Sampling the City:
An investigation of space and place within the City.

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Statement

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Summary

The creative work presented for examination deals with the spatial contradictions in 'the city'. The works are the culmination of studio research and are presented to summarise the major lines of inquiry investigated across the research period as well as reflect my practice-led research and iterative, inter-disciplinary mode of making.

A photographic installation from the Nightgarden series accompanies a large mesh wall-work, Unattended City #2, which evolved from Unattended City, 2013. These works reflect my ongoing concerns with the social contingency of urban space, and its potential for rupture, as well as my interest in locating the poetic, the narrative and the wild within the city. A video installation of a graffitied urban ruin is located adjacent, with the aim of overloading the phenomenological cues presented. This work also indicates the direction of future research.

The research paper undertook to examine 'the City' and its centrality to my practice, as a site for research and data collection, sampling, and temporary intervention. This paper discusses the multiplicity of the city and reviews spatial theory through a section of writers and theoreticians who were interested in the spatiality of the modern city, and to whom I was drawn conceptually. In particular, the relevant theories of Henri Leverbve, Marc Augé, Walter Benjamin and Michel de Certeau were considered in relation to each other and to my studio work. These theories enabled me to underpin an understanding of the city as containing a potential for the
poetic, narrative or imagined. Through this I see that in sampling the city I am drawn to spaces of the city that contain or imply the potential for propositional rupture, overlap or porosity in the fabric of urban reality. The relevant motivations and artistic output by a series of contemporary artists dealing with issues of space within the urban and city was also considered in light of the urban spatial theories I examined and my studio research output.
Introduction

Sampling the City

[The city is] man’s most successful attempt to remake the world he lives in more after his heart's desire. But if the city is the world which man created, it is the world in which he is henceforth condemned to live. Thus, indirectly, and without any clear sense of the nature of his task, in making the city man has remade himself1 - Robert Park

For amid the Ridley Scott images of world cities, the writing about skyscraper fortresses, the Baudrillard visions of hyperspace.... most people actually still live in places like Harlesden or West Brom. Much of life for most people, even in the heart of the first world, still consists of waiting in a bus-shelter with your shopping for a bus that never comes.2 - Doreen Massey

The city and the experience of urban modernity have been the central themes of my work for a number of years. It is a subject that I've found myself repeatedly drawn to for its complexity of phenomena. This thesis explores what it is about the city and its spaces that continues to intuitively engage my art practice. The

city is an idea that can be encountered on many different levels, likewise an understanding of it can take many forms and be shaped by a multitude of specialist perspectives, that I wish to examine.

In keeping with the limited nature of this paper I will be looking at only a fraction of these possible versions of the city. In this Introduction I will briefly look at how the city has been thought and written about and how these particular visions of the city have been shaped by different theoretical perspectives. Chapters one and two discuss a series of urban spatial theories to form a better understanding of my intuitive and phenomenological response to certain spaces in the city. In particular I will draw on identified texts by Henri Lefebvre, Marc Augé, Walter Benjamin and Michel de Certeau to propose a theoretical underpinning to an understanding of the city that contains propositional, narrative and poetic potential. This opens a path to understand and more deeply evaluate approaches and techniques used in my studio practice. The third chapter discuss artists whose work has significantly informed my practice, and the forth chapter discusses the studio work undertaken during the MFA, contextualised against the selected theoreticians and artists.

The city has been described by writers, philosophers and theoreticians over the years as anything other than itself: 'a dense ecology of strangers'3,'a machine'4, 'an asphalt jungle' and 'a state of mind, an abstraction'5, an 'immaterial city'6.

4 W R Burnet, as quoted by James Donald, Imagining the Modern City, (London: The Athena Press, 1999), p 6
5 Robert Park, as quoted by James Donald, 1999, p 6
6 Ihab Hassan, as quoted by James Donald, 1999 p 8
Within a traditional geographic and economic description, the city is a spatial concentration of population and infrastructure, co-locating the economic, defensive, technological, political and social activities to create economies of scale. The city marked an economic paradigm shift, the point at which humans moved from agrarian to state-level societies, 7,000 years ago. Hence, Lewis Mumford firmly located the modern city within its history: 'The modern city itself, for all its steel and glass, is still essentially an earth-bound Stone Age structure.' Edward Soja concurred, drawing parallels between the gridded cores, economic centre and spatial control of postmodern LA (2000AD) and historic Ur (2000 BC).

This material and physical way of visualising and understanding cities is an obvious departure point for any consideration of what cities are and how they have come into being. In my work I have been drawn to this scientific frame of reference, and the idea that the city is also an elemental state, in much the same way the termite mound or bee hive has a natural state, which is influenced at the most basic level by laws of physics, chemistry and biology. The shape, form and orientation of each unique termite mound is determined by the laws of thermodynamics in maintenance of internal ambient temperature, and inscribed into the genetic memory of the builder termites. Similarly, mathematical laws defining the growth of multicellular organisms can be applied to the growth

9 Michael E Smith, 3
of cities, where people, like cells, 'agglomerate', and predictions such as city size and expansion can be made through parameters such as average city income, walking speed and dimensions of the sewer system\textsuperscript{12}.

The city is, though, also a spatial conflation of history, economics, society and place, condensed within the single location or entity. A physical concentration of forms of capital, such as culture, material, power, and knowledge\textsuperscript{13}, to which some writers would also argue for inclusion of other aspects, such as time, power and gender.

But the city is more than this again. James Donald argues that 'the city' cannot be understood discontinuously- a product of the modern condition, a historic mythology, utopian or nightmare- but that it exists in the present and rests in the past, and importantly, is not a problem to be solved but an ongoing project. To this end, he calls for a poetic and imagined approach: 'We do not just read the city, we negotiate the reality of cities by imagining 'the city'.'\textsuperscript{14} In his argument Donald draws on the writing of Victor Burgin, who noted, 'The city in our actual experience is \textit{at the same time} an actual existing physical environment, \textit{and} a city in a novel, a film, a photograph, a city seen on television, a city in a comic strip, a city in a pie chart, and so on.' (Original italics)\textsuperscript{15}.

Following Burgin and Donald's lead, the city for me, in


\textsuperscript{15} Victor Burgin, \textit{In/Different Spaces: Place and memory in visual culture}, (Berkley: University of California Press 1996), 28.
addition to all of this, is also part of every city I have ever visited, inhabited, read about or imagined. It is simultaneously the here of Sydney and the there of Paris, Rome, Shanghai, and every filmic and literary description of a city that I have been exposed to, although at times fragments of specific cities may temporarily emerge within this paper and studio work. As voiced by the imagined Marco Polo in Italo Calvino's Invisible Cities: “Every time I describe a city I am saying something about Venice”\(^\text{16}\), I too, will unavoidably draw on real experiences in real cities as dweller, visitor and tourist.

Within the context of this thesis, I use the term 'city' as shorthand for all cities. The city for me includes the densely functional core and the urban metropolis, as well as the physical, mental and imaginary state of 'city-ness'. Until this point I have referred to 'the city', but could equally use the term 'metropolis'. Etymologically rooted in the ancient Greek words for 'mother city', within modern literature 'metropolis' has a specific location and connection with the crisis of modernity. Yet as Iain Chambers identifies, the metropolis imaginatively enfolds the past, present and future markers of the city:

The metropolis is, above all, a myth, a tale, a telling that helps some of us to locate our home in modernity..... The metropolis is an allegory; in particular it represents the allegory of the crisis of modernity that we have learnt to recognise in the voices of Baudelaire, Benjamin and Kafka. To go beyond these bleak stories of exile and


The complete paragraph is: “There is still one of which you never speak: Venice,’ the Khan said. Marco smiled. ‘What else do you believe I have been talking to you about? The emperor did not turn a hair. ‘And yet I have never heard you mention that name.’ And Polo said: ‘Every time I describe a city I am saying something about Venice.’” — Italo Calvino, Invisible Cities
that grey, rainy country of the anguished soul, is to establish a sense of being at home in the city, and to make of tradition a space of transformation rather than the scene of a cheerless destiny. For this metropolis is not simply the final stage of a poignant narrative, or apocalypse and nostalgia, it is also the site of the ruins of previous orders in which diverse histories, languages, memories and traces continually entwine and recombine in the construction of new horizons.

Geography, science and poetics aside, the city is unarguably a human commonality. It is the mode of habitation, and understanding of the world now shared by more than 50% of humans on the earth. For 99% of the history of humans on earth, there were no cities, yet from 2011 more people live in a city than not, and there are over 280 cities housing more than 1 million people. This speed of change is reflected in Ramesh Kumar Biswas’ statistics: “When the Pudong new area was officially declared into existence in 1990 it was a largely rural population of 1.3 million people with 20,000 telephone numbers and about 30 times as many chickens”. Pudong’s population, 24 years later, is over 5 million, within Shanghai of 23 million.

The city, then, is a relevant and engaging field of research, with a base in philosophy, sociology, history and science, and is where I have anchored my research focus. While undertaking the theoretical research I was more strongly drawn to certain

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18 Smith, 10
writers theorists and artists who were interested in the potential for the poetic, narrative or imagined spaces within the city. For this reason, this paper will discuss Henri Lefebvre, Michele De Certeau, Walter Benjamin and Marc Augé, Gordon Matta-Clark, Rachel Whiteread and Jess MacNeil, because of their resonating interest in place and space, in the city and the urban condition, grounded in experience in real spaces and real cities. Conversely, I was less drawn towards more spatially abstracted theorists, such as Deleuze and Guattari, or to theorists and geographers whose concern focuses around the built and social functionality/dysfunctionality of the city such as Nigel Thrift, Saskia Sassen, Georg Simmel, David Harvey, Manuel Castells or Doreen Massey. Neither will I be looking at the present-future: the technological, digital or networked city and related theorists such as Anthony Vidler and Paul Virilio.

James Donald argues for an individual author’s right to follow some theories, texts and threads over others, whom he has ‘steered clear’ of:

Each of [the listed writers and theoreticians] in his own way, and often in dialogue with others, has addressed the spatialisation of contemporary social relations, and in doing so they have done much to redefine the field of contemporary social theory... I do know that I do not want to spend most of my time explaining where and why I disagree with these guides- and also, of course, what I have learned from them.... Let’s just say that mine is a different city from theirs. It’s not just that my city is somewhere else. It is the experiential, imaginative and political differences that are significant. My city is at the same time abstractly conceptual and intensely personal. It is the city, not
I argue for a similar position to Donald's- this paper is not an anthology of urban socio-spatial theory, nor an exhaustive explanation of why certain theorists are mentioned over others, but is an exploration of what it is about the city that interests me and feeds into my art practice- a process of following both intuitive and formal research paths, as reflected in Walter Benjamin's intentional, poetic straying:

Not to find one's way in a city means little. But to lose oneself in a city as one loses oneself in a forest requires practice. Then the street names must call out to the lost wanderer like the snapping of dry twigs, and the small streets of the city-centre must reflect the time of day as clearly as a mountain hollow. I have learned this art of straying only recently. 23

22 Donald, x
Chapter 1

The city and contradictions of space

It is not necessary to create a world, but the possibility of a world.

Jean-Luc Godard (1985)²⁴

To help understand the innate pull of the city and my intuitive responses to certain spaces within the city, it became necessary to investigate my understanding and experience of urban space through a more theoretical framework.

In exploring the broad field of writers and theoreticians concerned with 'the city' I was drawn to texts concerned with the spatiality of the city and urban spatial practice. In particular, Henri Lefebvre, who redefined the field with his text *The Production of Space*²⁵, Marc Augé, whose text *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*²⁶ proposes a new category of urban space, as well as Walter Benjamin and Michel de Certeau who placed imagination, narrative and fable at the core of the city. I drew on these texts in particular amongst the broader field because they resonated with the issues I was working through in my studio and enabled me to progress a conceptual framework for the studio work.

The term 'spatial practice' is a product of modernity,

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²⁵ Lefebvre, 2007
urbanisation and the city. The term emerged in the mid-20th century from Georg Simmel's 'sociology of space' (1908)\textsuperscript{27}. How humans live with space/place became an increasingly pertinent question as pre-modern cities evolved into their modern and contemporary form: cities, metropolises, megacities and exopolises. In the modern era, industrialisation, Taylorist deconstruction of traditional work spaces and post-war state control of spatial and social planning all combined to grant primacy to the hegemonic control of urban space and place\textsuperscript{28}.

It was French theoretician Henri Lefebvre’s mid-twentieth century writings on urbanisation, the city, and most importantly, the location of the socio-spatial needs of people within these urban spaces that ruptured the Kantian and Cartesian understanding of urban space and place. Lefebvre’s *The Production of Space*, first published in France, 1974, interrogated the relational aspects of urban space and place.

France underwent extensive social modernisation, industrialisation and suburbanisation in the mid-twentieth century. Verena Andermatt Conley argues that Lefebvre was driven to react against social and capitalist pressures in France at the time to articulate a need for the creation of new spaces, beginning with the urban and 'The Everyday'. Conley further proposes that the spatial 'turn' in French cultural theory in the later twentieth century was a reaction against the social 'compression' between an increasingly bureaucratic French state and 'invasive' consumerism. She argues that Lefebvre, de


\textsuperscript{28} Verena Andermatt Conley, 'Negotiating Space in Post-68 French Thought', *Hagar*, 20, no. 1 (winter 2010), 9-11.
Certeau, Augé and Deleuze, amongst others, reacted to a sense of loss of an existential relationship with the world, proposing instead a socio-spatial re-appropriation.

Lefebvre was a one-time friend of Guy Debord, collaborator with the Situationist International movement, and involved in the May 1968 riots in Paris, placing him centrally in urban discourse of the time. Following Merleau-Ponty, Lefebvre was concerned with redefining space as more complex than just the Cartesian understanding of space: geometric, measurable and pre-existing within the world. Lefebvre’s central, innovative theory was that space can be socially created or 'produced' - a term purposefully connoting Marxist references - permitting the individual to make one’s own understanding of space, without 'authority'. Lefebvre was concerned the capitalist hegemony over the common people, which was occurring in part through abstraction and control of space. He saw the quotidian Everyday as the site of conflict for control.

In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre theorised a permeable relationship between people, culture and space, through his spatial 'trialectic'. He proposed that the individual's understanding of space is influenced by their memories and the social, functional and historical meaning attached to spaces.

Walter Prigg argues that Lefebvre saw power as inextricably linked with people and space, as opposed to Foucault, for whom space and the everyday was secondary in the analysis of power. Lefebvre positioned himself squarely within the urban

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30 Shield, 280
city: ‘[T]he city constructs, identifies, and sets free the essence of social relationships’\textsuperscript{32} and in \textit{The Production of Space} proposed a path for reclamation and embodiment of social space. Lefebvre notes the production of space is not simply the creation of another commodity, like sugar or cloth, but that it is both a precondition and an outcome of society; that society imagines, requires, generates and operates within these real and not real spaces: '\[T\]he space of social practices, - that in which sensible phenomena are situated in, not excluding the imaginary, projects and projections, symbols, utopias'\textsuperscript{33}.

Lefebvre posited a 'triadic' spatial relationship; a dynamic, dialectical balance between 'conceptual', real and experienced space (which he categorised as 'perceived' 'conceived' and 'lived' space), and optimistically offered the potential for individual reclamation of this balance\textsuperscript{34 35}. In this there is a centrality of embodiment and of 'lived' space to the (urban) experience, as the embodied space of human action, sensory phenomena, symbolism and the imagination.

Of most relevance to my art practice is Lefebvre’s fracturing of the solidity of Cartesian space into a plurality, one experientially unique to every person inhabiting that space. This position enabled me to think in different terms about the action of reading of city spaces, providing theoretical support for a subjective and intuitive understanding of spaces within the city. At the most abstract level I enjoy the notion that as an

\textsuperscript{2008}, 48.

\textsuperscript{32} Henri Lefebvre, \textit{The Urban Revolution}, translated by Robert Bononno (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 117-118.

\textsuperscript{33} Lefebvre, 2007, 12


artist I can be the creator of both a form of space and the stories occurring within it. This created space need not reflect a specific real-space, it can articulate off the real, or occupy a spatial porosity existing alongside real spaces; a poetic imagined space.

Lefebvre briefly identifies the spatial 'contradictions' (of abstract space)\textsuperscript{36}, a term with particular resonance to me. In trying to evaluate why I am drawn to certain sites in the city and what underpins this intuitive or phenomenological response, the notion of spatial 'contradiction' and resultant tension offers an alternative understanding of these spaces, and offers the potential to play on this tension through a shift or imbalance in the spatial trialectic.

This notion of spatial contradiction occurring in the city is further developed through an interpretation of Marc Augé's theories of 'anthropological' place and 'non-place'. Augé's text, \textit{Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity} takes up where Lefebvre left off, in his investigation of the increasing excess of hegemonically controlled urban spaces and the socialised human relationship with these places.\textsuperscript{37}

Augé, as an anthropologist, originally undertook field work with the indigenous tribes of the Ivory Coast, Africa, but was drawn back to the self-described 'anthropology of the near'. In \textit{Non-Places}, he argues for the anthropologist's right to occupy the position of non-independent participant-observer operating deep within his/her own culture; an observer of the 'near and the elsewhere'. I have found this idea particularly useful for my observationally based practice.

\textsuperscript{36} Lefebvre, 2007, 52
\textsuperscript{37} Augé 2008, 5-61
In *Non-Places* Augé investigates the relationship between geographical place, history, culture and people and the resultant connections within 'anthropological place'. This is Lefebvre's 'lived' space; a 'concrete and symbolic construction of space' by the individual and group. Anthropological place contains history, myth and narrative and above all, unique and contingent relationality. It may be described by geometric lines, roads and paths, but is also invested with human meaning and relationships.

Conversely, Augé resolutely declares that *Non-places* are what *place* is not:

'If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space that cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity is a non-place. The hypothesis advanced here is that supermodernity produces non-places, meaning spaces which are not themselves anthropological places and which, unlike Baudelairean modernity, do not integrate the earlier places...'

And further, '[Non-places are] the spaces of circulation, communication and consumption, where solitudes coexist without creating any social bond or even a social emotion'.

Augé's term 'supermodernity' is an attempt to identify this new accumulation of non-places and to see it as part of the emerging post-modern condition. Supermodernity is marked by an excess of three specified elements, one being 'space'. Paradoxically as

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38 Augé, 2008, 50-53
39 Augé 2008, 41-42
40 Augé's reference to Baudelaire concerns the poem "Paysage" in *Fleurs du Mal*, where the spectacle of the modern and historical Paris coexist in the landscape: 'Chimneys and spires, those masts of the city'.
41 Augé, 2008, 63
42 Augé, 2008, 178
the world has grown 'smaller' through connectivity, there has the amount of non-places has increased\textsuperscript{43}. Augé cites airports, chain hotels and shopping centres as examples of what this new type of space might be. These places exude a sense of the generic, operating intentionally free of time and (anthropological) place, in a history-less 'perpetual present'\textsuperscript{44}. Dominated by 'prescriptive' signs and texts, non-places deny familiarity or local knowledge and assume anonymity\textsuperscript{45}.

While Augé describes non-places by what they are not, other spatial theoreticians such as Martha Rosler, Manual Castells and Rem Koolhaas have evolved increasingly specific and loaded real-world definitions of 'non-place'. There is something fascinating about the notion of non-places that appears to have drawn many to its sense of the un-locatable uncanny.

The architect and urbanist, Rem Koolhaas, has rebadged Augé's term into 'Junkspace'. For Koolhaas, junkspaces always appear both recent and ageless, the surfaces remain clean and residue-less, and the marks of previous inhabitants are continually removed. The windows are sealed, and the environment controlled by air-conditioning\textsuperscript{46}. As Koolhaas notes, junkspaces are remarkably successful at 'undoing where you were'\textsuperscript{47}.

Augé does not despair of non-places to the same degree as Koolhaas. In some regard seeing them as offering the potential for a mini existential revision, a frisson of freedom. While transiting through a non-place, one can temporarily cuts all ties with identity, history and place and become, for a while,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{43} Augé, 20-27
\item \textsuperscript{44} Augé, 84
\item \textsuperscript{45} Augé, 77
\item \textsuperscript{46} Tim Gregory, “The Rise of the Productive Non-Place: The Contemporary Office as a State of Exception”, \textit{Space and Culture}, 14, no. 3, (2011), 244-258.
\item \textsuperscript{47} Gregory, 247
\end{itemize}
unchallenged, unloaded and anonymous\textsuperscript{48}.

Augé has subsequently refined his definition of non-places in novels (such as \textit{Le Sens des Autres}, 1994, and \textit{Fictions Fin de Siècle}, 2000), and has acknowledged the contingent individual relationality of place within non-place\textsuperscript{49}. For instance a cleaner in an airport may construct an anthropological relationship with these spaces that a commuter cannot, and can shift the spatial balance, through small gestures of spatial resistance, connecting with and reclaiming the place. O'Beirne summarises this in her argument that non-places can evolve 'placeful-ness' through the accumulated patina of memory and history\textsuperscript{50}.

The theory of non-place was enlightening to my understanding of the phenomenological spatiality of these types of urban places. I see Augé's markers of place and non-place as an anthropological, real-world refinement and contemporisation of Lefèbvre’s spatial triad. Through these theories of the unique and contingent nature of spatial relationships, I now understand that I am interested in both the belongingness of place and also the non-belongingness of non-place as well as the uneven threshold between the two. I have come to see the difference between these two possibilities of belonging as a Lefèbvrían point of spatial contradiction, an unresolved shift in 'placefulness', between place and non-place.

\textsuperscript{48} Augé, 120
\textsuperscript{49} O'Beirne, 2006, 45-47
Chapter 2
Poetics and the street

To dwell poetically does not mean to dwell in such a way that one needs poetry, but to dwell with sensitivity to the poetic, characterised by the impossibility, in a sense, of defining clear-cut boundaries between reality and imagination. If there is a passage from modernity to postmodernity, it seems to lie in a wearing away of the boundaries of the real. - Gianni Vattimo

As previously outlined, the city exists as a multiplicity, and can be read dialectically as a functional, rational, densely concentrated purpose-built space and also as a socially constructed and individually contingent space. The location between imagined, experienced and real, solid and porous is where I am interested in working. For me this location offers a potential for poetic rupture and creation of the propositional, imagined, story-tale or partly mythological narrative. This chapter looks at the writing of Walter Benjamin and Michel de Certeau to provide a theoretical basis for how these imaginative forces might be operating within the city.

These words: poetic, story-telling, magical and mythological, sit uncomfortably within the grown-up, utilitarian, modern world of the city, and I have reduced them to the term 'imagined', indicating a break with the real. It is the potential for this imagined that I am looking for in city spaces.

Walter Benjamin and Michel de Certeau are the two writers whose theories of the city kept re-engaging me in my research. This chapter reviews how specified texts helped shape my understanding of the possibility for poetics, narrative and the imagined to operate in the contemporary city.

Fran Tonkiss, in discussing Walter Benjamin argues that the evolution of the modern city across the nineteenth century generated a shift in spatial perceptions that was reflected in the writing of the theorists of the time such as Simmel and Benjamin. Walter Benjamin, a prolific writer with broad interests, produced a series of texts about the capitalist metropolis and the potential for the poetic within the modern city.

In one of his most important texts on this theme Benjamin focused on the work of nineteenth century poet, Charles Baudelaire. Baudelaire, writing in the thick of mid-nineteenth century Haussmannisation of Paris, called for a new experiential response to the transitory, the fugitive and the contingent, as Paris rebuilt and reshaped itself around him, in a decade where one fifth of Paris streets were being rebuilt, 20,000 houses demolished and replaced by 40,000 residences and the city population almost doubled to 1 million.

Benjamin himself adopted Baudelaire’s position of street-level observer, 'bathing in the crowd' and followed in Baudelaire’s

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55 Charles Baudelaire, Paris Spleen and La Fanfarlo,
footsteps of textual and contextual fragmentation to repeatedly rupture the rationally understood city by colliding disparate references of present and memory, the real and the poetic, in a reflection of the experience of modernity and the modern city.

Fran Tonkiss argues\textsuperscript{56} that Benjamin understood the city as above all, a poetic space. He was drawn the unremarked, the memory, the ordinary and overlooked, in his ongoing search for an understanding of the city. According to Tonkiss this was due to his extreme shortsightedness and resultant focus on surface, texture and detail. She notes: 'In this way Benjamin gets at the double life of cities- the way they slide between the subjective and the objective...'.\textsuperscript{57} Tonkiss refers to Benjamin's \textit{A Berlin Chronicle}, arguing that his interweaving of descriptions of the city with recalled memories was a direct reflection of his understanding of the fractured phenomenological layers of the city.\textsuperscript{58}

Benjamin wrote extensively about the profound and complex relationship between capitalism and the city, and it is in city-centric texts such as \textit{One Way Street} and \textit{A Berlin Chronicle}, that he is drawn to the poetic and spatial fracture within the city – the points where new slams into old and real abuts the remembered and dreamed.

In writing about cities Benjamin positioned himself as part archaeologist (allegorically digging up urban memories), part

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{\textsuperscript{56} Tonkiss, 113-115}
\footnotetext{\textsuperscript{57} Tonkiss, 119-123}
\end{footnotes}
detective (following Baudelaire), reading the 'unwritten text' of the city, part child, and part dreamer, psychogeographically mapping the city topography through his memories and dreams. He believed that we all have the potential to move continually between the real and dreamt city:

One knew of places in ancient Greece where the way led down into the underworld. Our waking existence likewise is a land which, at certain hidden points, leads down into the underworld - a land full of inconspicuous places from which dreams arise. All day long, suspecting nothing, we pass them by, but no sooner has sleep come than we are eagerly groping our way back to lose ourselves in the dark corridors...

This was a recurring theme of Benjamin's; the street-level location of the dreamed, the remembered and the imagined. Steve Pile and James Donald both write about the 'state of mind' of the city; the poetically imagined city we hold in our heads as we navigate its real spaces, the 'urban imaginaries', both offering Walter Benjamin as central philosophical support for their arguments.

'The world dominated by its phantasmagorias - this, to make use of Baudelaire's term, is “modernity” ', wrote Benjamin in his unfinished Arcades project, and Pile co-opts Benjamin's

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59 Gilloch, p 5-7
63 Donald, 1999, 49.
64 Pile, 2
65 Pile, 20
term 'phantasmagoria' to describe the dream-like, (ghost like) 'emotional work' of experiencing the city, where past, present, future and imagined can coexist, up-cycling Benjamin's quote to posit that 'Dreams and cities are the guardians of the moderns' sleep; an elaborate play of remembering and forgetting...

Both Pile and Donald briefly note Benjamin's fascination, outlined in Convoluted O of the Arcades Project, with the threshold; the liminal zone between street and arcade. Benjamin specifically defined this zone: ‘The threshold must be carefully distinguished from the boundary. A Schwelle (threshold) is a zone. Transformation, passage, wave action are in the word schwellen...’ whereas a boundary is a line or zone that separates. Pile further proposes that the threshold is also the site for the phantasmagoria of magic to enter the city of the real. To me this poetical spatial zone of transition, between inside and outside, real and imagined, solid and not, could also be seen as a location where placefulness is in shift, much like the potential for shift evident in Lefebvre’s (dynamic) spatial trialectic.

This theme of incomplete, dynamic and embodied threshold (a form of spatial rupture) is played out further in the term 'porosity' coined in the essay, “Naples”, (co-authored with Asja Lacis). Only briefly mentioned, in a few scattered sentences within the essay, the word nonetheless resonates deeply in describing the socialised modes in which 'private' space expands into public space and back again, by necessity or will:

66 Pile, 2-4
67 Pile, 57
68 Benjamin (1999), 494
69 Pile, 95
'As porous as this stone is the architecture. Building and action interpenetrate in the courtyards, arcades and stairways', and later, 'Just as the living room reappears on the street, with chairs, hearth and altar, so, only much more loudly, the street migrates into the living-room'.

Michele de Certeau, writing in the 1960's and 70's, similarly identified the potential for both narrative reclamation of the city and for holes and ruptures in the apparent solidity of urban space.

De Certeau, a one-time Jesuit, classicist and sociologist, was interested in the socialisation of space and empowerment of the individual, following on from Lefebvre’s insistence on the resistive, embodied production of (social) space. In his spatialist critique of twentieth century urban capitalism, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau focused on the everyday or quotidian, proposing individual agency through 'tactics' to counter the hegemonic control of urban space. For de Certeau, small and vernacular acts of spatial utilisation such as walking through the streets of the city could be seen as individual and poetic spatial interventions and reclamations. He described this as 'activating' and 'transforming' place: 'In short, space is a practiced place'. The geographer Mike Crang expands on this action as ‘...tactics transforming the places designed by hegemonic powers and envisaged as the neat and orderly realm of the concept city, into unruly spaces, that is, he sees practices as spatialising places’.

71 Benjamin and Lacis, 165 and 171.
74 Mike Crang, “Michel de Certeau”, *Key Thinkers on space and place*, 2nd edition, edited by Phil Hubbard and Rob Kitchin (London: Sage
De Certeau located these spatial 'tactics' at the street-level within the city-labyrinth (‘below the thresholds at which visibility begins’), which he pitted diametrically against the tower of the hegemonically controlled 'concept-city', looking down from above. In introduction to the chapter “Walking in the City”, he poetically (and with unknowing irony) writes about the centre of the concept-city from the 110th floor of the World Trade Centre.

De Certeau posits the city as a battleground for control of the 'functionalist organisation' of space and argues for the subversive and resistive power of the individual against the hegemony. He offers walking as the tool to enact vernacular knowledge, thereby reclaiming space and transformatively inserting their individual narrative within the texturology of the city. The pedestrians' '...bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban “text” they write without being able to read it', composing an unauthored, 'manifold story'. Expanding further: “The long poem of walking manipulates spatial organisations...”

This poetic conceit, that walking can be a tactic of resistance and narrative reclamation, (instead of just a means of getting around a crowded city) nonetheless creates the potential for embodied, enacted storytelling and even myth within the City. Mike Crang argues that through the power of walking texturology, 'language becomes city and the city becomes an arena of stories, mobilising the poetic and mythological

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75 De Certeau, 94
76 De Certeau, 92
77 De Certeau, 96
78 De Certeau, 94
79 De Certeau, 102
potential of the city"\textsuperscript{80}. De Certeau's proposition, then, echoes Benjamin's poetic, street-level city narrative, opening the potential for dream, storytelling and myth within the city, noting that: 'Memories tie us to that place.... Haunted places are the only ones people can live in..."\textsuperscript{81}.

De Certeau also, too briefly, touches on the potential for rupture of otherwise hegemonically constructed space: 'One thus has the very relationship between spatial practices and the constructed order. The surface of this order is everywhere punched and torn open by ellipses, drifts and leaks of meaning; it is a sieve-order"\textsuperscript{82}. De Certeau did not expand further, much like Benjamin's tantalisingly brief mention of 'porosities'. Yet these two terms describe a concept central to my work: the proposition that city-space is not necessarily solidly real; but like bread, the reality can contain holes or porosities, which can be actively created and repurposed containing the dreamed, the imagined, the story-tale or the myth. There is a threshold where the real meets the imagined, where, much like the articulation of non-place from place, there is a point of spatial tension, where the 'real' is ruptured.

\textsuperscript{80} Crang, 149-150
\textsuperscript{81} De Certeau, 109
\textsuperscript{82} De Certeau, 108
Chapter 3

Artists and the city

While I regularly scan the field for artists working with the city, the urban and (urban) spatiality, there are a series of artists whose work continues to engage me and relate directly to either my field of interest or mode of making. In this chapter I will be discussing the relevant works of Gordon Matta-Clark, Sally Smart, Jess MacNeil and the drawings of Rachel Whiteread.

Gordon Matta-Clark’s interdisciplinary practice includes sculpture, film, performance, drawings, but it is his building cuts and displacements that I continually refer to. In this thesis there is a recognised but unexplored Paris linkage between the theorists and writers discussed previously, and here it is Matta-Clark’s interventions in Paris, *Conical Intersect*, 1975, that condenses many of the themes that relate to my research.

Matta-Clark undertook *Conical Intersect* in Paris in 1975 for the Paris Biennale, in which he cut a series of ovoids though two floors of two adjoining apartments in rue Beaubourg, Les Halles. These seventeenth century buildings were dilapidated and slated for demolition and the streets adjacent were designated for the newly designed Pompidou Centre.

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83 Peter Muir, “Gordon Matta-Clark's Conical Intersect:”Luxury will be king”” *Journal for Cultural Research* 15, no. 2 April 2011, pp 173-192.
Figure 1  Gordon Matta-Clark, Conical Intersect, 1975. gelatin silver print. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

Figure 2  Gordon Matta-Clark, Conical Intersect, 1975, Estate of Gordon Matta-Clark/ Artist's Rights Society

Documentation taken during this temporary intervention show
a series of ovoids hewn through the old building, revealing a panorama of interior and exterior spaces through a vertiginous whirl of cuts, opening down to the street, many meters below. The cuts are roughly-hewn yet precisely aligned, speaking directly to the control of space inherent in the architecture of buildings. Light and shadow form around the cuts, revealing a series of almost biological lacunae or sinuses within in the architecture that align with de Certeau's quote about the proper order, '...punched and torn open by ellipses, drifts and leaks of meaning...’84

The shaky, blue-toned film documentation records the artist sawing and hacking through the aged masonry and wood. The penultimate shot lingers on the finished work, as light and shadow reveal the series of geometric ruptures through the building, then the film closes with the building’s rapid and complete demolition85. The intervention lasted for less than four weeks86.

In *Conical Intersect*, Matta-Clark was clearly reflecting on the recent Government dislocation of Les Halles market (to the Paris periphery) and the associated Haussmann-like makeover, replacing industry and working-class people with a clean new museum, shopping centre and bourgeois housing87. Peter Muir quotes Henri Lefebvre, who of course, because this is Paris, lived a few streets away and grumpily spoke on the hegemonic appropriation of working-class space:

‘In my building behind the Pompidou Centre, the old people have for the most part died and apartments are occupied by offices. They also want to push me out to have

84 de Certeau, 1988, 108
86 Muir, 175
87 Muir, 177
my apartment. I have the feeling that the centre is becoming museumified and managerial. Not politically, but financially managerial.88

In his cut building works, Matta-Clark called the cuts and voids he made in deserted buildings 'interruptions'.89 Eleni Axioti calls them 'improper spaces', challenging the architectural and cultural demand for rational coherence of internal built spaces. Bahar Beslioglu90 quotes Matta-Clark on the cut edge in his series of cut buildings: '...it was kind of the thin edge of what was being seen that interested me as much, if not more than, the views that were being created.'

There is a deeply visceral response to these transgressive ruptures and improper spaces that was summed up by sculptor, Joel Shapiro, recalling his response to Day's End, an illegal 'cutting' in a warehouse on the New York waterfront in 1975:

'It was a mysterious, decrepit place—a huge space—and the cuts had a certain scale. It was frightening. I recalled thinking, Whose building is this? It is dangerous—to go into an abandoned place and chop it up— I don't know what I thought about that. The destructive aspect, I mean... the wilful aspect, I don't know. The piece was dangerous to the viewer. It was large; it had scale. He was creating some kind of edge, flirting with the abyss...'91.

Pamela M Lee posits that Matta-Clark's building cuts function

88 Lefebvre, 2006, “Writing on Cities”, as quoted in Muir 177
as both positive and negative space, which 'destabilise' the spatial understanding of what is present or removed, horizontal or vertical\textsuperscript{92}. She contends further that the cuts generate an 'overabundance of architectural, gestural and spatial cues [that] only renders illegible the object in question'. She describes the phenomenological response: 'As if the person encountering Matta-Clark's work is phenomenologically shattered- traversed by contingency, overwhelmed by a surfeit of perceptual indices, and unmoored from the seeming given-ness of architectural spaces.'\textsuperscript{93}.

Peter Muir also recognises this shattering of legibility: 'In this process of acute interruption [in \textit{Conical Intersect}] the buildings move from architecture to object, from object to fragment... and from fragment to memory\textsuperscript{94}, linking back to Walter Benjamin's insistence on the fractured and uneven condensation of memory and dream around buildings within the city from the street level: a '[t]elescoping of the past through the present' in the words of Benjamin\textsuperscript{95}.

For me, \textit{Conical Intersect} speaks of the traumatic rupture of space in the city, and the almost thrillingly poetic presence and absence of the controlled and the uncontrollable, introducing a sliver of 'the wild' within the controlled city. It is the scale and excess of spatial phenomena, the barely controlled rupture and an explosive creation of new, unanticipated and contingent relationships of space that consistently engages. \textit{Conical Intersect} operates at the intersection of space, place, presence, absence, planned, lived, conceptual and visceral. This is similar territory to that which I strive to locate my art- a crash of Lefebvrian spaces.

\textsuperscript{92} Lee, 225-227
\textsuperscript{93} Lee, 235-236
\textsuperscript{94} Muir, 181
\textsuperscript{95} Benjamin, 1999, 471
For similar reasons, I often return to a series of Rachel Whiteread drawings, in particular those relating to her *House* (1993) project. I am most interested in Whiteread's treatment of space, and the drawings in which she experiments with rupturing and creating space.

Whiteread's drawings reflect her sculptural concerns but are more exploratory and propositional, and as she notes, 'I make lots of drawings: some are carefully drawn and painted; some are collages. It's how I worry things through'. With the *House* drawings her propositions are linked by an incomplete inversion of presence and absence, through positive and negative space.

In *House Study (Grove Road)*, Whiteread used white liquid paper to eliminate a house (possibly the house), from a photo of a row of Victorian housing slated for demolition, one of which she would later internally cast for *House* (1992). The solid slab of white paint on top of the photo shrouds the positive space of the extant house at the same time as indicating the future negative space when the house is demolished. This negative space is more solid and immutable than the built structures around it, but it's featureless plane simultaneously denies physicality, creating an incomplete spatial inversion and resultant tension, as with Matta-Clark's works, while obliquely referencing passing time and the future ruin.

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Whiteread repeats this technique in other experimental drawings, such as *Untitled Postcard study*, 1992, painting over the walls depicted in a found postcard of the interior of, presumably, a historic place, leaving only the parquetry floor visible. Again, the liquid paper simultaneously eliminates and creates space and there is an uncomfortable, continual battle for the foreground between the abstracted shapes of floor and painted-out walls. The use of quotidian materials such as liquid paper and old postcards and the somewhat scrappy working of the images operates against the more profound scale of most of her cast works, and against traditional value system historically inherent in art, amplifying the contingent feel of these works. I enjoy the provocatively contingent and playful nature central to

Figure 3  Rachel Whiteread, House Study (Grove Road)
1992, Tate Gallery, UK.
these drawings and the centrality of drawing to her practice, which relates directly to my studio practice.

Australian artist Jess MacNeil also works with the act of removal and inversion of positive and negative space, to describe personal responses to spaces\(^7\). In a recent artist talk MacNeil described her enduring interest in the individual embodied experience of space and place and the gap between the physical real-space and her personal, psychological response. MacNeil uses absence and negative space (the 'present absent') to create a sense of disorientation or dislocation, and a resultant (phenomenological) slippage or 'hyperawareness'\(^8\).

MacNeil works between video, painting, photography and drawing. Like Whiteread, she initiates spatial discussions through plays on positive and negative space, including process such as rotation and mirroring to attenuate the spatial dislocation. In *Pont des Arts 8a*, 2012, a plane of white paint eliminates the bridge, leaving the human figures and their shadows floating, ungrounded, in space. MacNeil describes her search for the disorienting effect of rupturing the real: 'The sense of “making sense” and also “making nonsense” is important. Alongside absence and presence - intertwined with it- is a preoccupation with orientation and disorientation, and part of the intrigue of exploring absence comes from the disorientation that idea conjures.'\(^9\)

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\(^8\) Jess MacNeil, artist talk, Sydney College of the Arts, Sydney, Australia, 9 April 2014.

Figure 4  Jess MacNeil, Pont des Arts 8a, 2012. Mixed media on board.

Figure 5  Jess MacNeil, Revolution, 2011. video still.

In the video work, Revolution (2011), MacNeil removes the human figures from a central London city landscape, filling the figure shaped void with video data time-shifted from a few seconds before or after, when the figure was absent, so the shape of the human form appears, counter-intuitively, to be filled by the same location. The effect within the visually
overloaded location is disorientating and, on the face of it, magical; a Benjamin-esque phantasmagorical rupture and re-layering of space and time. In this video the camera moves slowly around an endlessly filling classical fountain, in a slow-motion almost eternal present, which serves to increase the anxiety of the search for the removed human form within the cropped city landscape. As MacNeil notes, the human brain is wired to subconsciously search for human shapes and faces within visual data, as a residual survival response. The ‘excess’ of spatiality and contingent factors potentiates the sense of spatial rupture and dislocation. MacNeil has repeatedly used this digital trick in her video works, and each time the uncanny space-time slippage is hypnotically compelling.

I enjoy the magic of the present-absent within MacNeil's video works. The sleigh-of-hand disappearance of the human figures abruptly shatters the viewer's understanding of the real; as de Certeau described: '[t]he law of the "proper" rules in the place'. In the apparent absence of the laws of the physics, there is an opening for magic to step in, evoking a sense of wonderment - either in the cleverness of the digital effect or the visual possibility that it could be real.

The slight-of-hand of the cut and rupture are techniques used to a different effect by Australian artist, Sally Smart, whose work is also a recurring touchstone for my practice.

I respond to the method and materiality of Sally Smart's wall-based spatial narratives, made of deceptively low-fi pinned and collaged cut shapes directly on the wall. Operating within the Braque-ian legacy, Smart combines printed surfaces with

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100 Jess MacNeil, (2014), artist talk
101 Lee (1998) 235-236
102 de Certeau, 1984, 117
fabric, felt and paper, to generate large scale, oblique narrative installations, and through this space play out her concerns. Smart's works have been described as surreal and uncanny\textsuperscript{103}, and while her field of interrogation is centred around 'pick[ing] over exploded myths of femininity\textsuperscript{104}, Smart operates within the spatial though her generation of imagined spaces and installation techniques, generating 'unstable' compositions and 'impaired' pictures.

![Image](image-url)

Figure 6  Sally Smart, Femmage Frieze 1999, Installation view, Robert Lindsey Gallery, Melbourne

I am most interested in Smart's techniques: generating nonsensical spaces that are completely contingent, relational and surreal, containing an oblique narrative. Figures walk on roads of limbs and pirate ships contain skirts and ribcages. The apparently barely controlled visual elements appear to jostle for space and meaning as they are taped, life-sized, to the wall.

\textsuperscript{103} Maria Kunda, “Sally Smart: Shadow Farm”, Catalogue essay, Sally Smart: Shadow Farm, Bendigo Art Gallery (Impact Printing, Melbourne, 2001)

\textsuperscript{104} Helen McDonald, “The Unhomely Body”, Catalogue essay, Sally Smart: The Unhomely Body, Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia (Contemporary Arts Centre of South Australia, 1996)
Cut-outs and silhouettes have a broad and contemporary use and I frequently refer to other artists working in this field, such as Swoon (USA), Kara Rees (USA), Mia Perlman (USA) and Peter Madden (Aus). I am drawn to the cut-out and silhouette because they are effective reductive techniques. They permit collapse of the object's meaning, social reading, historical and physical context within the single cutout or silhouette. For me, the power of this lies in the tension existing within the collapse. In removing information and simplifying form there is an implied absence and, as with Jess MacNeil's 'present-absent', a point of balance must be actively sought by the viewer to resolve a reading. Smart's wall-based works amplify this tension as the viewer literally walks into the almost life-sized spatial narratives. Beyond this, though, it is Smart's aesthetic that appeals. The contingent, barely controlled and crowded, yet almost impossibly reduced look and feel of the works appeals viscerally, beyond spatial theory.
Chapter 4

Ruptures and porosities in the city: Studio Work

This chapter discusses the studio work undertaken as part of the MFA research. My research is practice-led and uses an intuitive and material process, allowing conscious and subconscious associations to emerge; like Benjamin, to follow glimpsed images and imagined situations. It is only after the materially-based interrogation commences that I am able to reflect and research the conceptual and theoretical relationships. This process is reflected in the structure of this thesis, with separate chapters discussing theory and studio work.

The studio work developed into three parallel lines of enquiry across the MFA research period, all sampling, exploring and spatialising the city.

I have been making works in response to the city for a number of years, reflected in the series of ongoing questions that thread through the studio works discussed. Frequently I start with an intuitive response to a fragment of the city—a place, movement, object glimpsed, or thought triggered as I move through the city. I spend time walking around the city looking at space, place and people, similar to Walter Benjamin’s urban rambling and sampling. As indicated in previous chapters, I am drawn to sites of contradiction; social, functional and spatial, which I can experimentally interrogate.

The first line of enquiry discussed here (Cubicle Farming) is associated with city office spaces, explored through paste-ups and drawings. The second line of enquiry evolved and
expanded to include questions of the built and the wild (*The Unattended and the Wild*). The third line further investigates notions of the rupture of (city) space (*The Cut and the Rupture*).

**Cubicle Farming**
The MFA studio work commenced with a series of four paste-ups, installed in the streets of my suburb, using suit-wearing office workers as shorthand for the contemporary condition of 'working'. This line of enquiry was called *Cubicle Farming*, in a nod to the pejorative and colloquial name for open plan offices—'cubicle farms' and my ongoing office-based work experiences. Immediately prior to starting this thesis I developed a series of videos and projections using interior office spaces and office workers.

The paste-ups evolved from this point. I had become interested in notions of productivity and how work and its associated spaces have shifted over time. It seems that the majority of city workers are office-based or in service industries to the office workers. There are no longer any functioning factories, commercial wharfs or warehouses in the city centre; they have been economically rationalised to this or other city peripheries. Work in the pre-modern city was highly embodied and local, deeply concerned with the physical: making, sorting, storing, growing or moving 'things' in the world. Yet contemporary city work is increasingly screen-based and virtual, in open plan offices where office-workers physically touch nothing except a mouse. Michael Serres provocatively posits that this cultural shift in the mid twentieth century marks the end of the Neolithic period\(^{105}\) and Manuel Castells named its replacement

\(^{105}\) Michel Serres, *Times of Crisis: What the Financial Crisis*
To open this question I proposed a playfully inverted hierarchy of 'productive work', where suit-wearing city workers undertook embodied, agrarian-based tasks. This evolved into a series of visual propositions. These 'productivity nodes', riff off common office tasks, such as double entry accounting, quarterly reporting and resource allocation, in which the workers make, tend or move physical agrarian things in place of the contemporary, virtual tasks, such as collecting water or planting crops. 'Management' was also present in each node, checking laptops, clipboard auditing and conveying orders over mobile phones.

It was important to me that the nodes occupied the porous threshold between totally nonsensical and sensible, between the photograph and the graphic, the urban and the agrarian and the real and the imagined.

Figure 8  Cubicle Farmers productivity node: Water Farming and team Resource Allocation, 2011. Paste-up, installation view.


Within these nodes I used the suit-wearing office worker as shorthand for contemporary 'work', and more specifically for contemporary CBD office-bound work: white-collar, computer-based and resolutely unheroic. I see the suit as both the commodity outcome and quotidian referent of office work, and use it in an almost non-pejorative sense. The suit has had an undeniably loaded visual history in art, and over time has variously stood in for the capitalist machine and spectacle, the hegemony, and the physical and social woes of the modern city. My reading of the suit, though, is that in line with other highly charged twentieth century concerns with the metropolis, such as 'the crowd', the spectacle and the commodity fetish, the suit has, by enlarge, been culturally internalised now, reducing its
previously polemic reading to one of only residual loading. Arguably, the suit has for some time been as much interwoven with the patina of the city as crowded footpaths, subways and mobile phones. Taking this position enables me to use the suit primarily as a descriptive visual element - much like an individual animal can be described in shorthand by the fur colour and type characteristic of its species.

**Ruptured space/ porous space**

On reflection, I see these works functioning as localised spatial ruptures, where the functional spatiality is disturbed through the insertion of the propositional spatial narrative of the paste-up node. The sites were phenomenologically selected and share a degree of spatial ambivalence or contradiction, through combinations of materiality, location or function. In Water Farming: Team Resource Allocation the location is a concrete retaining wall, below a road and beside an old, open drain. This transit space (cars, pedestrians and water) contains an ambivalent spatial and temporal relationality. The paste-up initiates a spatial disruption on a series of levels - broadly through conflicting scale and materiality, specifically though the inversion of inside and outside, and more obliquely, through juxtaposition of nature and culture. The interior office referents are conflated with external agrarian tasks, yet depicted almost fairy-tale sized, in a grittily urban site, at the edge of a contrived waterway.

As mentioned in previous chapters, I draw on Walter Benjamin's 'porosity' and Michel de Certeau's 'torn' spatial order to frame an understanding of the term 'rupture'. These spatial terms articulate away from the *a priori* geometric and social hierarchy of space ordered by rules; a solidified, 'proper'
The critical corollary is that this hierarchy can be inverted; that solidified space can be ruptured—actively torn and punched, or opened to reveal the internal porosities—through specific acts of intervention. This is the point at which I would like to make work: generating the rupture, like Matta-Clark and de Certeau, or, like Benjamin, sampling a location that is unstably porous or transitional, where the 'proper rules' of space, place and non-place are not completely in force.

Like the street, the office is also a site of spatial contradiction. Augé's 'non-place' and Rem Koolhaas's 'junkspace' describe the contemporary office. Environmentally controlled, furnished with bland formica surfaces and replaceable carpet squares, open-plan offices are designed to defeat any attempt by their inhabitants to leave a residue, mark or memory. Yet, office workers spend considerable time here, evolving minor de Certeau-style 'tactics' of inhabitation, such as family photos, personal mugs and shortcuts through the copy room, as they develop an anthropological connection of placefulness within the office. The office space itself, therefore, exists in contradiction, slipping between non-place and tactically reclaimed place, between conceived and lived space. In retrospect, it is this potential for shift within office spaces in the city that I find interesting.

The Gallery and The Street
The Productivity Nodes operate firmly at street-level, and I have an ongoing interest in the potentiated dialogue between site and installation in non-gallery spaces. Following the

107 De Certeau, p117
108 Verschaffel, Bart. 'Reading Rem Koolhaas'. In Architectural Histories 1 (1) no. 12, (10 Jun 2013) pp 1-3 http://dx.doi.org/10.5334/ah.al
footsteps of the Situationists, I am drawn by the elusive opportunity for play and small acts of detournement in the city, and use the street as both a site of data collection and as location for the interventional propositions and hypotheses.

The *Productivity Nodes* series expanded into a commission for *Streetware2*, October 2011, a City of Sydney public art project. The work, *Cubicle Farming*, 2011, was installed in three locations around a small, secretively walled park in a back lane of the Sydney CBD. The overgrown and unkempt park, surrounded by office blocks, presented a corner of unattended wilderness in the heart of the CBD. This location offered the opportunity to play off the two elements in an intervention.

![Figure 10 Cubicle Farming, 2011. Paste-up, installation views](image-url)
In the process of making, a group of foxes emerged within the work, as I was loosely thinking about the park’s location and notions of wildness. I saw the foxes as the propositional inhabitants of the park, and further, if the suit functions as shorthand for office work, then the fox could, oppositionally stand in for 'the wild'. This notion is discussed later in this chapter. I kept the visual narrative of the foxes and the suited figures intentionally ambivalent- they could be alternatively tended, farmed or even worshipped; located partway between the office, the field and the shamanic temple.

The final work in this series relating to office work spaces reflected on the Productivity Nodes works, but actually returned to my original question of the nature and spatiality of contemporary office work, in a super-sized wall paste-up, View of the West Pediment, at Stills Gallery, 2012. The question was triggered by a passing glimpse of a gesturing group of office workers, obliquely reminding me of the defiant battle gesture in Jacques-Louis David's 18th century painting, Oath of the Horatii. In this large-scale painting David directly referenced a Roman legend about two warring cities, but allegorically spoke about power and social unrest in pre-revolutionary France. In this work I playfully propose a link between the office bound 'corporate warrior' and David's neoclassical soldiers. Soldiering, like farming, was a technologically unskilled, highly physical, and commonplace job for much of pre-modern history. As with the Productivity Nodes, I was interested in a playful collapse of opposites: the pre-modern physical battles of soldiers and the contemporary, office-bound corporate power

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battles, as well as the potential to play with valorisation of the common, un-heroic office worker.

Figure 11  View of the West Pediment, 2012, installation view

The work referenced the classically formatted shape of battle scenes on the pediment of the Parthenon (such as would have existed on the long-destroyed west pediment\textsuperscript{110}). The super-lifesized figures presented a wall-length monumentality, attenuated by the value system implicit in the commercial gallery space, which was intentionally offset by the paste-up's cheap materiality. The work was plan-printed onto bond paper,

\textsuperscript{110}  'What are the Parthenon Marbles?' undated, http://www.greece.org/parthenon/marbles/pmarb.htm
leaving an analogue pattern of printer defects and tone variations, which obliquely recalled the geological marks revealed within carved marble.

I saw the complete paste-up series as a group of empirical experiments, initiated by the central question around contemporary work and work places, through which I was introduced to the previously discussed theories of contingent spatiality and developed my understanding of the potential for urban spatial instabilities and ruptures.

**The Unattended and the Wild**

The second, overlapping, line of enquiry that developed across the duration of the MFA, loosely termed 'the unattended city' evolved from the emergent fox forms that developed in *Cubicle Farming* paste-ups.

In the first phase of this investigation I wanted to further understand the role of these foxes within the city I was sampling. Foxes are both urban and wild: introduced into Australia by white Europeans for recreational hunting, yet subsequently successfully co-opting a series of ecological niches, including urban scavenger. For this reason alone the fox seemed appropriate for a paste-up in an overgrown city park. The fox, like wolves and coyotes, has historic mythological presence and is granted a wild intelligence, yet lives within the city terrain, all but invisible to humans.

I was therefore interested to see whether the fox (and later, other wild canids) could stand in as shorthand for both the 'wild' and the city. If the city is, a spatial concentration of economy, culture, information, power and population, then the 'wild' is its allegorical antithesis, outside the concerns of city.
These untamed urban canids could therefore function metaphorically as both the urban and the wild, collapsing a binary within the singular form of the fox at a point of narrative tension.

It is impossible to talk about poetic tensions and wild canids without referencing Joseph Beuys' use of the coyote in *I Like America and America Likes Me*, Beuys first and only aktion in America, in 1974\textsuperscript{111}.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure12.jpg}
\caption{Joseph Beuys, *I like America and America likes me*, 1974, photographic documentation of performance, Tate Collection, UK}
\end{figure}

In this work, a shamanically felt-clad Beuys and a native coyote occupied a caged section of an up-town New York gallery for three days. Jan Verwoert argued that this was nothing more than an unresolved, one-sided performance: Beuys performed obscure ceremonial gestures, while the coyote just did what coyotes do, for the most part ignoring Beuys. In a few passing moments there appeared to be mutual interest, which Verwoert notes, 'make the animal look as if it were an

\begin{footnote}{\textsuperscript{111} David Levi Strauss, *Between Dog & Wolf, Essays on Art and Politics*, (Autonomedia, Brooklyn, NY, 1999), 20-25.}
\end{footnote}
integral part of one single overarching allegory. But despite Verwoet's New York cynicism, perhaps this is exactly the point-throughout the 'performance' (or caging, depending on your point of reference) the coyote remained resolutely and singularly wild within the city, as if it could, imaginatively, precipitate all of New York around it, purely in reaction to its wildness. Of all of Beuys work, it is this specific point of poetic tension that interests me.

My studio research started with the cutout fox photocopies from Cubicle Farming. In experimentally removing the fox from the streetwall, and gluing them to foamcore silhouettes I could install the free-standing forms in the city. The working proposition was the potential for these simulacra foxes to inhabit the city, in parallel yet like ghosts or myths of 'the wild'. I scouted Sydney CBD for 'unattended' sites- the opposite of functional, clean and utilised; rather, the overlooked, forgotten or unoccupied niches. As I undertook this, much like Benjamin, I felt drawn phenomenologically to the whispering call of the ruin.

In the resultant photographs (the Nightgardens series), a group of foxes (intermittently accompanied by a female attendant) occupy hidden niches, passages and corners of the city. As with the related paste-ups, I kept the narrative intentionally opaque, to contain but not direct the echoes of the constructed contradictions.

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The works contain a series of contradictions. The fox itself is a mythological contradiction as is its presence with a human in the city. Foxes are naturally solitary animals and don’t operate in groups, yet it seemed necessary for them to do so here, to potentiate their visual effect and to reflect the scale and multiple of the city. Finally, the foxes are clearly not quite real, but neither are they digitally imaged. The use of freestanding
cutouts, photographed in black and white with limited tonal range and flat light generates a sense of uncanniness to their not-quite-there dimensionality.

Figure 15  *Nightgarden* series: *Words Follow Deeds*, 2012/2014. Digital print on rag.

Claude Levi-Strauss posited a human need to categorise and reconcile central dichotomies such as nature-culture, and the use of myth to collapse and resolve these binary contradictions, and there is a point of incomplete mythological reconciliation that I hoped these foxes occupied within the city, in a poetic node of contradiction.

I frequently return to the use of animal forms in my work. Partly because of my animal science background, I find the animal a handy cypher for the human. Within my work the single animal usually stands-in, in an Aesop-like mode, for the unidentified individual human and human society. In general I tend to avoid the specific or particular; place, people, things, events; but am drawn to collapsing the particular back into the

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general: the generic group or species rather than the unique individual, the City rather than this city; the rule rather than the exception. In this space of the generalised there is an almost scientific operational distance between the imagined, narrative proposition I create and the visceral real world of the particular.

After completing four images within the Nightgarden photographic series, I was unsure how the line of enquiry would progress photographically, so returned, iteratively, to the paste-up and gallery wall collages to experiment further with the canid forms.

Figure 15  
*View from the edge of the ruin, 2013. Paste-up, fabric and mesh. Installation view, dimensions variable.*
In this enquiry I combined forms rendered in photocopy, fly-screen mesh and rubberised fabric to experiment with layering, materiality, and contingently generated spaces, aligning with Sally Smart and following in the Surrealists footsteps. Max Ernst, in particular, linked collage with the impossibly generative magic of alchemy: “Collage is the noble conquest of the irrational, the coupling of two realities, irreconcilable in appearance, upon a plane which apparently does not suit them”. 

In this exploration I aimed for the threshold between the clear and opaque, the controlled and sketchy, and the real and the mythologically unreal. Using the wall permitted a direct materiality that contrasts with photography. Beyond the scope of this MFA research work, I see potential to interweave the two media-based approaches in dual-location narratives where street and gallery wall speak directly to each other.

*View from the edge of the ruin* lead to a larger mesh and fabric installation, *Unattended City*, installed in the Graduate School Gallery, in *Dystopia*, curated by Nicholas Tsoutas, July 2013. The title refers to the corners and crevices I became familiar with in making the *Nightgarden* photographs, and reflected on the economically contingent nature of the modern city, where the eddies and flows of success and failure are reflected in the repeating cycle of rebuilding and slow slide towards ruin.

In this work I composed a collaged view of an imagined city, using fragments of photographed unattended nodes, in an attempt to ‘make’ a mythological city for the canids I had been exploring. During the work’s development the fox forms

morphed into wild dogs, slinking, mobbing and fighting in a loosely described, graffitied, urban space—larger, more numerous and physically threatening than the Aesopian foxes.

Figure 16  *Unattended City*, 2013. Mesh, plastic, fabric and tape. Installation view, dimensions variable.

Figure 17  *Unattended City*, 2013. Mesh, plastic, fabric and tape. Installation view detail.

The large-scale city fragments were pinned and gaffa-taped impermanently to the wall, in part as a search for the point of
layered intensity at which the materials almost, but not quite, oversaturated and peeled off the wall. On the opposite wall, the node of wild dogs fighting contained a pared back materiality and form.

Figure 18  Unattended City, 2013. Mesh, plastic, fabric and tape. Installation view detail.

Taped up and repaired, incomplete and contingent, the interstitial zone of the Unattended City is where the economically dispossessed and the urban wild can be found, inhabiting the uneconomic, unplanned and not-quite-yet ruined. This installation operated as a poetic proposition, an incomplete narrative of a city sliding into and out of ruin, a point that also interested Benjamin. Susan Buck Morss, writing about the ageing Parisian arcades attraction to Benjamin notes "The crumbling of the monuments that were built to signify the immortality of civilisations becomes proof, rather, of its transiency".\textsuperscript{116}

This work marked an overt shift of enquiry, to consideration of the ruin and ruin-lust. While this is beyond the scope and duration of the research question, I am interested in the functional, temporal and visual porosity presented by the notion

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of the ruin, and for future studio research would like to respond to a term from Robert Smithson, ‘ruins in reverse’.

The Cut and Rupture
The third line of enquiry undertaken during this MFA focused on drawing and cut marks on paper. My drawing practice occurs continuously and in parallel to the studio work previously discussed. This section looks at drawings undertaken, specifically in relation to Marc Augé's non-place and Matta-Clark's visual theories of the cut and rupture.

It was enlightening to discover, part way through the MFA theoretical research, Augé's spatial theory of non-place. I had previously struggled to articulate my intuitive response to the spatial tension in these places, attempting to frame it though the terms 'ungrounding' and 'untethering'. Drawing offered an alternative mode to think about place, non-place and spatial instability through the rupture of erasure and of cut. As noted by William Kentridge, 'the vital thing about drawing for me is that it is a medium in which one can think.'

Location plan for air factory, 2012, evolved from left-over working material from the Cubicle Farming paste-ups and location scouts, into a collage of drawing and digital print on paper. Like Jess MacNeil, I played with the disconcerting erasure of digital information from the photograph to create a virtual rupture, and to further disorientate by colliding the photographic plane with a second plane of drawn figures to create an impossible space.

To further explore the potential for rupture I experimented with cutting into the printed and drawn mark on the paper. This opened a new field of investigation, using as a starting point my collected images of urban non-places. While on a residency at the Cité Internationale des Arts, Paris in 2011, I reconsidered my understanding of built relationality to ground. As I explored the city, it appeared that the historical centre of Paris had a material groundedness and an organic link to the soil through the shared materiality of limestone, slate and sand, whereas the high rises in La Defense and the banlieue actively denied any groundedness through modernist form and concrete materiality. I see this as a reflection from Augé's conversation about anthropologically mediated spatial connection, to a conversation about material and geological connection and how the 'built' articulates with the earth on which it stands.

This line of enquiry is in-progress and at this point I have undertaken three drawings to explore notions of un-
groundedness, and again, work at the threshold between two positions: ungrounded / non-place/ junkspace/ zero-panoramas, and the ‘grounded’ or articulated spaces that I propose as their visual counter.

![Figure 20 Certitude, 2012. Pencil, cut paper and spray paint, 75 cm x 95 cm](image)

In developing these works I use photos of sites selected phenomenologically and attenuate the spatial tensions through pencil drawing and cut paper mark. The action of physically cutting recurs repeatedly in my practice so it intuitively seemed appropriate to use in here. The cut mark is a hard and rupturing force. In this, like Matta-Clark, I was deeply interested in the destabilisation at the edge of the cut.
Figure 21  
Surface Tension, 2012. Pencil, cut paper and spray paint, 72 x 97 cm.

Figure 22  
Superdry, 2014. Pencil and cut rag paper, 95 x 120 cm

This in-progress body of work opens a future research question that is not yet ready for exploration here, including notions of 'groundedness' and the emergence of the sublime within the
spatial context previously discussed, and possibly even connecting to notions of ruin-lust. The process of studio research is continual, so nominating an end point is artificial, yet this is the point at which this thesis is now. This is not the finish, but the start of a new series of questions.
Conclusion

The original purpose of this thesis research was to investigate the reasons why the city had become central to my art making and try to understand why I am repeatedly drawn the city as a site of research, sampling and narrative. In this I have undertaken a journey through a series of spatial theories, and considered how these theories and texts resonate with and inform my studio work.

My art making is practice-led and I did not intend to replace intuition, play and experimentation with the foreknowledge of theory-led making in this process. Across the MFA project the studio work remained distinct yet related to the theoretical research. I was drawn to research writers, theorists and artists that resonated with my interest and in doing so came to a better understanding of the theories and experience of urban space and place, my intuitive and phenomenological response to certain spaces within the city and my compulsion to work propositionally at the threshold between the real and the imagined. The theoretical research has provided me with a valuable framework to critically review and reflect on my work and to more effectively frame and discuss my practice within the context of urban spatial theory, which I hope will ultimately lead to making work that is tighter, more probing and closer to the edge.

This thesis summarises the research path undertaken and the theories and artists that were most relevant to my site of research and studio work. I do not claim to have investigated all relevant spatial theorists or artists working within this field, but within the time limitations of the MFA project, these are the
figures, words and images that I felt on both an intuitive and theoretical level resonated with my interest and practice. To repeat a quote from James Donald, in arguing for the author's right to select inclusions and exclusions: 'I do know that I do not want to spend most of my time explaining where and why I disagree with these guides...Let’s just say that mine is a different city from theirs'.

Henri Lefebvre’s post-Cartesian, triadic and relational spatiality provided me with a breakthrough to understand space as a fluid relationship between people, culture and space. Lefebvre’s theories support the idea of the experience of urban space as unique, relational and contingent, a spatial experience that can be subject to shift. I was able to enrich this position through Marc Augé’s refinement of anthropological connectivity and the emergence of non-place to provide a theoretical understanding of my intuitive response to non-places, and to conceptualise the threshold or articulation between place and non-place as a site of spatial shift or tension.

Walter Benjamin’s term ‘porosities’ and his oblique interest in the threshold provided an alternative framework to understand the Augé/ Lefebvrian shift between place and non-place. Augé's resolute dichotomy of connected / disconnected space did not consider how these met, articulated or changed over time. Benjamin's poetic insistence on the presence of porosities and thresholds within the city enabled me to see this dichotomy as also an analogue continuum; a path or threshold from one state to another and back again.

Through interrogating Matta-Clark’s cuts and Jess MacNeil’s present-absent spaces, I have formed an understanding of the

119 Donald, 1999, x
underlying phenomenological tension created at the point of the cut, and the edge of the porosity, which was important in furthering my understanding of the function and reading of the cut paper mark and the paper and fabric cutout within my practice.

Finally, Walter Benjamin and Michel de Certeau offered theoretical support for the use of the narrative, storytelling and the poetic within my practice. For de Certeau, these could be seen as counter-hegemonic tactics of spatial reclamation whereas for Benjamin they were part and parcel of inhabiting the socially, historically and spatially condensed sites of the city. He offered an individual and narrative-based way of viewing the world.

The thesis also clarified for me where my future interests and research may lie, and opened some lines of enquiry to pursue, such as the threshold of the ruin and “ruins in reverse”¹²⁰, and the location of the (urban) sublime within this context. I am looking forward to undertaking this from the position of understanding achieved through this thesis research.

Note- The images following were the gallery-based outcome of this thesis and examination process.

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Fig 23 Void Fraction, installation view, Graduate Galleries, Sydney College of the Arts, 2014
Flyscreen mesh, plastic, spray paint, monitor, light, tape, pins, thread.

Fig 24 Void Fraction, detail of installation.
Fig 25 *Void Fraction*, video still

Fig 26 *Void Fraction*, detail of installation

Fig 27 *Void Fraction*, detail of installation
Fig 28 *Void Fraction*, photographic installation on opposite wall.
Digital print on photorag paper, each image 145 x 80 cm approx.

Fig 29 Studio installation of work in progress, 2014.
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J.A. Barcelo, G. Pelfer, A Mandolesi. 'The origins of the city: from social theory to archaeological description.' *Archeologia e Calculato*, no.13 ( 2002): 41-64

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Resume
Catalogue of Work Presented for Examination

*Nightgarden 2*: installation of digital photographs on digital rag paper, 2012/2014

*Unattended 2*: wall installation: flyscreen mesh, fabric, tape, beads, thread, pins, 2014

*Ruinscream*: video installation with sound (2:00 looped), 2014
List of Images (DVD)

As the basis of the works to be examined is installation, documentation of these works to be provided after installation.