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Hidden Contributions? Searching for Women in Copenhagen's Suburban Landscapes

They are used on a daily basis, but few of us think of them as having been designed and planned: parks, school playgrounds, town centres, squares, sports fields, cycle paths, and motorways dating from the post-World War II decades. Such quotidian landscapes were a key part of the huge planning efforts that took place in Scandinavia and beyond during the 1950s to the 1970s, a period when urban growth was being organised to create new landscapes for modern citizens supported and regulated by the welfare states. These *welfare landscapes* were unprecedented in their sheer quantity and extent.¹ They reflect the period's strong belief that planning and design – of everything, from cutlery and furniture to playgrounds, housing areas, and large park, road and water systems – could improve the lives of individuals and communities, and could even contribute to reach the ideal of the universal distribution of welfare, which characterizes the post-war Scandinavian state policy.² The huge urban expansions and building projects of the period created significant modern monuments all over Scandinavia, including new town halls, churches, sports facilities and schools – some of which later became absorbed into the canon of architecture. But most of this designed urban landscape has lived a much more silent life in architectural histories.³ Many landscape architects' works for the post-war welfare state remain *hidden contributions*: designed gestures that form the basis of many people's lives and are significant in our cities, but which are not usually perceived as designed landscapes. Scandinavian landscape architecture of the twentieth century is traditionally written about in terms of a few designers who are highlighted as the drivers of innovation in modernist garden art and landscape architecture.⁴ These are most often men. Although some important pioneer-

1 Ellen Marie Braae et al., "Welfare Landscapes: Open Spaces of Danish Social Housing Estates Reconfigured," in *Mass Housing of the Scandinavian Welfare States: Exploring Histories and Design Strategies*, ed. Miles Glendinning and Svava Riesto (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh/DocoMoMo, 2020), 13–23. Johan Pries and Matthias Qviström, "The Patchwork Planning of a Welfare Landscape: Reappraising the Role of Leisure Planning in the Swedish Welfare State," *Planning Perspectives* 36, no. 5 (2021): 923–948.

2 Gösta Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (Hoboken NJ: John Wiley, 2013).

3 See e.g. Liv Løvetand Rahbek, Svava Riesto and Henriette Steiner, *by Women: A Guidebook to Everyday Architecture in Greater Copenhagen* (Aarhus: Ikaros Press, 2022).

4 See e.g. Mark Treib, ed., *The Architecture of Landscape 1940–1960* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002). Sven-Ingvar Andersson and Steen Høyer, *C. Th. Sørensen: En havekun-*

ing work has been done on the contributions of the many women who entered the disciplines during the twentieth century, many of the stories of their contributions to welfare landscapes are yet to be written.⁵

This lack of knowledge and attention often makes it difficult to assess the value of these landscapes or their potential future roles. Observing the contemporary urban development of post-war landscapes in Stockholm, Catharina Nolin provocatively states that landscape architecture designed by women is “rich – but threatened – cultural heritage.”⁶ Although green landscapes and public spaces are always in flux, many welfare landscapes are currently facing significant changes. New urban agendas such as privatisation, densification, climate adaptation, biodiversity agendas, and new ways of living are pressing for change in urban landscapes across Scandinavia. How can we begin to understand women landscape architects’ more or less hidden contributions from the post-war decades, and hence to discuss their potential roles in today’s and tomorrow’s city? How can we do so in ways that avoid the pitfalls of canonisation or idealisation, instead seeking to understand them from a multitude of perspectives that grasp some of the landscapes’ complexities?

This chapter emerged from experimental, interdisciplinary fieldwork that tested collective modes of investigation and interpretation. The chapter considers two projects, a school and a park, created by the Danish landscape architect Agnete Mygind (1918–1991) together with her then partner Erik Mygind (1916–1978). Agnete Mygind changed to her name Muusfeldt after the couple’s divorce, and we hereafter refer to her as Muusfeldt. She worked extensively on public commissions from the 1950s to the 1980s, and she was especially active as a consultant to the Copenhagen suburban municipality of Rødovre, where the two projects are located. The projects have eluded most architectural histories, and today they are barely visible in architectural magazines or architectural archives. Some of her work, both solo and with Mygind, is held in the Collection of Landscape Architectural Drawings at the Danish Royal Library. The mere existence of this collection is

stner (Copenhagen: Arkitektens Forlag, 2001). Malene Hauxner, *Fantasiens have: Det moderne gennembrud i havekunsten og sporene i byens landskab* (Copenhagen: Arkitektens Forlag, 1993).

5 Annemarie Lund, *Danmarks Havekunst, vol. 3, 1945–2002* (Copenhagen: Danish Architecture Press, 2002). Annemarie Lund, *Guide to Danish Landscape Architecture 1000–2000* (Copenhagen: Danish Architecture Press, 2003). The collaborative online publication projects *Kvindebiografisk Lexikon* (Denmark) and *Kvinnobiografiskt lexicon* (Sweden); Jenny B. Osuldsen, ed., *Outdoor Voices: The Pioneer Era of Norwegian Landscape Architecture* (Oslo: Orfeus, 2019). Catharina Nolin, “Women Landscape Planners and Green Space: Sweden, 1930–1970,” in *Green Landscapes in the European City, 1750–2010*, ed. Peter Clark, Marjaana Niemi and Catharina Nolin (London: Routledge, 2018), 175–190. Bendsen, Steiner, Riesto, *Untold Stories*.

6 Catharina Nolin cited in Karin Andersson, “Kvinnorna formade vardagslandskapen,” *Stad*, no. 32 (March 2021): 30.

somewhat exceptional, in Europe in general and Scandinavia in particular: while Denmark and Norway have similar collections dedicated to landscape architecture, Sweden and Finland do not. The Muusfeldt holding mostly comprises photographs she took for teaching purposes, and it does not include many of her drawings as we write. Apart from this holding, we at first found no obvious traces of Muusfeldt's many large design commissions for Rødovre municipality. This is typical when one is studying woman landscape architects: one can often find little information by looking in one archive alone. Instead, it becomes a sort of detective game in which historians must search in multiple places, applying multiple archival strategies, and that is what we did at this workshop. Indeed, we saw the somewhat hidden state of these projects in authoritative architectural historical records as an opportunity rather than a constraint. At the time of the workshop, very little established architectural historical narrative about Muusfeldt, her contribution, or the two specific projects in question existed.⁷ The lack of records in the official archives inspired us to go and search elsewhere. Our fieldwork tested how archival sources could be taken into the field and used to create knowledge about various aspects of the landscape. It lasted only an afternoon, but it still resulted in new knowledge and rich conversations. The aim was both to create new knowledge about Muusfeldt's largely forgotten work and to test a collective approach to historical fieldwork that may be relevant to further work on other hidden contributions to the landscape, in Scandinavia and elsewhere, by men and women.

1 Studying Agnete Muusfeldt's Contributions in Rødovre, Copenhagen

While few people today know about Muusfeldt's work in Rødovre, the municipality is known for another architect's work. Its famous town hall and modernist city centre were designed by the most famous Danish architect, Arne Jacobsen, and when they were finished in the mid-1950s, they became symbols of modern life in this rapidly growing suburb, set in a landscape that had formerly comprised farms and small settlements. The town hall and town centre, with its library and large public square, seemed to materialise the democratic ideals of the new welfare society: in this horizontally extended city, no one building towered over the others, and the public symbol of the town hall spoke to finesse and expensive materials. It

⁷ Since the workshop, we have published on Muusfeldt e.g. in Bendsen, Riesto, Steiner, *Untold Stories* (Copenhagen: Strandberg Publishing, 2023).

was here, in this acclaimed piece of architecture, that we found ourselves at the end of the workshop, and the brightly lit building seemed to be anything but a hidden contribution. It was clearly designed according to strict forms, and the vast space in front of it – designed in 2012 by landscape architect and professor Sven-Ingvar Andersson – made the building stand out; our walk from the bus that took us to the fieldwork and up to the town hall felt indeed like a promenade. The town hall's meeting rooms, we discovered, were the perfect setting for a Scandinavian workshop, since they had even been named after towns in Nordic countries: the Finnish Järvenpää, the Norwegian Lørenskog. Indeed, rather than placing the iconic town hall and Muusfeldt's designs for Rødovre in opposition, our bus trip between the sites made it clear that they were all entangled in the same urban fabric. They were all part of the urban expansion of the 1950s and 1960s, when Rødovre became interwoven with larger systems of roads, green wedges, and parks along the waterways of the Copenhagen metropolitan region.

As part of its rapid urbanization during the 1950s, Rødovre decided to hire landscape architects to design some of its many new school playgrounds, social housing estates, street plantings, and public parks. Muusfeldt became the municipality's close collaborator and consultant. Valhøj school, which we visited during the fieldwork, was a design that she made together with Mygind and the architects Hans Hartvig Skaarup and Jens Marius Jespersen (1953–1961); the public park Viemose was one of many parks that she designed with her own company (1961–1968). These designs were not necessarily the largest or most significant projects of Muusfeldt's long career, but perhaps rather examples of her quotidian work on everyday landscapes.

We had previously collected documents, pictures, texts, and other materials from archives and books that might tell us something about Viemose park and Valhøj school. Each group was handed a own folder of archival material that shed light on different aspects of the park and school, ranging from short biographical texts about Muusfeldt to local histories of Rødovre at the time when the school was new and photographs of everyday life at the school during throughout time, Muusfeldt's own photographs of the sites when they were newly designed, an analysis of Viemose park's fauna, and aerial photographs of the larger landscape where the sites are situated. Maja Rosendahl Larsen, a landscape architect for Rødovre municipality, met us in Viemose park and told us about its role in the local community and how the park is maintained.

Although the groups could use their folders of archival material to learn about the sites, they were not obliged to do so, and the workshop format was free and experimental. We asked everyone to take the material into the field, but they could choose whether to draw on it or just to rely on their own observations and discussions. All groups got the following questions:

- How can we create knowledge about landscape architects' more or less hidden contributions to creating space in the welfare state?
- What are the opportunities and pitfalls of different ways of going about such investigation?

The groups were also asked to bring back two pictures from each site and to share their thoughts. Below we share with you their short accounts of the groups' work, which in turn suggest ways of approaching women's contributions through field-work, and pose methodological questions for future research.

Photographing Change – The Island as Motive

Maria Bay Wendt and Maria Markman

Our group worked with Muusfeldt's own photographs of the two sites. Muusfeldt used to take pictures of her own work and that of others, immediately after the works' completion and years later. People who knew her say that she would linger for hours, waiting for the right light. She would drive back to gardens and parks every season, to observe their rhythms and changes. Growth and withering, rain, and new beginnings. Vitality, lush combinations of plants, and their many changing shapes seem to have been at the centre of her attention.

As we visited the sites, her photographs of her landscapes' lives formed the basis of many discussions about Muusfeldt's aesthetics. Her landscapes reveal an almost Romantic interest in combining different tree shapes and sizes on large sloping lawns, playing with light and shadow, and promoting curiosity about and closeness to plants. Her text about the garden with which she grew up, which she describes as idyllic, suggests that she brought her own experience of life in a wealthy family with a designed into her many public commissions for the post-war welfare society. Pastoral motifs are present in her account of her family's garden, which she describes as a formative experience that made her feel connected to plants and the forces of landscape for the rest of her life.

Viemose Park bears witness to her memories of her childhood garden. The pastoral motif of the pond where little Agnete would sail her boat, a tiny island was placed for her to explore. This design is recalled in the park's water basin, which was designed to collect heavy rainfall in the low-lying wetlands as urban expansion took off during the 1960s. The basin communicates reminiscing qualities of her childhood garden with an embedded motive of an island. This park thus combines the engineering of the growing urban region with pastoral motifs that we encountered by looking at her photos and walking in the field.

Valhøj School: Discovering Landscape as Education

Catharina Nolin and Julia Donner

The school playground seemed so quiet when we arrived on a November afternoon. There were still some children present, but many had already gone home. Clearly, the pupils were meant to arrive by bicycle from the nearby residential areas, which had been built in the 1950s, as had the school itself. There seemed to us to be an abundance of cycle parking spaces. Most striking of all, however, was the scale of the school's buildings and gardens: they were clearly made for children. No building here is too large for a child. Windows stretch almost to the floor, so that small children can easily look through them. Small gardens allow for discovery. The only large space is the football pitch, which invites children to run freely with their classmates, enclosed – or rather, embraced – by rows of large trees.

The article that Muusfeldt and Mygind published about their school playground design in the magazine *Havekunst* in 1961 shows their original plan. We see that a small botanical garden was created for the pupils. This motif can be found in many schools of the period, and it was used to teach children about botany. There were signs attached to every plant in the garden, which was used as an outdoor classroom, with plants representing various areas of Denmark, such as heathland and agricultural landscapes. Large windows enabled the pupils to look at this green room from the classrooms and observe how the plants changed throughout the seasons. We went looking for this garden, and we found that it is converted into another kind of garden, still located close to the headteacher's dwelling, like the botanical garden. He – yes, we assume it was a he – lived on school premises, and his large front garden shows that his was an important social position when the school was built. Today, this garden is a vegetable garden, where it seems that pupils can come and participate in the cultivation. Vegetables in planters seem to be today's version of the educational landscape, even though our period is characterised by far less scarcity than the early 1950s. The main idea is not to show children different species, as the first botanical garden used to do, but to display how food is grown, and to engage pupils in vegetable gardening.

Using an original plan as a guide to fieldwork can be a way to discover continuities and changes. This may be helpful, since it is often much easier to describe buildings than landscapes. The landscape seems to contain some kind of hidden knowledge that the plan can help us to discover, although this is not the only way to see it.

Viemose Park: In the Shadow of Prejudice

Ranja Hautamäki, Rikke Munck Petersen and Vera Vicenzotti

“Can you actually see that a woman was behind this project?” our group wondered at the start of the fieldwork. Is there any such thing as female – and by implication, male – design? Do we see landscapes differently when we know they were designed by women? If we look at Viemose park, do we find any signs that it was landscaped by a woman? This was what our group asked itself.

Trying to find the woman designer in the landscape, we slipped by default into over-interpretations, falling back on intellectually embarrassing but deeply culturally anchored stereotypes. Viemose looks like a miniature version of a nineteenth-century landscaped garden, with its soft curves and round forms: can we argue that there is something feminine about the pastoral design? However, Viemose is also a technological construct connected to a large-scale water system, and the pond in the park works as a basin to collect rainwater and prevent the flooding of nearby houses. Can we claim that there is something masculine about technical design? No. Such over-interpretations are the product of and thrive in the shadows of stereotypical thinking. They disregard the project's social and technological solutions. That the park is at a tangent to a large motorway, whose noise is omnipresent in the rather small park and whose runoff water is polluting the pond so that it is now toxic – none of this has anything to do with the fact that the park's designer happened to be a woman.

Visiting Viemose park, we concluded that when we focus on stereotypes, we tend to overlook the spatial and experiential qualities of a space. Muusfeldt's designs, including the scheme for Viemose park, do not fit binary categories or the simplified notion that a woman's work will be softer or closer to nature than other modernist constructions. Rather, the park reveals itself to be a design that reflects pastoral imaginaries of nature and yet is inextricably connected to modern technology. If we are to begin to understand these entanglements, we must look beyond strictly designed sites such as the small Viemose park and begin to see them as part of larger-scale landscape systems complete with technological infrastructures: the motorway intertwined with the larger wetland area connected to the park's pond.

As we searched for the woman designer in the landscape, we concluded that it was not the woman that was hiding, but the landscape itself. Places such as Viemose park are hidden contributions, everyday landscapes that do not fit the standard scope of landscape architecture's historiography. Therefore, we must also seek to understand what it is that is hiding these landscapes, and how this may influence their futures. And, so we are left with one more question: is it tenable to state that a common denominator of modern(ist) landscapes designed by women is that they

seem hidden because the commissions were for unspectacular everyday spaces, to which the women responded with unobtrusive, plain, and effective solutions?

In Viemose Park, we tried to detect the woman behind the design, but were uncomfortable with the idea of typically female design elements or forms. In the end, we did not find the woman, but hidden contributions of everyday landscapes, designed by women landscape architects.

Muusfeldt's Positioning in Large-Scale Landscape Planning and Similar Neighbouring Landscape Projects

Johan Wirdelöw, Lei Gao and Torben Dam

Working with archival sources in the municipal planning office, we began to speculate about how Muusfeldt saw the park in relation to the motorway, the water system connected to the other watershed (Harrestrup Å) and the existing water basins. She must have been familiar with *Hovedstadens grønne betænkning*, the large nature conservation plan of 1936 that became the basis for the Copenhagen region's Finger Plan, which separated built-up and green areas and established large-scale park systems in the growing city. Viemose park is on the edge of one of these large green connections. This provides one possible context to understand the park. It is also worthwhile to compare Viemose park with neighbouring parks from the same period, such as Utterslev Mose (designed by Copenhagen city gardener J. Bergmans in 1940) and Kagsmose (on the other side of the motorway from Viemose park). They use similar plants and similarly concentrated water surfaces in defined, precise forms; even the soft detailing of the terrain is the same. Viemose park reveals that Muusfeldt wove her project into the overall planning, with a full understanding of the Harrestrup Å watershed and the means of landscape design. The project has the same high professional quality as other, better-known works such as Utterslev Mose and Kagsmose.

The motorway construction site is visible in an aerial photo from 1940, so Muusfeldt must have known the plans, although she might have been surprised by extent of its impact on the park today. The motorway was not constructed until after World War II, and car traffic has increased significantly since the 1970s. An aerial photo from 1995 shows a four-lane motorway, but today it has six lanes, which have eaten up part of both Viemose and Kagsmose. Although there are heavy noise barriers on both sides of the motorway, the traffic sounds one hears in Viemose park are hard to ignore, and this disturbing factor affects one's experience of the park.

Empirical material on Viemose park is limited. This shortage leads us to seek information and interpretation from broader contexts. By introducing materials from large-scale landscape planning and interpreting the park from this perspective, we also raise questions about designers' intentions and recipients' interpretations. Do we need the landscape architect to tell us what she thinks (in the empirical material), or can we find this out for ourselves by experiencing the project on-site and looking at other materials? Is it like reading a book, where one can figure out the meaning without the author explicitly telling us what it is? Is there a productive way to speculate? And what does our own positioning mean? Our group comprised a mix of genders and nationalities; some of us were new to Muusfeldt's work, while one had known about her since his student days. This provided an interesting starting point for a discussion of how different our perspectives are, and how putting them together can enrich our understanding.

Embodied Experience to Counter Dystopian Plans

Viktoria Sjöstedt and Marianne Skjulhaug

Walking is a well-known mode of experiencing the landscape. We walked together and used this as our main tool to understand the two sites, which had previously been unknown to us. Viemose park had a terribly disturbing soundscape. The motorway was acoustically everywhere and sometimes even made it difficult to talk. Yet the noise also made us curious, and we followed it. We went looking for the road it came from, and we thought of this as our method: follow the noise and look behind it. The park itself felt a little claustrophobic – small in size, with the artificial lake as its main element. Yet there were also comforting places within it. By following the road, we discovered an opening to the twin lake on the other side. It was probably a single water system divided by the road infrastructure – strangely close, and yet two completely different worlds.

Our walk at Valhøj school was different. It was immediately pleasant, and we started to move around. Surprisingly – since it was a school – we did not feel like intruders in this inviting atmosphere. The small scale that seemed to have been made for the pupils, the level of detail and the spatial qualities of this school playground led us to recognise that this was also a vulnerable place. How was it cared for, and by whom? We knew that there was an ongoing project to create a large extension to the school – how would the refined landscape be dealt with in the plans? We imagined a dystopian reality.

We chose to rely on spontaneous movement as method to explore the spatial qualities of the two places. The embodied experience allowed us to involve all the

senses. How can this kind of knowledge be transferred to the planners? How can we communicate knowledge by using the body to experience the landscape, to understand its qualities, and to come into contact with past ideas?

Researchers on the Move between Documents, Sites and Ideas

Jannie Rosenberg Bendsen, Johanna Brathel and Nina Marie Andersen

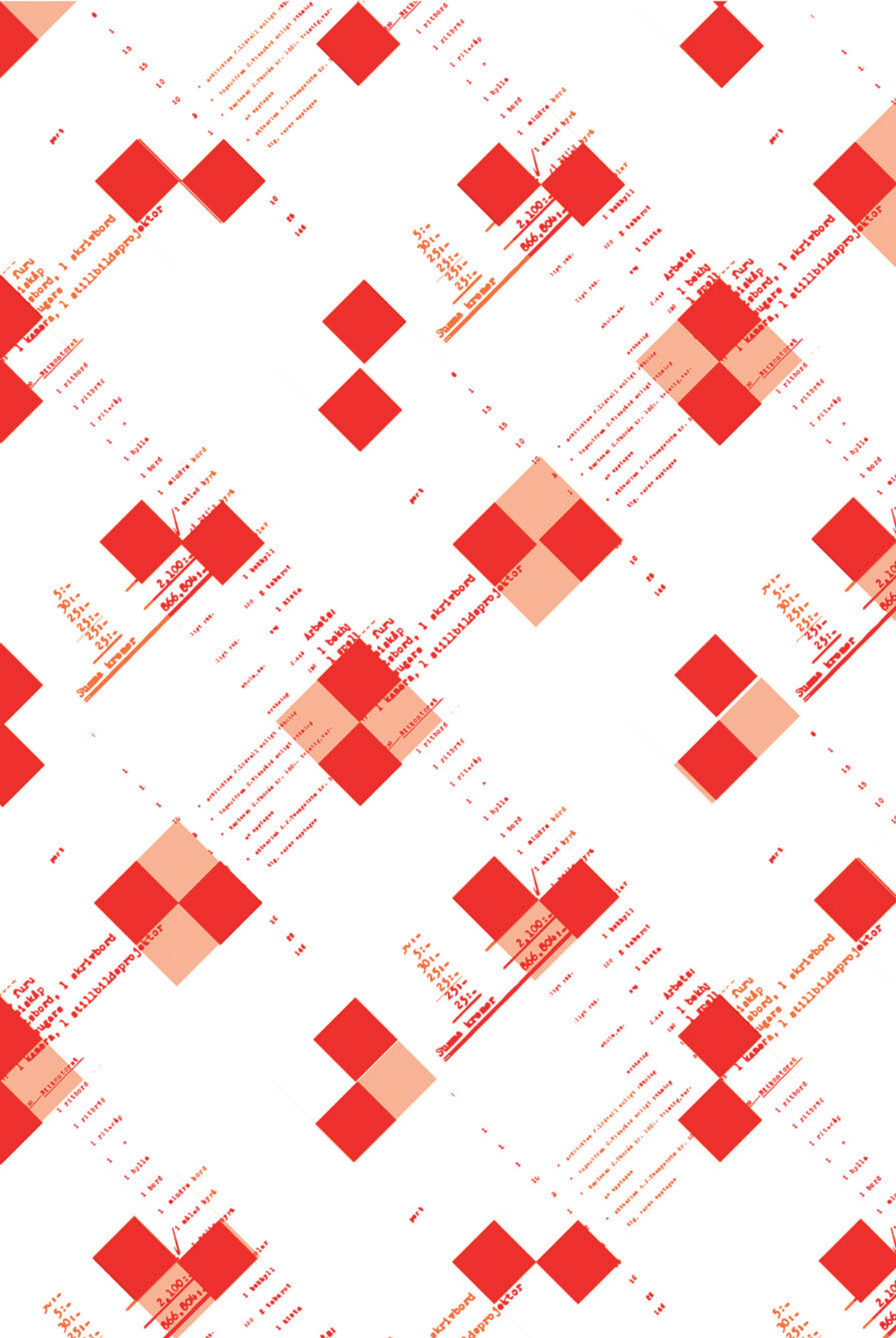
Our group of three researchers was given a folder containing historical photographs from multiple time periods, collected from newspapers, local histories, and other sources in various cultural fields. We chose to use different approaches to the two sites. One approach was based on the archive material and the other on the experience of the place. There is no one-size-fits-all in fieldwork; rather, there are situations where specific people encounter empirical situations and adjust their questions, modes of operation, and ways of creating knowledge accordingly. Three reflecting minds and sensing bodies experiencing a representation of a project on the actual site is a productive starting point to make new or nuanced knowledge.

At Viemose park, the group entered a discussion about the premises of the research. Why should hidden contributions be unveiled? Once we delve into books and articles about a landscape architect such as Muusfeldt and her designs, we begin to discover other aspects of these landscapes that bear witness to certain intentions and historical conditions. But what about the people in the neighbourhood who visit the park as their everyday landscape? That would be interesting to study based on on-site observations and additional source material.

We might discover the changes that have happened in these areas, in order to gain a dynamic understanding that might be operative in discussions regarding how to take care of these places for the future. For example, by studying the original plan for Valhøj school, we saw that there used to be a secluded flower garden here. When we went looking for it, it had disappeared. With the plan, we could go and look for it. We decided to move between field observations and recollections from the archival material. Although this was a short workshop, we did both. In retrospect, as we now know each other better than when we first met to conduct this study, we see that our discussion was coloured by a certain reticence, even though we were all eager and grateful for the task. To make this approach more fruitful, contributors should be in open mode, relaxed and confident. Nonetheless, we think that this oscillating methodology, alternating between different ways of finding knowledge, may be useful for future research.

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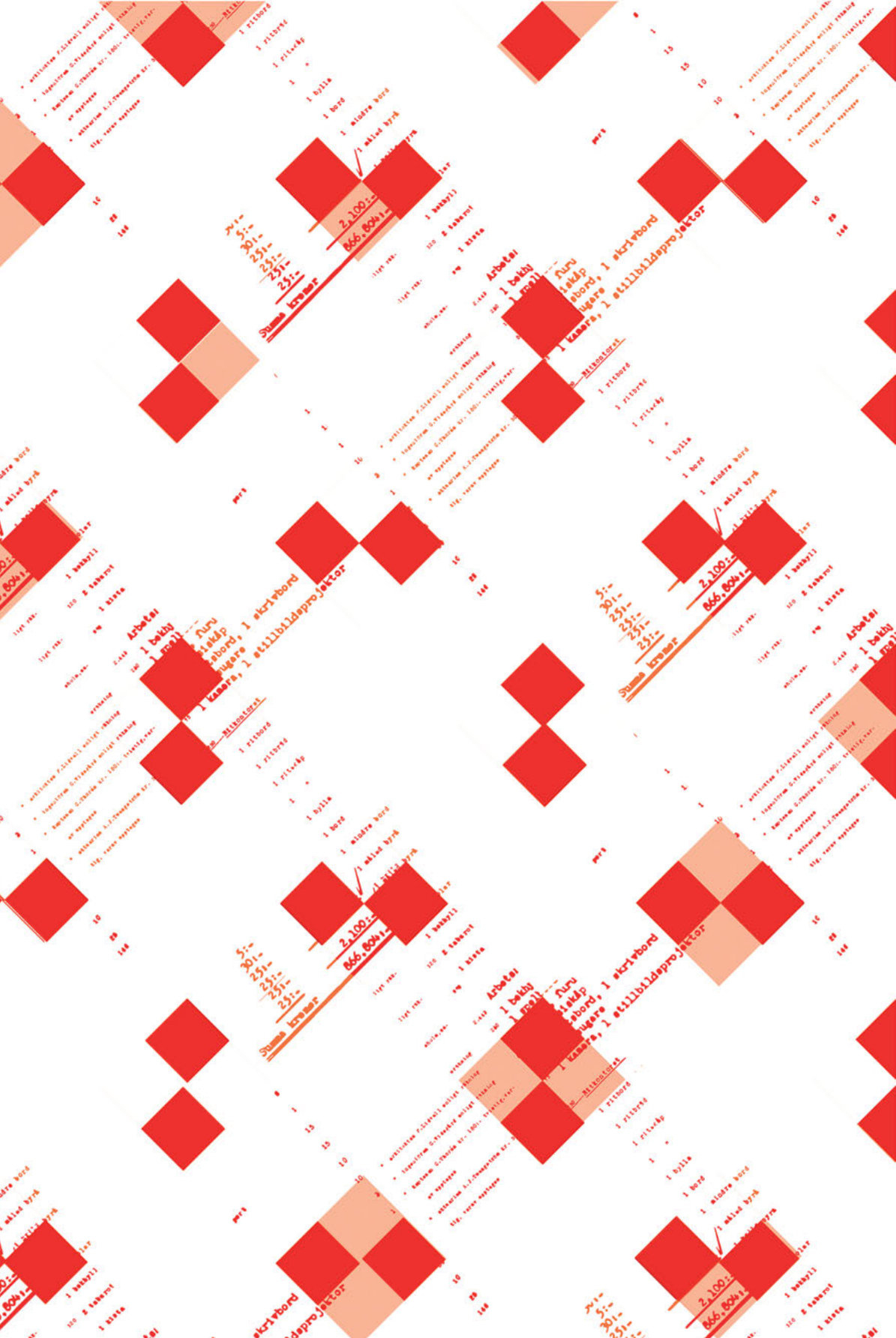


Figure 3.5: Listing things. Pattern inspired by “Estate Inventory Lists as Keys to the Hidden Lives of Women Landscape Architects”.