

## Make the invisible visible



I remember reading Patrick Modiano's *Missing person* in my mid twenties, and how the book had a huge impact on me – how memory is an unpredictable but yet fascinating thing. In the book a man – a private detective - who lost his memory is searching for a man and he ends up finding clues that lead him to himself. So who is he then? This twist makes memory question our own ideas about who we are, and who we want to be. Modiano describes the weave of memories in a city:

With the passing of the years, each neighbourhood, each street in a city evokes a memory, a meeting, a regret, a moment of happiness for those who were born there and have lived there. Often the same street is tied up with successive memories, to the extent that the topography of a city becomes your whole life, called to mind in successive layers as if you could decipher the writings superimposed on a palimpsest. And also the lives of the thousands upon thousands of other, unknown, people passing by on the street or in the Métro passageways at rush hour.<sup>45</sup>

Memories, like a hidden topography yet to be discovered.

---

<sup>45</sup> Patrick Modiano, *Nobel lecture by Patrick Modiano 2014-12-07*, p. 17.  
[http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/literature/laureates/2014/modiano-lecture\\_en.pdf](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2014/modiano-lecture_en.pdf)

Our memories form who we are, without memories, who are we then?  
Or are we at all? These are questions I ask the audience. "Memory makes us human. Without it people are turned into a formless mass that can be shaped into anything the controllers of the past desire."<sup>46</sup>

This is a piece that I started working on during the fall of 2014 at the Academy of Music and Drama in Gothenburg. Cecilia Lagerstöm led a Lab forum and the task was:

Choose an essay from the book *Re:searching Gothenburg* as your working material and work out a sketch for an artistic proposal, to be performed in that location or to be related to the place or problem that the essay is rising.<sup>47</sup>

A text about how the architecture and planning of the city exclude happenings and memories that are not a part of the power structure, is catching my interest. In her essay *SITES OF AMNESIA* Ingrid Martins Holmberg describes how the history of Romany camps are forgotten in the collective memory of the city. "Those without property and address are doomed to remain outside the city's materialized self-image and memory..."<sup>48</sup> So how can one reclaim the cityscape by cheering memories? That is the question I explore in the performance piece that I develop inspired by the text.

The city's self-image is intimately connected to who and what is allowed to take place in the collective memory. The right to the past in the form of memory is decided by unequal power relations that give precedence to certain individuals, groups or occurrences, and such precedence tends to be naturalized over long periods of time.<sup>49</sup>

The city's and building's materiality dictate the self-image of the city. In that way a selection is made on which stories and memories will be

---

<sup>46</sup> Aleksandr Nekrich, Mikhail Heller, *Utopia in power. The history of the Soviet Union from 1917 to the present..* (New York 1986), p. 9.

<sup>47</sup> Instructions for a laboratory work on performance sent by e-mail from Cecilia Lagerström, professor at the Academ of Music and Drama, University of Gothenburg.

<sup>48</sup> Ingrid Martins Holmberg, "Sites of Amnesia" in *Re:searching Gothenburg*, ed. Helena Holgersson, Catharina Thörn, Håkan Thörn, Mattias Wahlström, (Gothenburg 2010), p. 192.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 186

1982 - I am 19 - It is in June  
We are going to see Rolling Stones on Ullevi; I am going there with some friends in our bus.

The bus stops a couple of kilometers outside Gothenburg

Something is wrong with the engine and it does not start again. We have to hitchhike the last kilometers.

I have nowhere to stay.

I meet some friends; Helene and Kathrine, I can stay with them at Kathrine's aunt's apartment.

It is somewhere close to Haga, Linnégatan maybe, or Olivedalsgatan?

My friends stay in a small room just behind the kitchen. In this little room, there is a little door leading to an even smaller room - a wardrobe. This is where I sleep.

Of course the space is too small

So I sort of have to sleep like this:

*Here I lie down on the floor preferably over a doorstep, in the door that leads us into the performance space.*

There is a party in the apartment. Everyone is leaving their shoes in the hallway, and so do I.

An ocean of shoes.

My shoes are swimming with the other shoes. I don't know anyone at the party; they are much older than us and from this other city - Gothenburg. Tomorrow is the concert.

I wake up in the

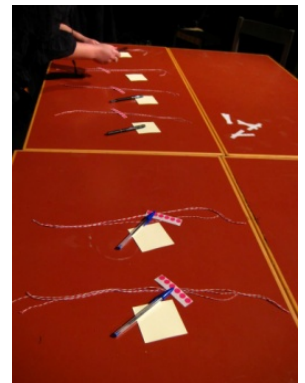
remembered. The city contains and hides a myriad of untold stories and memories, a hidden and forgotten archive. To try to retell some of these excluded memories is an act of reclaiming the City.

This is what I do: I start with sharing my first memory of Gothenburg – a very simple memory but nevertheless my very personal memory.

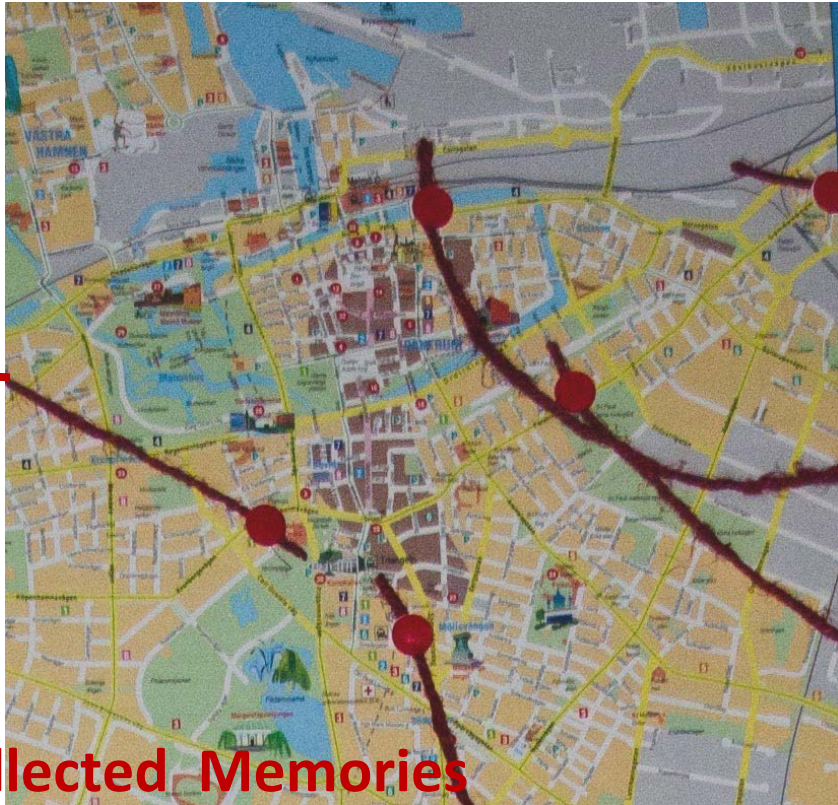
After sharing my memory I invited the participants to share their memories and thus together contribute to the act of reshaping the story of the city and make the invisible visible. An act of reclaiming the story of one's own neighbourhood. The room we step into is an immersive space with maps of Gothenburg on the walls. There are pens and papers to write down memories on, a piece of yarn to connect the written memory to where it took place on the map. The room is filled with a soundscape of Gothenburg streets, and pictures of various locations in the city are shown.

It was a sound, film and picture installation with one performer interacting with the audience.

By inviting the audience to share their memories and thus reshape the map we reclaimed and reinterpreted the cityscape together. This was a performance made in a 1 to 1-7 setting meaning one performer and an audience with 1-7 participants. By acknowledging each other's memories we might be able to see the city in a new perspective. Street corners that we before neglected will evoke new stories about what happened in the past and maybe change us a little bit.







## Collected Memories

*I came early a September morning - walking back and forth in the town centre - all shops still closed - I stopped by the florists unpacking their scents and colours in the autumn sun but I didn't by anything this memory*

On passing the square early in the morning when the florists start to unpack for the market, how passing all these colourful flowers made a big impact on the owner of the memory.



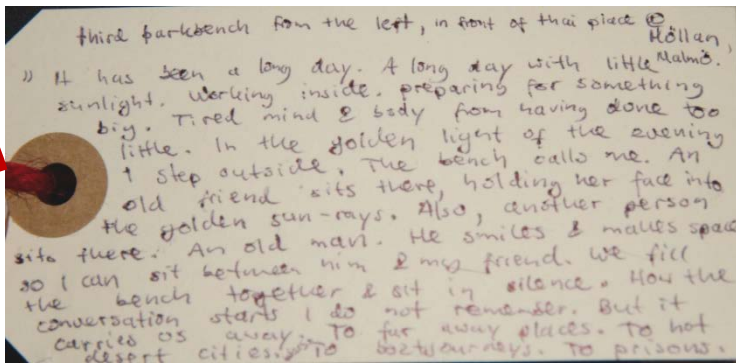
A memory of a masterclass in opera singing and how the memory owner for the first time meets a queer perspective and other queer-oriented colleagues, a strong and positive memory of possibilities.

A good kiss.

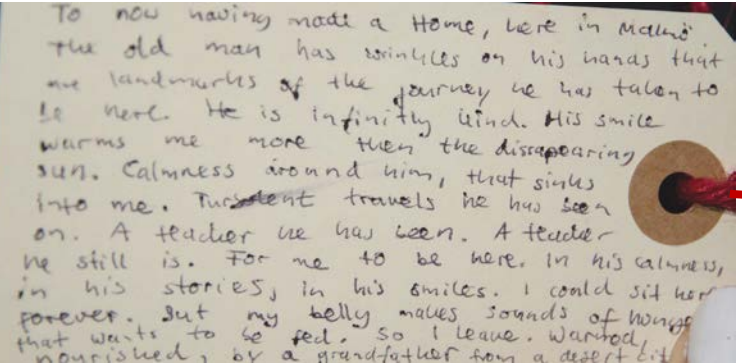


## Perpetuum immobile – One memory creating new memories

At sisters Academy a woman writes down this memory and connects it to a square on the map. I ask her if she wants me to bring her memory to the square where it happened.



third parkbench from the left, in front of this place @ Möllan, Malmö.  
» It has been a long day. A long day with little sunlight. Working inside, preparing for something big. Tired mind & body from having done too little. In the golden light of the evening I step outside. The bench calls me. An old friend sits there, holding her face into the golden sun-rays. Also, another person sits there. An old man. He smiles & makes space so I can sit between him & my friend. We fill the bench together & sit in silence. How the conversation starts I do not remember. But it carries us away to far away places. To hot desert cities. To journeys. To prisons.



To now having made a home, here in Malmö. The old man has wrinkles on his hands that are landmarks of the journey he has taken to be here. He is infinitely kind. His smile warms me more than the disappearing sun. Calmness around him, that sinks into me. Turbulent travels he has been on. A teacher he has been. A teacher he still is. For me to be here. In his calmness, in his stories, in his smiles. I could sit here forever. But my belly makes sounds of hunger that want to be fed. So I leave. Warmed, & nourished, by a grandfather from a desert city.

The third parkbench from the left, in front of the place – Möllvångstorget

It has been a long day. A long day with little sunlight. Working inside, preparing for something big. Tired mind and body from having done too little. In the golden light of the evening I step outside. The bench calls me. An old friend sits there, holding her face into the golden sun-rays. Also another person sits there. An old man. He smiles and makes space so I can sit between him and my friend. We fill the bench together and sit in silence. How the conversation starts I do not remember. But it carries us away to far away places. To hot desert cities, wars and to journeys. To prisons. To now having made a home, here in Malmö. The old man has wrinkles on his hands that are landmarks of the journey he has taken to be here. He is infinitely kind. His smile warms me more than the disappearing sun. Calmness around him, that sinks into me. Turbulent travels he has been on. A teacher he has been. A teacher he still is. For me to be here. In his calmness, in his stories, in his smiles. I could sit here forever. But my belly makes sounds of hunger that want to be fed. So I leave. Warmed and nourished by a grandfather from a desert city.

One week later I deliver the memory, it is a sunny day. The square – Möllvångstorget in Malmö - is filled with market stalls selling flowers, fruit and vegetables. There is an ongoing activity of selling and buying but people also linger in the early autumn sun. There is a man sitting at the bench where the memory belongs. I wonder if he might be the man from the desert city in the memory. I start talking to him, he is

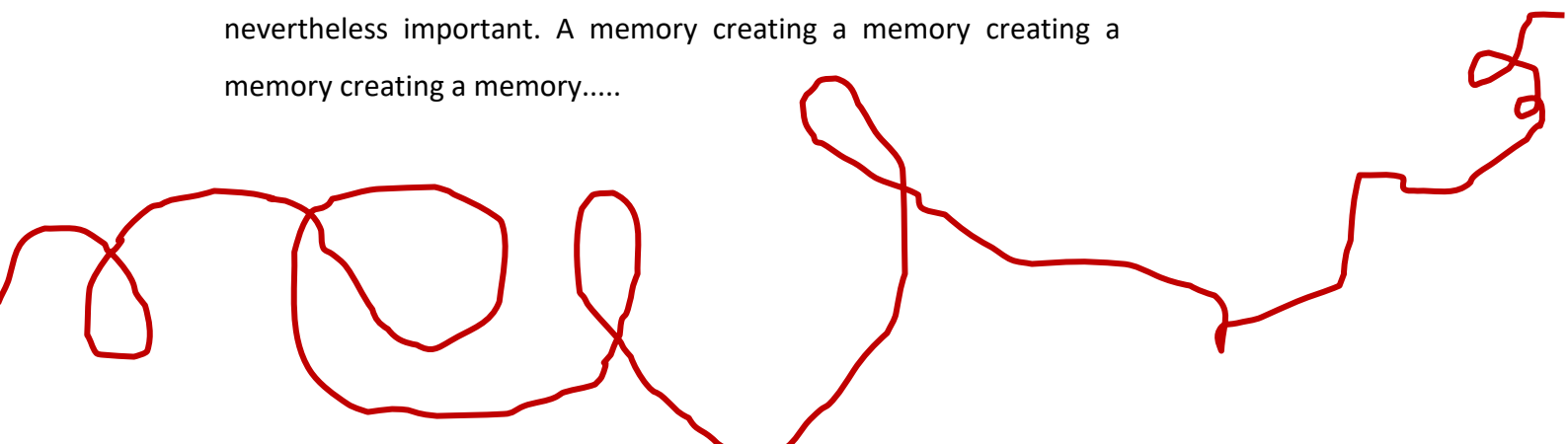


not speaking english nor swedish. Another man comes up and asks what I want? I tell the story of the memory, the men talk to each other. They are not the ones that the memory is about but we talk, some street cleaners turn up and join the discussion. I ask if it is okay that I put the memory by the bench and take a photograph. They laugh and say: as long as you don't send it to Bashar al Assad.

After this I return to the Sisters Academy and tell the woman about how her memory created a new memory when I placed her memory



at the bench in the square. A very simple human encounter but nevertheless important. A memory creating a memory creating a memory creating a memory.....



Text from *A Critical Wedge* by Annikki Wahlöö <https://gupea.ub.gu.se/handle/2077/44654>  
Degree Project, 60 higher education credits, Master of Fine Arts in Theatre with specialization in acting  
Academy of Music and Drama, University of Gothenburg, Spring Semester 2016