition Town community garden at Warrior Square train station. The garden has transformed the north platform area from an overgrown plot of bramble bushes, introducing edible plants in raised beds, flowers, shrubs as well as several benches for sitting. Ever year an open day takes place inviting local residents to find out more and sample food and drink made from the produce grown on site. Beyond providing food for the local community it aims to promote the idea of collective growing, sustainable, organic growing practices and create an inclusive space that enhances community well being.

We can link the act of walking with the act of gardening. Pink convincingly states that creating a garden is intimately related to the act of walking, “the garden would be more likely to be experienced locally as being part of a pathway or for those who garden as a place of intensities where they interact with plants, with the environment more broadly and with those whose pathways cross theirs”.

Pink goes further by stating that a garden can exist as “a domain of the criss-crossing of routes in the sense of the entanglements of ‘lines’ that Ingold

(2007) writes about, for example not only people walking through, but also of the intersections between routes of someone slowly gardening and another meandering through with a dog or stopping to rest on one of its benches on the way home from shopping”. The garden is a “series of routes, rather than a bounded locality”.⁴

Is citizen participation in these spaces transformative or empowering? Gardens can suffer from volunteer fatigue with regular drop off in numbers of those regularly contributing.

Ghose and Pettygrove argue that grassroots community gardens simultaneously contest and reinforce local neoliberal policies.⁴

To successfully grow on a site you would need to walk the site, observe it in every season to discover the lands limitations as well as its possibilities. A successful project may lead to gentrification and increased house and land values that negatively impact some members of the community.

Focusing on parcels of land can reinforce the marginalisation of public space. In a TED talk earlier this year, Torange Khonsari suggests we scale up and create a networks of these parcels of land.⁵

1. Quayle, Helen. 2007. “The True Value of Community Farms and Gardens: Social, Environmental, Health and Economic.”

2. Kumar, Satish. *Soil, Soul, Society: A New Trinity for Our Time*, 117. Lewes, East Sussex: Leaping Hare Press, 2017.

3. *ibid* 134

4. Sarah Pink, *Situating Everyday Life: Practices and Places* (London: Sage, 2012), 97-98


4. Ghose, R. and Pettygrove, M. (2014), *Urban Community Gardens as Spaces of Citizenship*. *Antipode*, 46: 1092-1112. doi:10.1111/anti.12077

5. Khonsari, Torange. 2019. “Harnessing The Power Of The Civic Commons | Torange Khonsari | TEDxTottenham.” YouTube. May 16, 2019. <https://youtu.be/i5RGnQyKrmA>.



My practice walk and mapping

As inspiration, I walked in my neighbourhood finding spaces that interested me, taking photos of potential sites for growing or other uses and identifying nearby resources e.g.. water sources and an existing composting site.



Historic, extant water fountain.



Dead end road with grass patches and pavement



Mossy road island - safety issues




Bench and grassy patch - good for guerrilla planting




Flower beds - could be part of private garden



Tree stump in pavement - good for guerrilla planting



Grassy patch on pavement - good for guerrilla planting



Footpath with grass patches and some access to traffic - signs of composting activity

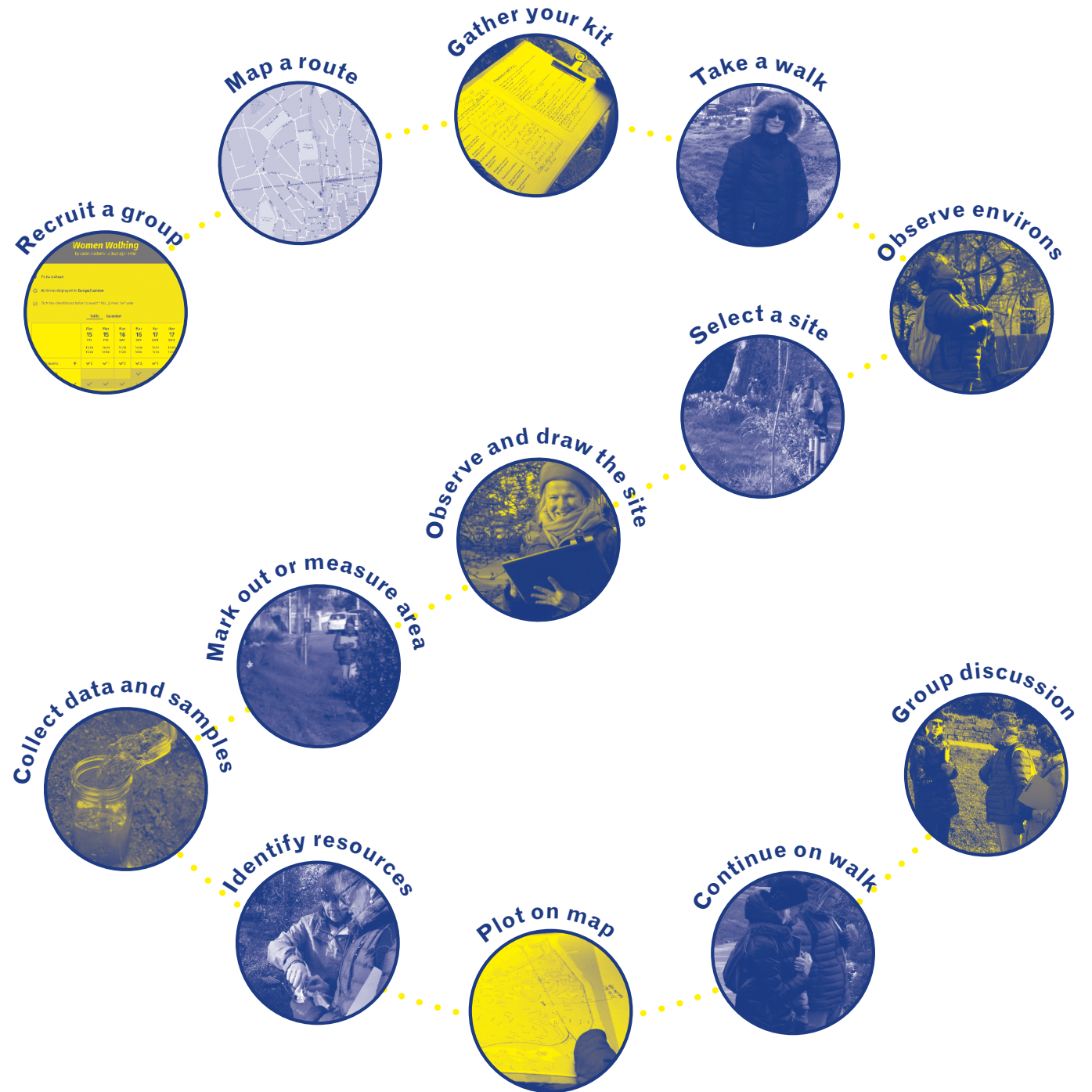


Walking model

As stated previously, my model focuses on the discovery phase of a complete design process.

The walk may be initiated or led by one woman. Ideally, a group of three to five women would work together to decide a route, or starting point and leave the route open for 'drifting'.

A walking guide can be carried on the walk along with necessary materials and tools. Observations, data and sample collection, along with identifying resources, is carried out to establish the viability of a site.



Walking guide

I've created a walk guide submitted with my workbook, a PDF that could be available as a download or a printed booklet. It details the required kit, the stages of the walk, a checklist for data and materials to gather, and several soil tests. The guide could include information about health and safety, risk assessments, suitable clothing and suggestions for what to do after a walk.

A walk in search of the commons

A group walk for women looking to identify common land or common resources in the public domain



A step by step guide to recreating a walk in search of the commons.

Recruit a group

A diverse group of women that have some investment in the area.

Map a route

Decide on the time and distance and start and finish.

Gather your kit -

Bring the following materials with you on the walk:

- A print out map of the area you wish to walk in
- Paper, pens, pencils and drawing boards
- Twine or rope and sticks or canes for marking out space
- Jam jars and water for soil samples
- Plastic bags or envelopes for storing samples

Take a walk

Decide on the area to walk as a group

Observe environs

Look for sites

Select a site

The site not contain boundaries or signs that imply private property. It should feel suitable as a community growing space. It can be large or small. Ideally it contains some soil and possibly, existing vegetation.

Observe the site

By observing the landscape we draw inspiration from the survival strategies followed by natural systems and imitate them using species of more direct use to us.

Use the checklist in Appendix 1 to note the features of the site.



Walking model in practice

On March 17 2019 four women join me to test out my walking model. They selected two sites and completed surveys for each in the Maze Hill area of St Leonards on Sea.

They marked the sites on maps, did drawings, completed checklists, soil tests and took samples. Overall they enjoyed the session and contributed a huge amount. One participant shared a recipe for a soil test using vinegar and baking soda, another talked about permaculture practice. Another talked about a similar project she had been involved in London, taking migrant women out for a 'noticing walk'. I received one email after the session saying: "Thanks again for yesterday ...we're both still buzzing about your work".

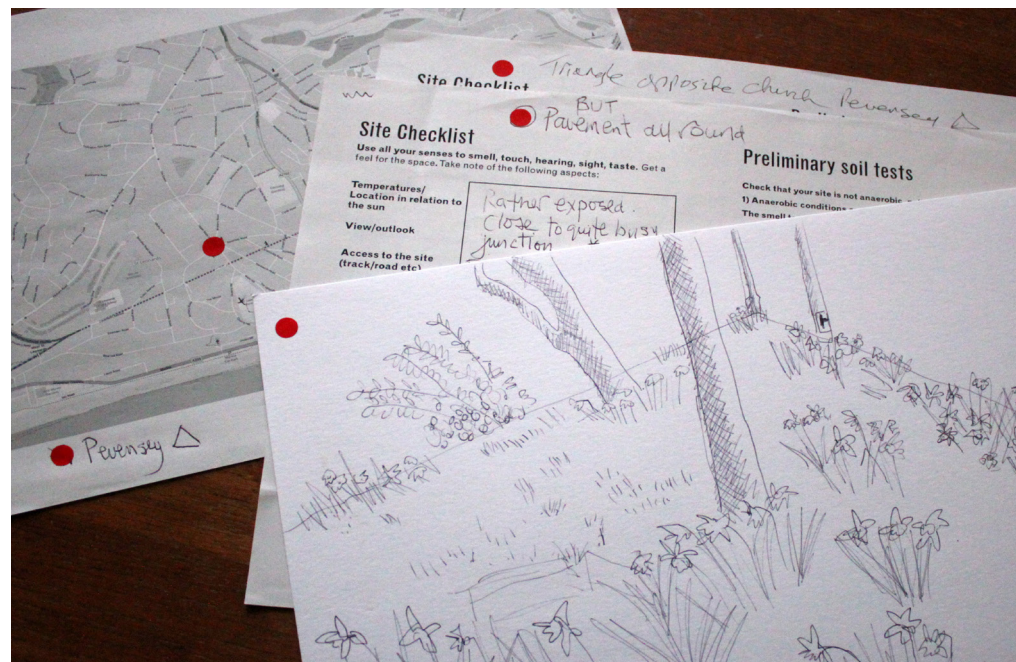
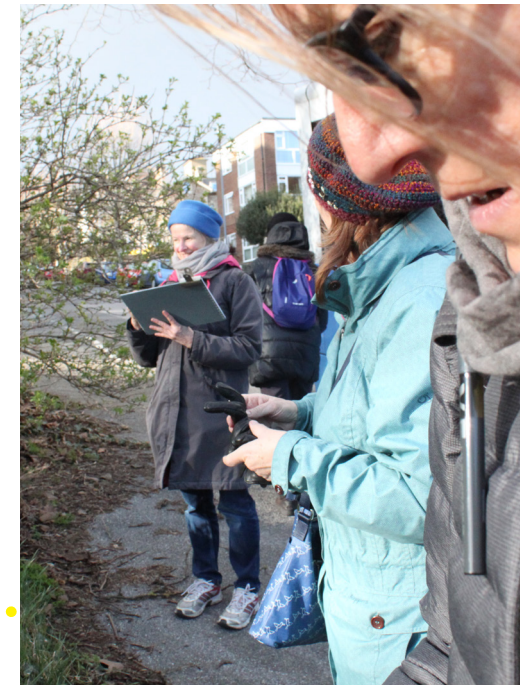
Thinking about the model as a whole, it may be limiting if a city/town/urban environment is hostile to growing. Instead the walk can be about another aspect of commons or commoning.

Women need to be motivated to participate (e.g. if they have no access to growing, or have a particular need for food). It can't just be the pursuit of the well intended, middle classes.

How could I replicate this model in towns and cities where walking doesn't take place? Can it contribute to the reclaiming of space for that very practice?

The model can be seen as the precursor to community activism. This creates unplanned, unsanctioned spaces that may be vulnerable to local development plans, land sales and developments in the future.

Case study participants and data collected. March 2019



Interviews

To gain a better understanding of the potential of the model I interviewed three women, one had participated in the case study. I asked the following questions:

- What is your understanding of the 'commons'?
- What does the act of walking mean to you?
- How do you feel about climate change and its potential impacts on people and the planet?
- Who in society do you see as responsible for ensuring sustainability is at the heart of everyday life?
- What else could this model be used for?
- Aside from finding sites for growing what else do you think this model could be used for?
- Do you think it is important to do this as group?
- And specifically, as a group of women?
- Would this work with other groups less familiar with sustainability?
- How did the participation in this practice make you feel?

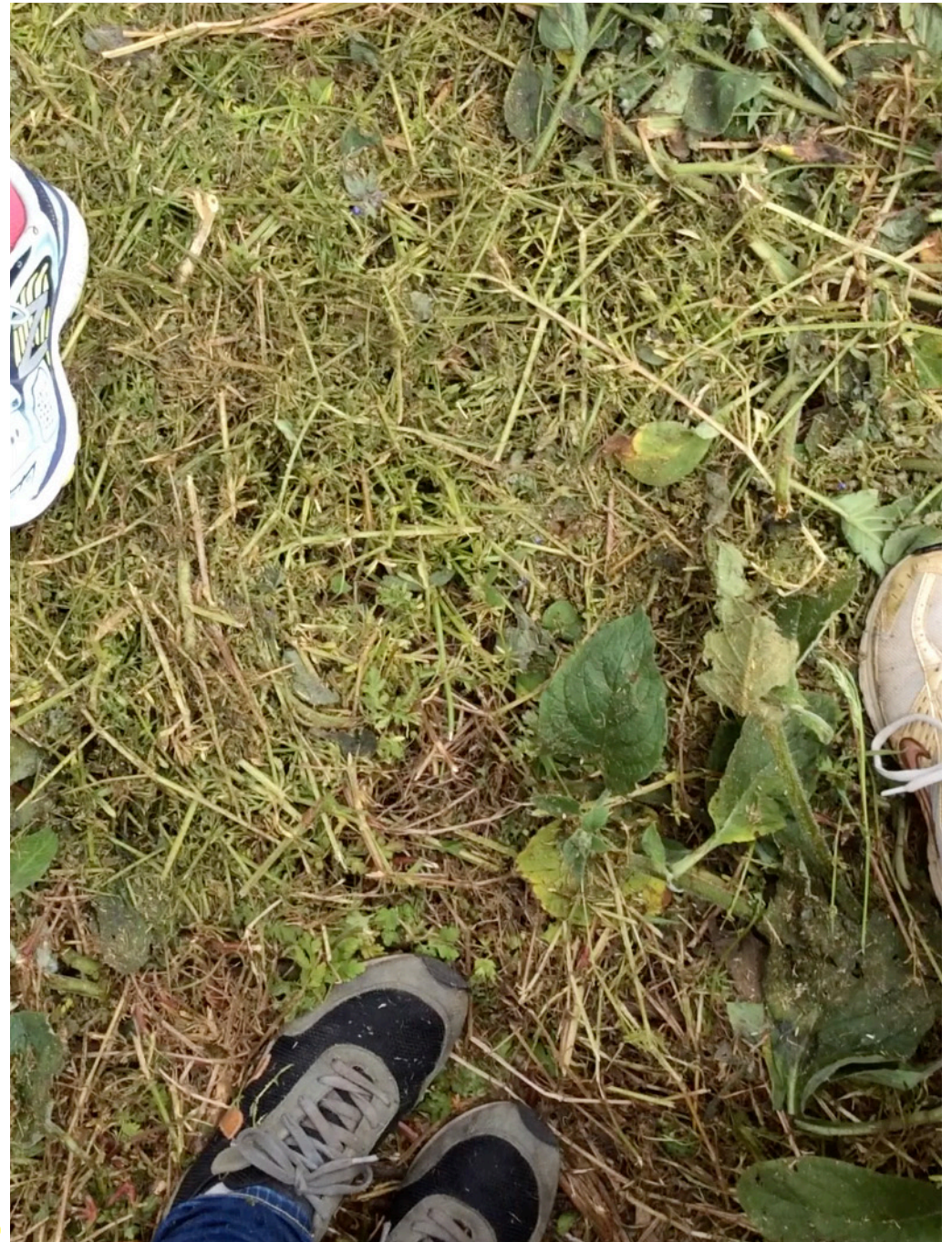
The women had a limited understanding of the commons and its potential. The word "shared" was repeated a few times.

They stated that walking was "elemental" and "created space and new possibilities" "brought clarity". "it connects and grounds you and also slows you down".

Discussing climate change raised concerns about not having power to make a difference. They felt everyone was responsible for combating it. Asked about other ways the model could be used they were more able to confidently share ideas and became more animated and positive. Other outcomes were discussed, such as the discovery of more sustainable routes through the town.

There was also a positive reaction to the model being a group activity and how that can generate more ideas. "Every person brings a different contribution", "it's more diverse". They felt the quality of the walk would be different if it was a group of men rather than women. One woman made a nice connection between the commons and the fact that they had their gender 'in common'.

The interviews recording is submitted with this workbook. Also view at <https://vimeo.com/340197576>



Conclusion

Despite its multitude of definitions the commons is a convincing concept that can contribute to work with a sustainability agenda. It could be a way forward that moves us beyond the dichotomy of capitalism versus socialism to create new social movements with a focus on collective action and care for our natural resources.

Making women the actants of the model is important. Women could play a significant role in commons practices, given they already depend on communal natural resources for everyday life. I have argued that women need to play a significant role in the designing of public space, to create more equality in the public domain. They need to be included in the designing of our futures.

We need to act in response to the creep of privatisation and marketization of space, and reclaim space for the common good. We can map our collective resources and

The model is a promotion and celebration of walking as a healthy, social, mindful and creative practice. Walking can create space in the mind for thinking and responding to the environment walked in. Added to this the act of gardening to improve health and well being, continues the sense of movement as walking routes are established across a growing space. Despite this, the outcome of

the creation of an urban garden is not necessary in gaining insights and valuable experiences.

We need to be aware that these community-led projects need support. It is hard work to maintain communal spaces and their tenures can be temporary and vulnerable.

The case study and the interviews showed a need for this kind of activity. The participants comments were very insightful and highlighted successful, positive aspects of the model: a shared purpose, enjoyment of being in a group, the social aspects of walking and the opportunity to talk and act together. The model generated new ideas and enthusiasm for exploring more ways to share space and collectively create new projects. There were questions raised about land use and ownership and a willingness to do more work to identify opportunities for change. This could also be extended to the creation of a network of 'commons' spaces and commoners.

There is evidently much richness in the act of walking as a group, regardless of the outcome. Sharing time together, with a shared purpose is rewarding, as well as enjoyment from being outdoors and communing with nature. Each person making a contribution, discussing a vision for a new space in the community, or even new aspects of society, is also an exciting prospect.



Items collected on the case study, March 2019

Bibliography

Awan, Nishat. "Mapping Otherwise: Imagining Other Possibilities and Other Futures." In *Feminist Futures of Spatial Practice: Materialism, Activism, Dialogues, Pedagogies, Projections*, by Meike Schalk, Thérèse Kristiansson, and Ramia Mazé. 33-41. Baunach: Spurbuchverlag, 2017.

Cardiff, Janet, and Mirjam Schaub. *Janet Cardiff: The Walk Book*. Cologne: Buchhandlung Walther König, 2005.

Coverley, Merlin. 2018. *Psychogeography*. Harpenden, Herts: Oldcastle Books.

Criado-Perez, Caroline. *Invisible Women: Data Bias in a World Designed for Men*. New York: Abrams Press, 2019.

De Angelis, Massimo. (2003). *Reflections on alternatives, commons and communities*. The Commoner. 6. 1-14.

Debord, Guy. 1956. "Theory of the Dérive." *Theory of the Dérive*.

Elkin, Lauren. 2017. *Flaneuse: Women Walk the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice and London*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Federici, Silvia. *Re-enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of the Commons*. Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2019. http://sduk.us/silvia_george_david/federici_feminism_politics_commons.pdf

"Futurefarmers." Futurefarmers. Accessed May 2, 2019. <http://www.futurefarmers.com/>.

Ghose, R. and Pettygrove, M. (2014), *Urban Community Gardens as Spaces of Citizenship*. Antipode, 46: 1092-1112. doi:10.1111/anti.12077

Gordon-Farleigh, Jonathan "Reclaiming the commons", in *Playing for Time: Making Art as If the World Mattered*. by Lucy Neal 64-68. London: Oberon Books, 2015.

Gros, Frédéric, John Howe, and Clifford Harper. *A Philosophy of Walking*. 94. London: Verso, 2015.

Hewitt, Rachel. n.d. "I Decided to Start Walking down the Street like a Man. Spoiler: It Didn't Go Well." *New Statesman*. Accessed March 3, 2019. <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/uk/2018/11/i-decided-start-walking-down-street-man-spoiler-it-didn-t-go-well>.

Holder, Sarah, Sarah Holder, and CityLab. 2018. "How Maps Look Different When Women Make Them." *CityLab*. March 22, 2018. <https://www.citylab.com/equity/2018/03/who-maps-the-world/555272/>.

Ingold, Tim, and Jo Lee Vergunst. *Ways of Walking: Ethnography and Practice on Foot*. London: Routledge, 2016.

Khonsari, Torange. 2019. "Harnessing The Power Of The Civic Commons | Torange Khonsari | TEDxTottenham." YouTube. May 16, 2019. <https://youtu.be/i5RGnQyKrmA>.

Kumar, Satish. *Soil, Soul, Society: A New Trinity for Our Time*, 117 & 134. Lewes, East Sussex: Leaping Hare Press, 2017.

"Land Justice Network." n.d. Land Justice Network. Accessed February 10, 2019. <https://www.landjustice.uk/>.

Mollison, B. C., and Reny Mia. Slay. *Introduction to Permaculture*. Sisters Creek, Tasmania: Tagari Publications, 1991.

"Penny Woolcock: Fantastic Cities." *Modern Art Oxford*. Accessed January 21, 2019. <https://www.modernartoxford.org.uk/event/fantastic-cities/>.

Piiparinen, Richey "Faking It: The Happy Messaging of Placemaking." *Newgeography.com*. Accessed March 14, 2019. <http://www.newgeography.com/content/003244-faking-it-the-happy-messaging-placemaking>.

Pink, Sarah. *Situating Everyday Life: Practices and Places*. London: Sage, 2012.

Pollock, Griselda. 2003. *Vision and Difference*. 3rd ed. London, New York: Routledge.

Purcell, Mark. 2014. "Possible Worlds: Henri Lefebvre and the Right to the City." *Journal of Urban Affairs* 36 (1): 141

Ruivenkamp, Guido, and Andy Hilton. *Perspectives on Commoning: Autonomist Principles and Practices*. London: Zed, 2017.

Roberts, Yvonne. "Report Finds Shocking Absence of Women from UK Public Life." *The Guardian*. February 24, 2013. Accessed May 5, 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/feb/24/shocking-absence-women-uk-public-life>.

Schalansky, Judith, and Christine Lo. 2014. *Pocket Atlas of Remote Islands: Fifty Islands I Have Not Visited and Never Will*. New York: Penguin Books.

Shepherd, Nan. *The Living Mountain*. Canongate Books, 2011. First published 1977, Aberdeen University Press p.xxxii (Introduction by Robert MacFarlane).

Solnit, Rebecca. *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*. London: Verso, 2001. p138, p176

Solnit, Rebecca, and Paz de la Calzada. 2017. *Mother of All Questions: Further Reports from the Feminist Revolutions*. Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books.

"The Collective", Accessed April 14, 2019, <https://www.thecollective.com>

Truman, Sarah E., and Sarah E. Truman. "WalkingLab." *WalkingLab*. April 17, 2019. Accessed May 24, 2019. <https://walkinglab.org/>.

"Walking Women - Events." 2016, Live Art Development Agency. Accessed April 23, 2019. <https://www.thisisliveart.co.uk/whats-on/walking-women/>.

Wall, Derek. *Beyond Commons Feudalism and Platform Capitalism*, STIR Magazine Issue 20, Winter 2018

Yang, Soo-in, Kyung Jae Kim, and Hyungmin Pai. "Live Projects Seoul" In *Imminent Commons: Urban Questions for the near Future: Seoul Biennale of Architecture and Urbanism 2017*, by Alejandro Zaera and Hyungmin Pae, New York, NY: Actar Publishers, 2017.