

Unforeseeable situations: a confined reflection

Situações imprevisíveis: uma reflexão confinada

Situaciones impredecibles: una reflexión confinada

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Resumo

Situações imprevisíveis: uma reflexão confinada reflete o impacto das recentes restrições de confinamento na prática de pesquisa urbana incorporada apresentado num formato acadêmico não tradicional: ilustração cidadã. É um percurso não sequencial que destaca espaços específicos e, sobretudo, espaços emblemáticos da cidade de Amsterdã, ao mesmo tempo que os confronta com a realidade da ausência. Os espaços vazios são justapostos com conversas fantasmas, memórias superficiais da minha própria prática corporificada de caminhar, contrastando a superficialidade da realidade de superlotação turística na cidade de Amsterdã com os seus elementos físicos sólidos que permanecem mesmo sem esse superlotação. Desenhar nas ruas e aprender com essa interação com o espaço urbano é uma parte importante da minha pesquisa artística. No entanto, o cotidiano mudou rapidamente nos últimos meses devido ao surgimento e disseminação do novo coronavírus Sars-CoV-2 ao redor do mundo. Enquanto me encontro confinada atrás das paredes da minha casa, volto-me para essas ilustrações da cidade para refletir sobre meu papel como pesquisadora

urbana, sobre como lidar com a doença e sobre as implicações do confinamento na prática da pesquisa artística e corporificada.

Palavras-chave: Ilustração cidadina; Incorporação; Práticas artísticas; Investigação urbana feminista; Imaginação urbana.

Abstract

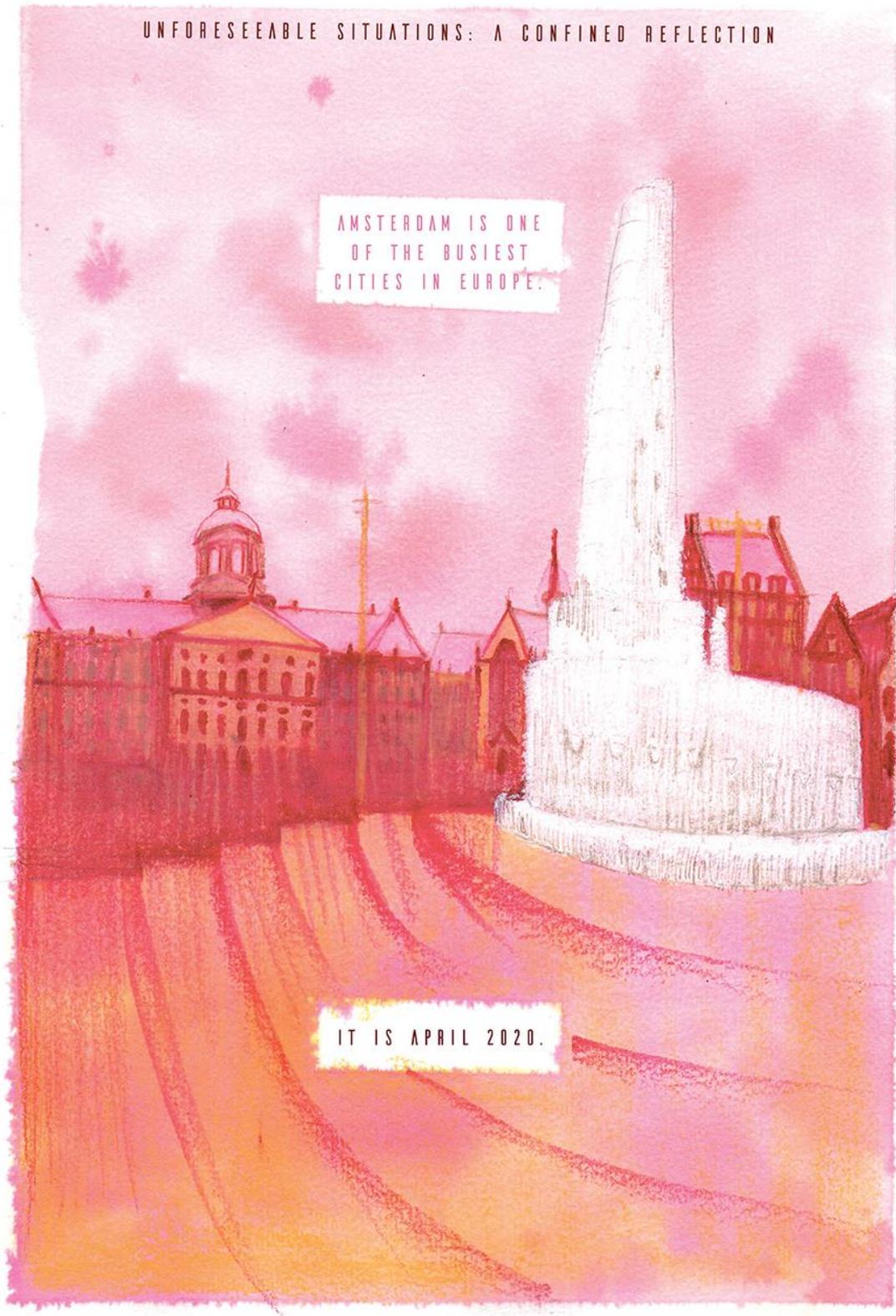
Unforeseeable Situations: A Confined Reflection considers the impact of the latest confinement restrictions on the urban embodied research practice in a non-traditional academic format: city illustration. It is a non-sequential route that highlights specific and mostly iconic spaces in the city of Amsterdam while confronting them with the reality of absence. The empty spaces are juxtaposed by ghost conversations, superficial memories of my own embodied practice of walking, contrasting the superficiality of the overcrowded tourist reality in the city of Amsterdam with the solid physical elements that remain in place even without it. Drawing in the streets and learning from this interaction with urban space is an important part of my artistic research. However, everyday life, in general, has quickly changed in these last months due to the emergence and dissemination of the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 around the world. As I find myself confined behind the walls of my house, I turn to these city illustrations to reflect on my role as a female urban researcher, learning how to cope with chronic illness, and the implications of confinement in the practice of artistic and embodied research.

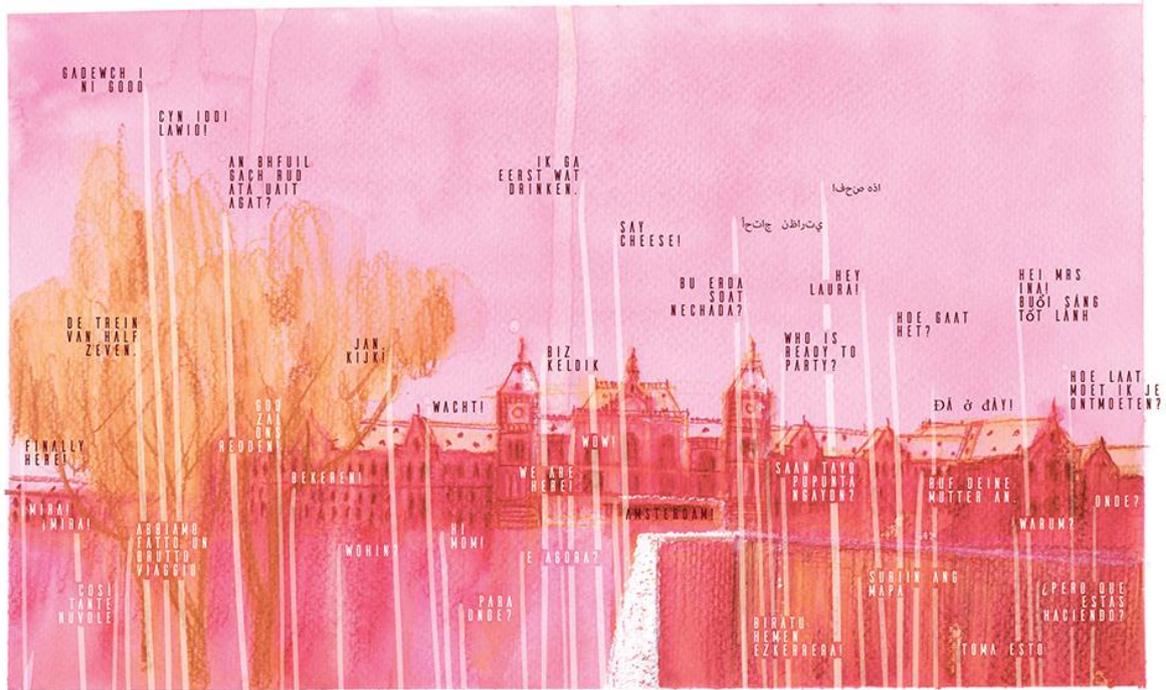
Keywords: City Illustration; Embodiment; Artistic practices; Feminist urban research; Urban imaginary.

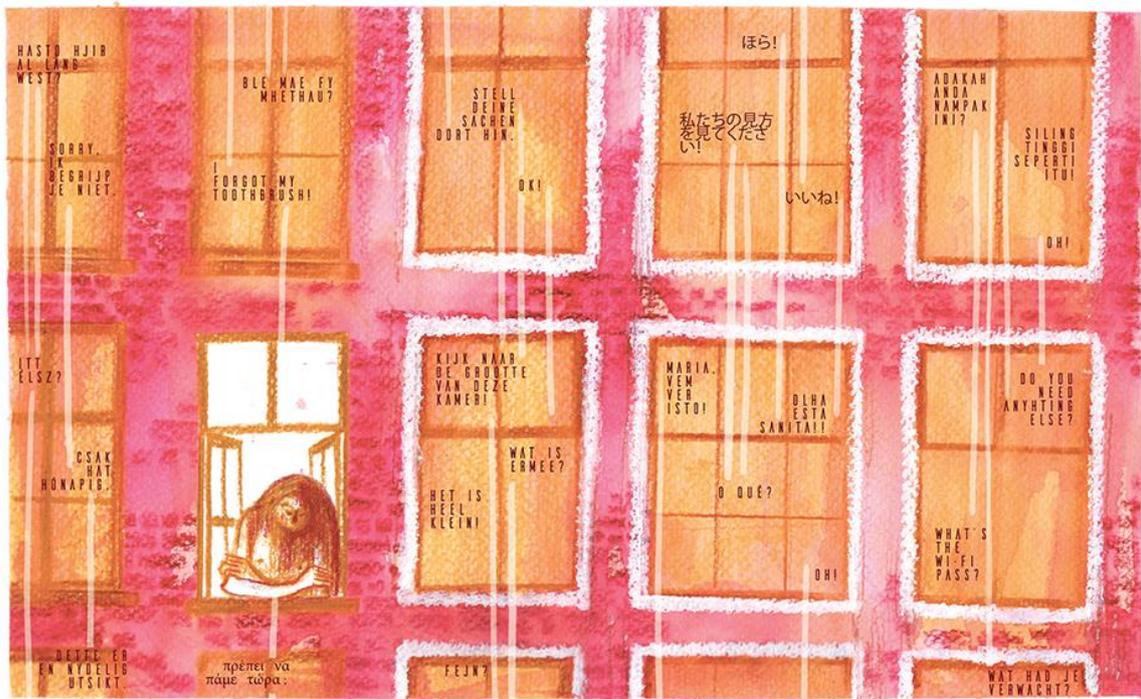
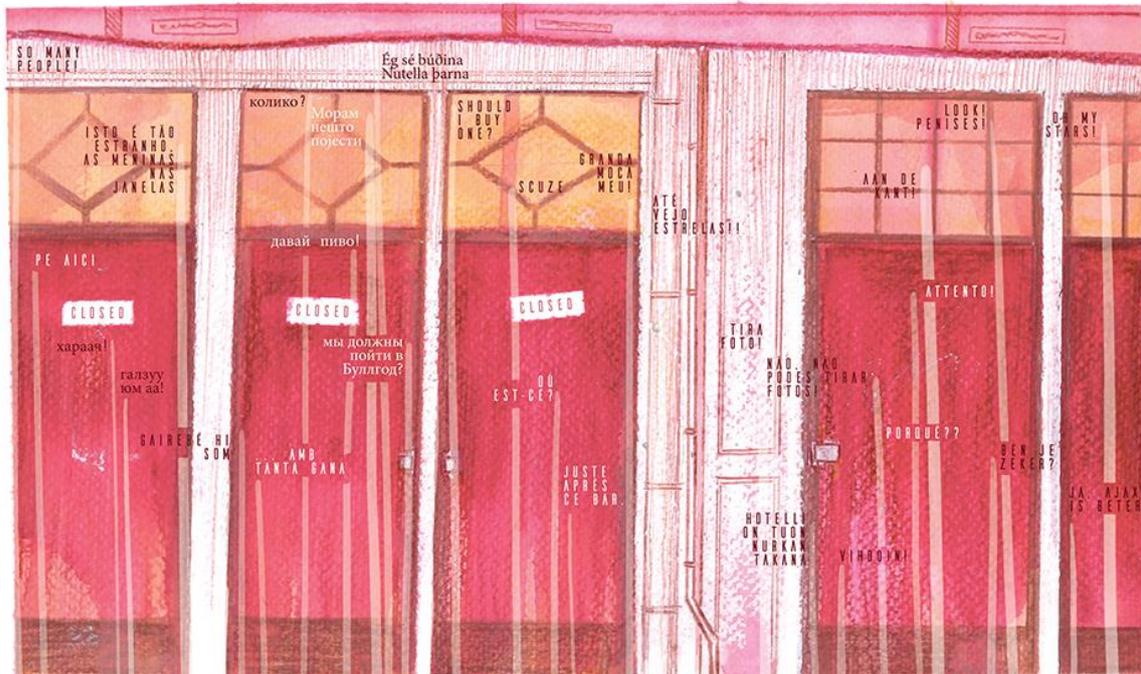
Resumen

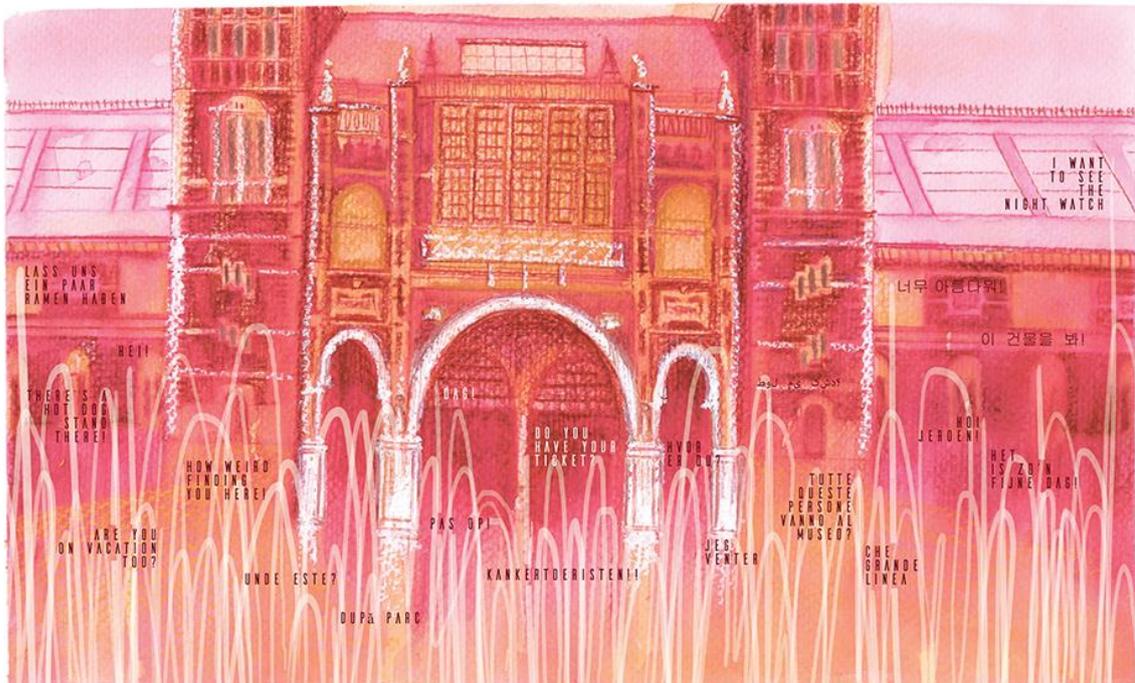
Situaciones Impredecibles: una Reflexión Confinada refleja el impacto de las recientes limitaciones en la práctica de la investigación urbana incorporada presentada en un formato académico no tradicional: la ilustración de la ciudad. Se trata de un recorrido no secuencial que resalta espacios concretos y, sobre todo, espacios emblemáticos de la ciudad de Amsterdam, al mismo tiempo que los confronta con la realidad de la ausencia. Los espacios vacíos se yuxtaponen con conversaciones fantasmas, recuerdos superficiales de mi propia práctica encarnada de caminar, contrastando la superficialidad de la realidad del hacinamiento turístico en la ciudad de Amsterdam con sus sólidos elementos físicos que permanecen incluso sin ella. Dibujar en las calles y aprender de esta interacción con el espacio urbano es una parte importante de mi investigación artística. Sin embargo, la vida cotidiana ha cambiado rápidamente en los últimos meses debido a la aparición y propagación del nuevo coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 en todo el mundo. Mientras estoy confinado detrás de las paredes de mi casa, recurro a estas ilustraciones de la ciudad para reflexionar sobre mi papel como investigador urbano, sobre cómo lidiar con las enfermedades y sobre las implicaciones del confinamiento en la práctica de la investigación artística y incorporada.

Palabras clave: Ilustración de la Ciudad; Incorporación; Práticas artísticas; Investigación Urbana feminista; Imaginación urbana.









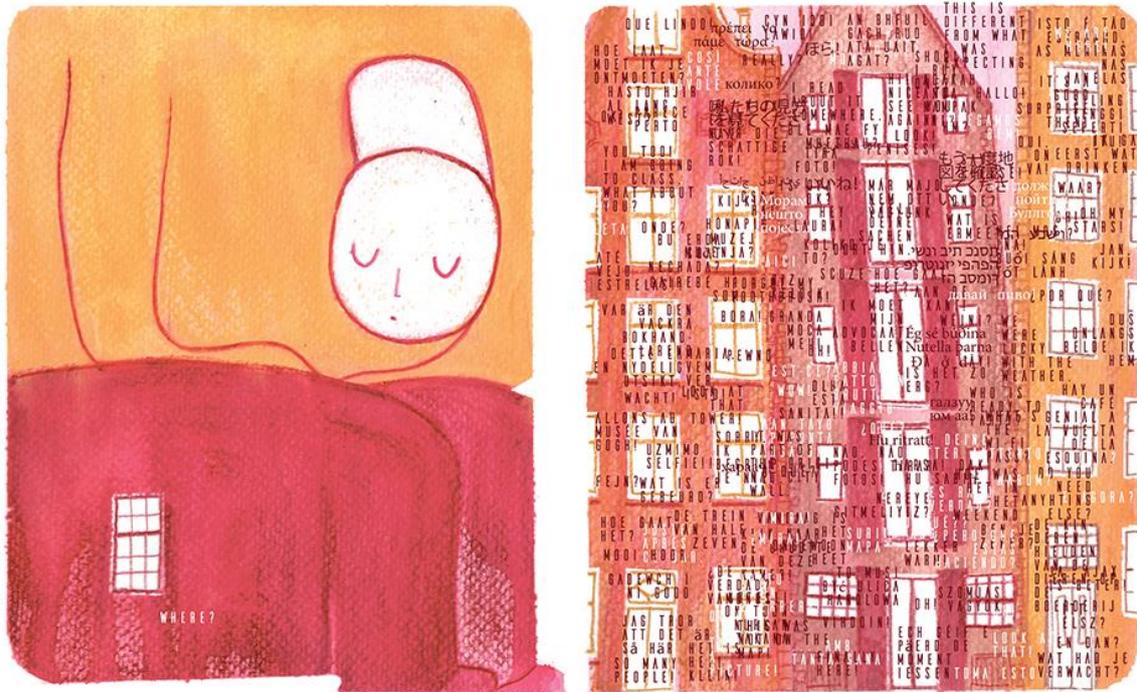




Figure 1-10: The city illustrations depicted in this article are akin to a picturebook based on walking practices in Amsterdam and on the retracing of those memories throughout a pandemic, 2020. Mixed media – borrowing from the medium specificities of picturebooks to create hybrid images where text and illustration are part of the same whole. The techniques used are washes of watery Kuretake watercolor on watercolor paper (Fabriano 300g), CaranD'ache Supracolor II watercolor colored pencils, and finishing on Adobe Photoshop. Amsterdam.

Unforeseeable situations: a confined reflection draws upon the impact of the latest confinement restrictions on urban embodied research practice in a non-traditional academic format: city illustration. Therefore, this article was divided into two different sections: the city illustrations that compose the visual narrative, followed by an introduction to my artistic practice. In this introduction, I will explain the main concepts and motivations behind these pieces of illustration but will not analyse them in full detail. I intend to let the pieces speak for themselves to allow readers to make a free, open-ended interpretation. This introduction will thus start by explaining my overall PhD research and the main concepts from which these illustrations developed¹.

My PhD research investigates how cities have been a vital component of visual storytelling and reportages in illustration that disclose urban space and its everyday practices. I explore the potential of illustration to be an intensive engagement between the illustrator and the city and, simultaneously, to create a discursive space in its lines which reveals the city as a complex entity through alternative and multiple perspectives. By combining theory and praxis, I intend to demonstrate through my artistic practice how the phenomenon of illustrated cities can be found at the intersection between urban experience, place and illustration. My understanding of illustration is reminiscent of Johanna Drucker's use of 'graphical knowledge' as that which relates to or contains graphic elements in order to send a message meaning that the resulting city illustration can graphically emphasize practices taking place in the city's space, reflecting on its mobility, while being an element of mobility itself (Drucker, 2006). Illustrated cities, such as the one presented in this article, are ground-based illustrations of urban settings propelled by the intent to communicate through visual narratives focusing on the purpose of generating meaning and producing qualitative knowledge (Brinkerhoff and McIlwain Nishimura 2019:2; Doyle et al. 2019: xix). Urban illustrators aim to clarify and evoke the subject of the city in an impactful, literal, or even metaphorical way by expressing meaningful content, using different visual signs and compositions.

The particular series of illustrations I am displaying in this article created mid-April 2020 when it was clear to me, as an individual suffering with chronic illness, that the fast progression of the SARS-CoV-2 virus would not allow me to maintain embodied work on the streets of Amsterdam - therefore forcing me to rethink my usual methodologies. This illustrated contribution also reflects a gendered place of the city, as my personal choices as an urban artist tend to be locations that are frequently crowded, where a lone woman may go unnoticed². Drawing in the streets is a subtle activity, but one that also disrupts the normative functions of space, as in turn, it may attract a lot of curiosity. Additionally, the illustrations presented were more than just retraced steps of past walks - they were critically constructed pieces based on sensorial memories. It is understood, in this way, that city illustration can reflect the tension between having been immersed in the city in the past (the performance of movement in urban space), and the remembrance of the mechanisms put in place to build it (memory and illustration). The re-

¹ This research is made possible with the support of FCT, the Portuguese National Funding Agency for Science, Research and Technology.

² For more on questions related to gendered urban space please see Kern (2020); for question related to the role of the woman in comics please see Chute (2010).

enactment of the embodied experience and the retraced path becomes a visual narrative of city activities, exposing its rhythms and the overall movements of its inhabitants.

The performance of my artistic practice can be structured around several characteristics that can be defined by complex dynamics built from traditional binaries (documentary/fiction; time/duration; look/gaze; motion/stillness; body/memory; public/private) - aiming to go beyond them and to allow the transition of the illustrator/walker from observed to observer/researcher. In other words, by defying the traditional binaries, urban illustrators may engage in a myriad of outside interactions and reveal the city's multiplicities. The conditions for my artistic practice in the streets amid a pandemic led me to a place of absence and memory, and consequently one of melancholy, expressed in the pages of the city illustrations I created. Building on this reflection and following the experience of confinement of these last months, I argue that the process of absence is as important as the process of presence in the performance of my urban artistic practice as research, as it reinforces and works on the fringes of performance and documentation, of sensing and of remembering, and of first impact and consequent reflection, not being quite one aspect or the other but somewhere in-between.

My artistic practice as research involves a series of embodied practices in different cities in Europe. The outcomes expressed in solo illustrations, small zines, and sketchbooks that I create as short narratives each revealing one walking performance or urban experiment. The choice of Amsterdam as a case study in this article has two main reasons. The first is practicality. Amsterdam is the city where I currently work and my artistic use of its streets, still fresh in my memory, had to change amidst a pandemic. This is a reflection on those changes. The second reason is the contrast between the processes of everyday life in a city such as Amsterdam. Many city dwellers, such as tourists and commuting workers, found themselves restricted and prevented from travelling freely which completely changed Amsterdam's cityscape and daily-life.

Building on Tim Ingold's (2011) work on the importance of graphic anthropology to understand and describe the world, I argue that drawing is an ability to understand and engage with the urban space in which I find myself in both as an illustrator and as a researcher. Recognizing the complex nature of my artistic practice, I combined different disciplines to engage with both embodied practices and graphical elements. I integrate a methodology loosely based on site-specific practices of walking in the city based on psychogeographical practices developed by authors such as Michel de Certeau (1984), Alison Powell (2018) and Guy Debord's Situationist International (1958[2009]), with the research methodologies of urban sketching (CAMPANARIO, 2012) and comic journalism (ARCHER, 2013; CHUTE, 2016; MICKWITZ, 2016; SACCO, 2012), which capture lived experiences of a non-fictional nature in a graphic drawn element. Through this mixed methodology, the illustrator may also enhance their ability to find their way around the city, as the drawn line is a prevalence that reflects the illustrator's thinking, evidencing a motion where the traces done on a paper surface are information added in real-time (INGOLD 2011, p. 222). By integrating these methodologies, I create a site-specific drawing experience as a performance act - likewise, a reflexive ability to simultaneously learn about the city and generate a critical process through which urban knowledge is

constructed and communicated. These methods aspire to blend my artistic practice as a performer/observer with my documented critical analysis as a researcher, hoping to inspire further experimentation in urban space.

Considering that urban space filled with the diversity of practices composed by the experience of bodies in motion through an ever-changing environment, one can suggest that this experience is a movement full of social and cultural significance (HARVEY, 2014). The rendering of urban space in illustration reveals that the lines of mobility between two spatial elements are full of activity. Space, according to de Certeau (1984, p. 117), is “a practiced place”, composed of the intersections between urban practices and dwellers’ movements, and considered a separate entity from its geographical configuration (place). Therefore, walking and drawing relate as practices in space that can create resistance, appropriation, and interpretation in a geographical place (DE CERTEAU 1984, xiv). Striving “for accuracy within a drawn work’s subjective framework” (SACCO 2012, xi), drawing, and city illustration, can simultaneously cause these lines of space, as defined by de Certeau, and the illustrator’s sensibility to move between reality and imagination while standing on their own.

Walking, and drawing in this sense, becomes a form of agency that allows the formation of affective attachment to space. Walking, or *dérive* as defined by Guy Debord (1958 [2009], p. 77-78), establishes the collection of psychogeographical articulations through the flow of events in the city, and their different units of environment and inhabitance. The drawing up of the practice based on psychogeography establishes walking as a structured activity with set time limits and routes. Occasionally, certain rules might be placed in order to limit the experience to a certain area or focus. However, despite every constraint of walking, drawing still has the freedom to explore. The illustrator might follow the city flow, reject it or even modify it while being immersed in space and retracing these choices on paper. For example, the illustrator walks through the streets watching their steps and surroundings, constantly changing the position of the eyes from the ground to the skies, gathering optical information and if possible, recording that on paper. Original plans may be thwarted by interesting textures, sounds, smells and other strong signals which have intervened in the process of walking, therefore triggering changes in direction and focus. In other words, the illustrator creates a rhythmic succession of movement and pause as something catches their senses while scanning the horizon. Slowing down or speeding up (prolonging the drawing or not) depends on how the senses play out through the city. In this sense, space becomes a sum of movements in the city. In the case of urban illustrators, these methodologies of walking in combination with drawing allow the illustrator to read urban space at a slow pace, to specifically allow the senses to take over and learn from them. The attachment to space created through this engagement is a result of the way the bodily senses mediate the illustrator’s routine activities in space, performed as both observation and documentation. These experiences and sensations are stored not only in the memory of the illustrator who has walked and defined the rhythms of the city, but in their sketchbook as well.

Pedro Salgado (2007, p. 6) suggests:

Seeing is not the same as observing. Scientific exploration/investigation is based on observation. So is drawing. Through a drawing, it is possible to better observe, understand, register, and communicate scientific facts and concepts. For the most part, science reaches those closely involved with it as well as a broader audience using images generated by drawing [...] it intends to tell a story, corresponding to a specific perspective of the model it represents [...] The best scientific illustrations are those that seek to balance these two strands: Art and Science³ (SALGADO, 2007, p. 6).

Understood in this way, both scientific investigation and drawing are acts of intense observation, record, and communication that intend to explore the world and tell its stories. Ingold (2011, p. 222-224) takes a similar stance as Salgado by regarding the practice of drawing as indispensable for the field of ethnography, adding that besides observation, drawing is a crucial ability for ethnographic description. Following these perspectives, I suggest that the inherent ability of the illustrator-researcher to question urban reality allows for a critical, open-ended reflection in a non-totalizing form – a way to think about the world while being in it through various conceptual and material possibilities (COTTER, 2019, p. 12-14). By gathering elements from different disciplines, artistic research questions traditional fields and methodologies of thinking, focusing on alternative processes of thought and experience (DE ASSIS; D'ERRICO, 2020, 1-3). Although still facing several challenges posed by the academic world, the artist as a researcher (not unlike a scientist) seeks to explore the particularities of practiced experiments. The focus on 'thinking by doing' turns research processes into creative acts in a permanent state of uncertainty and flow, blurring boundaries and problematising conventional practices in the fields with which it relates (DE ASSIS; D'ERRICO, 2020, p. 5). With a predominance in empirical experiments and reasoning, artistic practice becomes a scientific paradigm to understand how artists reflect on their surroundings (MUSTAQIM, 2018, p. 56). It aims to rethink artistic practices from within questioning its own creativity processes by looking into and intersecting with other fields of knowledge. This means that by exploring artistic practice, the researcher permeates every level of the research through creativity in hopes of understanding not only their practices, but also the world itself.

As mentioned previously, choices of routes, landscapes and landmarks depicted in the illustrations presented in this article not only influenced by their iconicity or popularity in the city of Amsterdam but also reflect a gendered view and experience of the city based on my artistic practice as research. As Leslie Kern (2020, p. 13) argues: "women still experience the city through a set of barriers - physical, social, economic, and symbolic – that shape their daily lives in ways that

³ Translation from the Portuguese by the author of the article: "Ver não é o mesmo que observar. A exploração/ investigação científica baseia-se na observação. O desenho também. Através do desenho é possível observar melhor, entender, registar e comunicar factos e conceitos da ciência. Por seu lado, a ciência chega aos seus intervenientes e ao grande público através de imagens geradas pelo desenho. [...] Cada desenho científico pretende contar uma história, corresponde a uma perspectiva particular do modelo a representar [...] As melhores ilustrações científicas são as que procuram equilibrar estas duas vertentes. Arte e Ciência" (SALGADO, 2007, p. 6).

are deeply (although not only) gendered". While walking in the city, I observed that the ordinary processes of daily life structured in specific rhythms and activities of which only a few seem to be properly design for women. I have found from my artistic practices' experience that disrupting the traditional notions of womanly activity in certain areas may seem out of the norm and bring about confusion. Ordinary urban practices and movements of city dwellers conform to the structure of the city and its guidelines. However, according to de Certeau (1984, p. xiv), unusual movements, such as walking and drawing, may be active elements of appropriation of the environment that surrounds typical city dwellers, producing a change in the perception of their urban space. This change rarely goes unnoticed.

The act of lingering or drawing in the streets of Amsterdam would sometimes raise suspicion. This would happen, for example, in Kalverstraat, a street currently known for its shopping and touristic activities where intently observing and quickly drawing is looked at as suspicious; or in quieter neighbourhoods where my practices were interpreted as institutional acts (municipality) provoking worry in the inhabitants. When drawing in a group, in sketchcrawls or with the urban sketchers, these questions were simply non-existent. The simple act of me being in the street alone, as a woman illustrator, was not seen as ordinary. My embodied practice and the remembering of that practice has allowed me to reflect on how my identity as a woman dictates the types of choices available to me. This site-specificity becomes a part of my body as a space for interaction with the city, considering my personal experiences are reflected in the movement of drawing. The fact that there are no illustrations at night, or that I have not performed any walking practices during the pandemic but chose to work from memory raises pertinent questions related to my body's security and healthiness, as well as awareness of the role of women in the city. "We anticipate these questions and they shape our mental maps as much as any actual threat" (KERN, 2020, p. 15). This constitutes what Kern (2020, p. 14) argues as the "woman's fear in cities" which disrupts female experience in a city, in conscious or even unconscious ways.

Nonetheless, artistic practice is allowing me to face these unconscious fears as cities can equally become a place where rules can be disrupted, boundaries can be blurred or broken, and new roles can be obtained. According to de Certeau (1984, p. 161), these spatial practices may act as a response to technologies that encourage the disembodiment of everyday life, especially of women. My investigation as illustrator-researcher desires to take on the unknown and unpredictability of the embodied practice in the city as part of the processes of urban understanding. These motivations shape the level of engagement of my drawing practices as I walk through the street and emphasize the process of 'thinking by doing'. A constant response to the environment I find myself in.

Although the act of walking can be outlined in a map by its trajectory, the action stays invisible for those who read it (INGOLD 2002, p. 234; DE CERTEAU 1984, p. 115). However, de Certeau (1984, p. 161-162) suggests that the art of building a route through walking is equivalent to the art of narrative. As such, drawing as artistic research may be an alternative mode of understanding the environment in which the illustrator finds herself in and an act of giving shape to the rhetorics of walking revealing the invisible actions through a visual narrative. Daily life, de

Certeau (1984) suggests, is conceived poetically and mystically, often aided by chance. Those who are on the ground floor, outside of panoptical visibility, are the ones who inhabit space and ordinarily experience urban life creating a metaphorical urban mesh drawn by their embodiment and memory. This implies that the results of this cultural construction will have a symbolic structure in their representation based on the projection of the illustrator's body in urban space. Therefore, by linking the illustrator is moving body in urban space with the gesture of their hands in a paper drawing, an important tool to understand and describe an empirical and phenomenological world i revealed.

Ingold (2011, p. 179) states: 'As a technique of observation, drawing is unrivalled'. Yet, drawing appears to remain overlooked in different disciplines, from anthropology to urban studies, in the connection between observation and description due to its status of unimportance when compared to other renderings of the city especially text, photography, and film. However, considering artistic practice as research as an alternative mode of thinking, I argue that the act of illustration is a process in which the illustrator-researcher uses the practice of drawing to understand the environment in which she finds herself in. The resulting illustrations depict the tension between performance and documentation as processes of engagement with both real and imaginary spaces creating a hybrid discursive space. The results are reflexive pieces that simultaneously allow the artist to learn about the city and to generate critical processes in the illustration through which sensible urban knowledge is constructed and communicated. Through the combined methodology mentioned previously, I am able to blend my artistic practice as an observer/performer with my documented critical analysis as a researcher, hoping to inspire further experimentation in creative urban practices.

It was in my artistic practice, particularly the tensions between performance and documentation amplified by this pandemic, that I found the need to reflect about the presence of the illustrator in the streets, the memory of that event and the importance of absence in the processes of urban documentation through illustration⁴. The awareness of the illustrator in the streets is replicated in the construction of the illustrator's experience through memory in the drawing, no differently from the performance of the whole moving body through the street. According to Ingold (2002, p. 103): memory is more than a mind's storage where information is preserved, it is in fact "an activity situated in the world". Building on Ingold's perception of memory, I state that the memory of embodied practices is also a site-specific activity as important for the reflexivity of my artistic practice as walking and drawing in the street⁵. The act of remembering through illustration preserves the contents of everyday life experience and of drawing *in situ* (on location) and implies the externalization of acquired knowledge into paper. The body, both through embodied experience in the city and through the gesture on paper, becomes the mediator to capture the moment. The question that concerns

4 Such urban experience may resemble Walter Benjamin's concept of *Erlebnis* e *Erfahrung* where the former refers to the lived and witnessed experience focusing on the internal flows of existence, and the later refers to a learning experience in which something fundamental is gained in encounters through the possibilities of communication and construction of collective meaning. Their combination allows for the enrichment of the traditional experience. For more on the two modalities of experience *Erlebnis* e *Erfahrung* present in his seminal essay "The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov " please see Benjamin (1968[2007].

5 For more on questions regarding memory and place please see Ingold, 2002.

my artistic practice while in confinement is: what is the meaning of memory and absence for a site-specific methodology? Part of the answer lies in the illustrated space created by the tension between the acts of performance and documentation of the illustrator-researcher caught in the struggle of being in the environment and remembering the environment. Another part lies in the graphic languages used to construct these illustrations as pieces of information that are transmitted and disseminated from the artist's urban experience to others. The illustration becomes in this way not just an object of memory but the practice of memory in which the illustrator retraces her movement through the environment as she gestures these experiences through pencil, watercolour or ink on paper.

Conclusion

In closing, I have shown how artistic practice as research, through city illustration, may raise questions of self-reflexivity as well as create a continuous space for experience and discourse. Particularly in my practice, I found that the processes of being physically embodied in an urban space through the act of walking could not be surpassed by the bodily activity of remembering that same space only with hand gestures in the paper pages of illustrations. The tension between the female movement of the body in the city and the re-enactment of this experience through a visual narrative emphasizes the rhythms and flows (or lack of them) of urban experiences of everyday life. In this sense, the illustrations reflect and question normative urban activities that were taken for granted before this pandemic. Simple activities such as going to a shopping street are, as of this moment, either forbidden or discouraged. The processes in which these illustrations were constructed have shown that absence, through memory, is as important as the process of embodiment in the city, of being present. It rather reflects on different aspects of the urban embodied experience, of critical thought and sensible reflection, and reinforces the importance of the illustrated city created by the tension between performance and documentation as an open-ended and ongoing process.

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