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Fragments of a Scene: Voicing Urban Memories Through Postcards

Abstract

In this paper I develop a postcard metaphor as an aid to a deep and personal enquiry into the construction of urban place within a constantly shifting global context. Such an approach is significant to the discourse of urban development in cities like Perth where, due to the highly mobile population, the city plan cannot of itself carry the history of much of the population. Through Clifford and Massey I locate a position from which to explore the intimate meanings generated between people and the built environment which actively includes their personal travel histories and relationships to locations around the world.The auto-ethnographic and creative practice component of this paper takes the form of constructed postcards through which I examined my relationship to the city of Perth and several external sites of related experiences. The postcard as both metaphor and guiding rule for creative enquiry seems rich with potential as a way into inter-urban stories of place meaning.

I left. Not for the first time. I left again. I wanted to know what it felt like to live and walk in the glossy magazine urban regeneration photos. How was it different to make a home in the cities that people said they wished Perth was like? I packed an oversize backpack with books, clothes, a camera, pens and notebooks. I packed tracing paper too, although this was soon discarded. Turned out measuring the pavement wasn't helping.

Introduction

In this paper I develop a postcard metaphor as an aid to a deep and personal enquiry into the construction of place. Such an approach is significant to the discourse of urban development in cities like Perth where, due to the highly mobile population, the city plan cannot of itself carry the history of much of the population. This is a challenge to established approaches to urban theory and urban regeneration practices. To test the postcard metaphor as a mode of enquiry which centers urban meaning on the individual I examined my relationship to the city of Perth and several external sites of related experiences.[1] This paper consists of four main sections, this introduction, and a bridge. This introductory text outlines the intent and structure of the paper. The first main section, "Setting the Scene: Noticing a Gap," locates this paper in the place-meaning discourse and highlights the gap in the discourse which I seek to address through the postcard metaphor. The second section, "An Alternative View Point," outlines an elaborated theory of place that I build on to address the gap outlined in section one. The third section consists of three parts, each contains two sides of a created postcard and a re-photographed image. These are aspects of the early stages of my creative practice enquiry. The text that accompanies these images outlines key themes addressed in the created postcards and in doing this I outline the anticipated key themes of my larger PhD work. This larger work explores the sometimes tenuous connections between Perth and Barcelona, Manchester, and Berlin through my lived experience. The final section of this paper discusses postcards as metaphor through which to engage with this elaborated theory of place, comments on the successes of this chosen in the context of my thesis enquiry to date, and indicates the direction of further work.

Section One: Setting the scene and noticing a gap

Broadly, writing on collective memory and sense of place can be divided into two

categories. One sees the design of the city as a way of producing or guiding the collective memory of a population, through monuments, memorials, historic references; the other is more concerned with the slow layering of everyday meaning between a place and the people who occupy it (Hebbert 2005, 581). Both positions have strengths and inherent problems or gaps when considering Perth as a place of everyday inhabitation.

The former mode which often seems to dominate the language of designers deals in typologies and essences. From this top down perspective the individual actions and associations of the inhabitant are glossed over. The associations and life of the city are seen as a result of the language of the design. The assumed readings and response of the "users" relies on a common (European) background. This is the urban language of "institutional power and continuity" (Hebbert 2005, 851).

The second, Halbwachian sense of place, a notion of collective memory built over an extended time between a static population and the built environment, can be said to underlay or resonate with the "new urbanism" of Rossi, Siza, Bohigas, Rowe and Boyer (Hebbert 2004, 588). However, this admirable Halbwachian emphasis on the co-responsive relationship between groups and the qualities of an urban space does not translate simplyfor a city like Perth. The population of Perth cannot be considered to be homogenous or static. When speaking of the relationships between the built environment and the population of Perth not only do many groups within a culture need to be considered but many cities, cultures, and histories need to be taken into account. The city plan does not carry the history of significant proportions of the population. Thus, the established practice of figure-ground analysis requires augmentation to encompass the pasts and the travel paths of the highly mobile, and globally interrelated population.

Many theorists claim that place is no longer meaningful, "claiming that modernity and internationalisation produce "'placlessness'… inauthentic physical environments" (Gustafson 2001, 5). For example Boyer searches for the City of Collective Memory in contemporary sites, but does not find it. Lefebvre and de Certeau call for a "return" to a static population's relationships to the city and street, one of fable and local history. Certainly from this position the suburban sprawl and hollow centre of Perth would be read as an example of this modern

lack of place. However delving into the scale of the inhabitant (or the walker as de Certeau names the urban dweller) need not romanticise a past European walled city type, a sympathetic mode of enquiry can instead investigate the specificity and meaning of a place which is constantly changing and dependant on intimate relationships across the globe for this meaning.

Specifically, where the Halbwachian derived notions of inhabitation fail in a reading of Perth is in their naturalisation of static and long term groups as the model for urban inhabitants. This is problematic in a city like Perth, (and many cities all over the world) where a substantial proportion of the population are first and second generation migrants.[2] Additionally, in Perth the practice of overseas travel and return is normalised through the practice of, or aspiration to, international travel: gap years, working holidays, ancestry visas, youth migration and return for family raising and retirement, budget tours, and holidays. The role of this amassed cultural capital in reading or writing Perth is not accounted for in the essentialising models of place. In a city of individuals with recent migrant history, sprawling new buildings, and frequent travel practices it is limiting to focus only on the heritage fabric of proximate historic events (or its absence) to explore the way in which people read and appropriate the urban form.

Section Two: An alternative view point

In searching for a more fruitful model of place-experience, I link the dual identity traveler-dweller as articulated by James Clifford (1997) with Doreen Massey's network-places (see for example 1994a) and Michael de Certeau's notions of inhabitation (1984). The outcome of this is a theoretical position from which to develop the postcard as metaphor and method for creative enquiry.

James Clifford presents a model of inhabitation that has grown out of a critical analysis of ethnographic and anthropological practices. He identifies the practice of naturalizing the assumption that a studied population is static, while camouflaging or rendering unproblematic the travel between physical locations and cultural institutions undertaken by the field research. In practice, says Clifford, both the researcher and the researched are engaged in spatial practices of travel and dwelling. Locating Perth as a site of travel encounter (Clifford 1997, 5) when engaging in a deep site analysis gives weight to the travel histories of the

city's inhabitants and shifts the weight of significance away from static, essentialising constructions of history and heritage. I speculate this will shift the bias from colonial history and built form, towards a closer reflection of aspects of lived experience within Perth.

Massey argues the danger of "reactionary" and nostalgic notions of place. She argues that places have always been interconnected with others, and that the specificity of a place comes not only from the built environment, and the activities of the individuals, but the particularity of connections between that place and the rest of the world. As such, places must be in a state of constant change. For Massey it is the processes – the dynamic relationships – that define a place. As different individuals are involved in different relationships, the same place holds different meanings to different individuals, or the same individual over time (see for example Massey 1991 and 1994). Single essential identities do not account for the reality of multiplicity of identity within a single place and the internal conflicts that must be negotiated because of this. The reliance on a "long, internalised history" in order to construct an identity of place draws boundaries and renews opposition between groups: "them and us." Static notions of place are vulnerable to change, or invasion and therefore defensive in a way that the notion of dynamic process of place avoids (1994, 152). Drawing battle or defense lines is problematic from a post-structuralist and postcolonial position which values multiplicity and inclusion. In her sympathy to individual meaning making and her model for a fluid and relational specificity Massey maps a way out of the trap laid by often unquestioned assumptions of the norm and desirable urban life in contemporary cities.

A brief extract from Massey's description of her own place Kilburn illustrates these progressive values:

> …while Kilburn may have a character of its own, it is absolutely not a seamless, coherent identity , a single sense of place which everyone shares. It could hardly be less so. People's routes through the place, their favourite haunts within it, the connections they make (physically, or by phone or post, or in memory and imagination) between here and the rest of the world vary enormously. (1994, 153)

Massey highlights the "routes," "haunts," and "connections" of the local inhabitants as generating the diversity and specificity of the place. These connections themselves she breaks down into three general categories: "physically, or by phone or post, or in memory or imagination."

De Certeau's digressions on entrances and exits to habitable spaces suggest the form for the metaphor of this elaborated model.In particular in one passage within "Walking in the City" he writes of "bringing back" to the urban everyday, fragments of places visited in a process of imaginative augmentation, that is inhabitation:[3]

> Travel (like walking) is a substitute for the legends that used to open up space to something different...[it produces] a fiction, which moreover has the double characteristic, like dreams or pedestrian rhetoric, of being the effect of displacements and condensations. *One could say the same about photos brought back from trips, substituted for and turned into legends about the starting place.*[4] As a corollary, one can measure the importance of these signifying practices (to tell oneself legends) as practices that invent spaces. (1984, 107)

I read this extract as a suggestion towards a form for a more interlinked model of place, one grounded in the experience of individuals. The postcards presented in the second half of this paper are material representations of "legends about the starting place," they are an embodiment of individual performances of space.[5] The "photos brought back" in the extended quote above are the point of departure for the postcard metaphor adopted in the next part of this paper.

Through Clifford and Massey I locate a position from which to explore the intimate meanings generated between people and the built environment which actively includes their personal travel histories and relationships to locations around the world. From de Certeau I borrow the sensitive and at times poetic engagement with urban walkers, and the specific form of a small transportable rectangle of printed photo image that carry personal stories of place.

Bridge

In working towards a grounded engagement with other places in the lived context of Perth, the image fragments of this paper sketch and gesture at three postcards that, at this stage in the research, seem likely that I am carrying about in *my* pockets. They suggest connections between routes and haunts in Perth and memories, imaginings, and ways of being in distant places. Firstly, in a *Postcard from Barcelona*, a reflection on Perth's urban discourse. Secondly, a *Postcard from Manchester*, reveals an unexpected transfer of places through my mother. Finally, in a *Postcard from Berlin*, a reflection on the unreliable nature of communication, speculating on aspects of what is not "written" and not "read" in Perth's built form.

The creative construction of these postcard-like personal summaries has formed part of the reflexive analysis and interpretation process. The text and image sides of the cards work together, rather than one side explaining or illustrating the other. Through images something is discovered and shown that could not be appreciated and felt through words alone (Simoni 1996, 76). Likewise words are able to focus the discussion and give specificity and context in ways that the images do not.Making postcard summaries is the first step in the proposed methodology of my larger PhD work - the "sending" phase. My ambition for these developing narratives and image fragments is that they read as open texts full of lunca for inhabitation, and in doing so echo my reading of urban places. The "receiving" phase proposed repeats the field work process on home turf, in response to the postcards "sent." A first step toward this second phase is taken in the section that follows through the re-photography of the constructed postcards into the landscape of Perth as I find it, late 2010.

I am presenting these postcards here as a starting point towards testing the metaphor. The criteria we are testing against are Jane Jacobs' among others (1992, 16). As readers, I ask that you do as I am doing. Hold these postcards up to your own experience, as starting points for embodied critical thought. In the final section of this paper I will reflect on how well these objects work as expressions of place connection, what personal associations are conjured, and what opportunities these objects avail for the reader's own inhabitation.
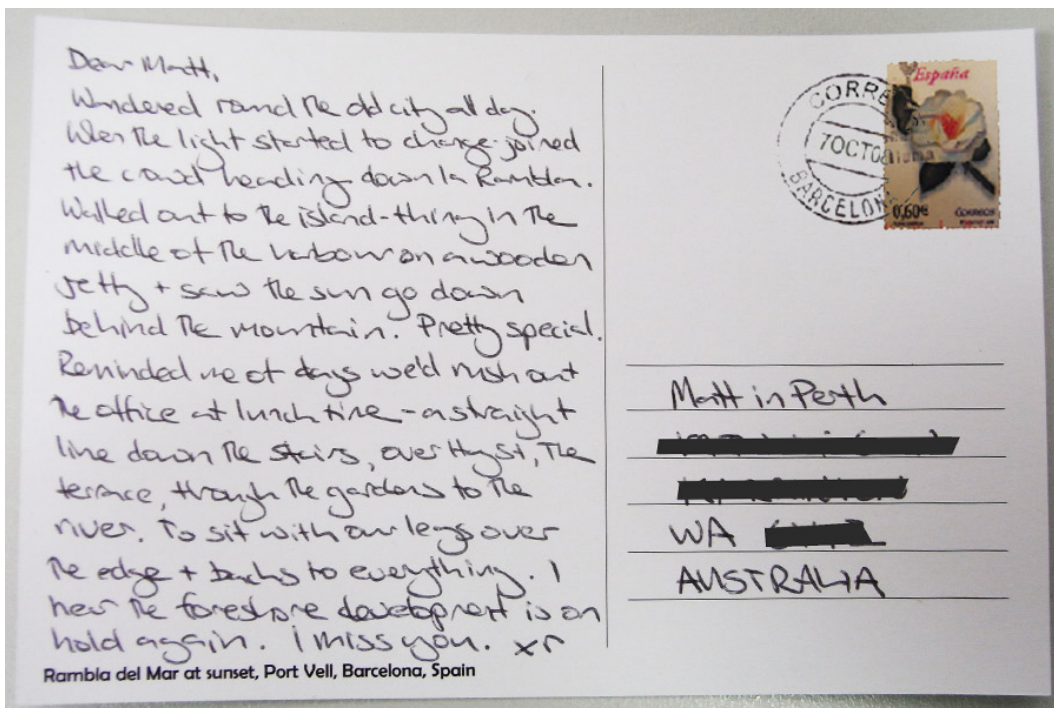
Section three: Constructed postcards

Dear Matt,
Wandered round the old city all day. When the light started to change joined the coast heading down la Rambla. Walked out to the island-thingy in the middle of the harbour on a wooden jetty + saw the sun go down behind the mountain. Pretty special. Reminded me of days we'd rush out the office at lunch time – a straight line down the stairs, over the st, the terrace, through the gardens to the river. To sit with our legs over the edge + backs to everything. I hear the foreshore development is on hold again. I miss you. xr

Rambla del Mar at sunset, Port Vell, Barcelona, Spain

Matt in Perth

WA

AUSTRALIA

Figure 1: Postcard from Barcelona. The subject of this postcard relates to a theme within the media discussion of Perth's urban development, which is the excellence of Barcelona's waterfront design and the appropriateness of this as an exemplar to Perth. In this postcard however the focus has shifted from built form to pedestrian practices within these constructed landscapes.

Postcard from Barcelona: Addressing Perth's urban discourse

The postcard image presented shows a wholesome family population who have just exited the city, heading out over the water, into an idyllic windswept deck-scape (Figure 1). This exodus relies on the cultural construction of a city/nature dichotomy[6] in the mind of the participants and the postcard viewer. Here an easy transition is suggested, a glide or pleasant stroll. This image presents a positive image of Barcelona, a city in complimentary connection with the natural environment. Barcelona is depicted as an exotic European city more in touch with the natural and sensual, than the addressed destination: the colonial English and then economic-rationalist/modernist Perth. This representation of Barcelona's waterfront is influenced by postcard image conventions, but also by the way in which Barcelona is discussed in Perth within popular media.[7] Within this context Barcelona is raised as an ideal waterfront city. In particular the relationship between the city proper and the water edge in Barcelona is lorded as an exemplar for Perth's Foreshore (FORM 2008, among others).

In a reliance on comparisons, Perth's urban discourse can be said to demonstrate postcard clutching behavior. In talking about the future of Perth's urban form, or in deriding its current form, Perth residents and commentators use examples from their knowledge of other places as a shorthand.[8] An online forum gives a succinct example of this mode of communication: "decisions in Perth are aimed at being mediocre and are constantly compromised" claims oneparticipant. He goes on to say that "the French build a glass pyramid smack bang in the centre of the Louvre, Sydney builds an Opera House, Bilbao builds the Guggenheim and Hong Kong builds a new island to house an airport" (Hillbeck in FORM 2008a online). In this extract, the Guggenheim is a part that stands for the whole—Bilbao—which in itself has become a symbol for a particular urban regeneration strategy. This summary process is inherent in souvenirs (and so, in postcards) argues Beverly Gordon:"souvenirs function as metonymic signs rather than metaphoric symbols. In such a metonym, the part stands for or is considered an actual piece of the whole…" (1986, 139).

I have constructed this postcard 'from Barcelona' (Figure 1) directly in relation to this strand of Perth's "urban conversation." The reverse text of the postcard (in Figure 1) makes reference to this. In the brief postcard text, the larger public

conversation of comparisons to Perth's built environment frames a more personal and contrasting understanding of the two places. The relationship of city to water edge is here described as a spatial practice of escape, rather than primarily through a taxonomy of built form—such as in a more conventional architectural spatial analysis.[9]

Within this constructed postcard, I have added detail to the metonymic shorthand-discourse through the verso note; the relationship starts to be fleshed out. The relationship between the two main characters, narrator and implied reader, are significant in this brief text. The journeys of the characters within the two sites serves as a vehicle to explore the relevance and usefulness of the comparison between Perth's foreshore and Barcelona's sea edge – an idea again gestured at in the re-photography of the postcard in Perth's waterfront development zone in Figure 2. Making this constructed postcard builds on the existing practices and conversations in Perth. Within this already familiar framework space is made for deeper and narrower observations.
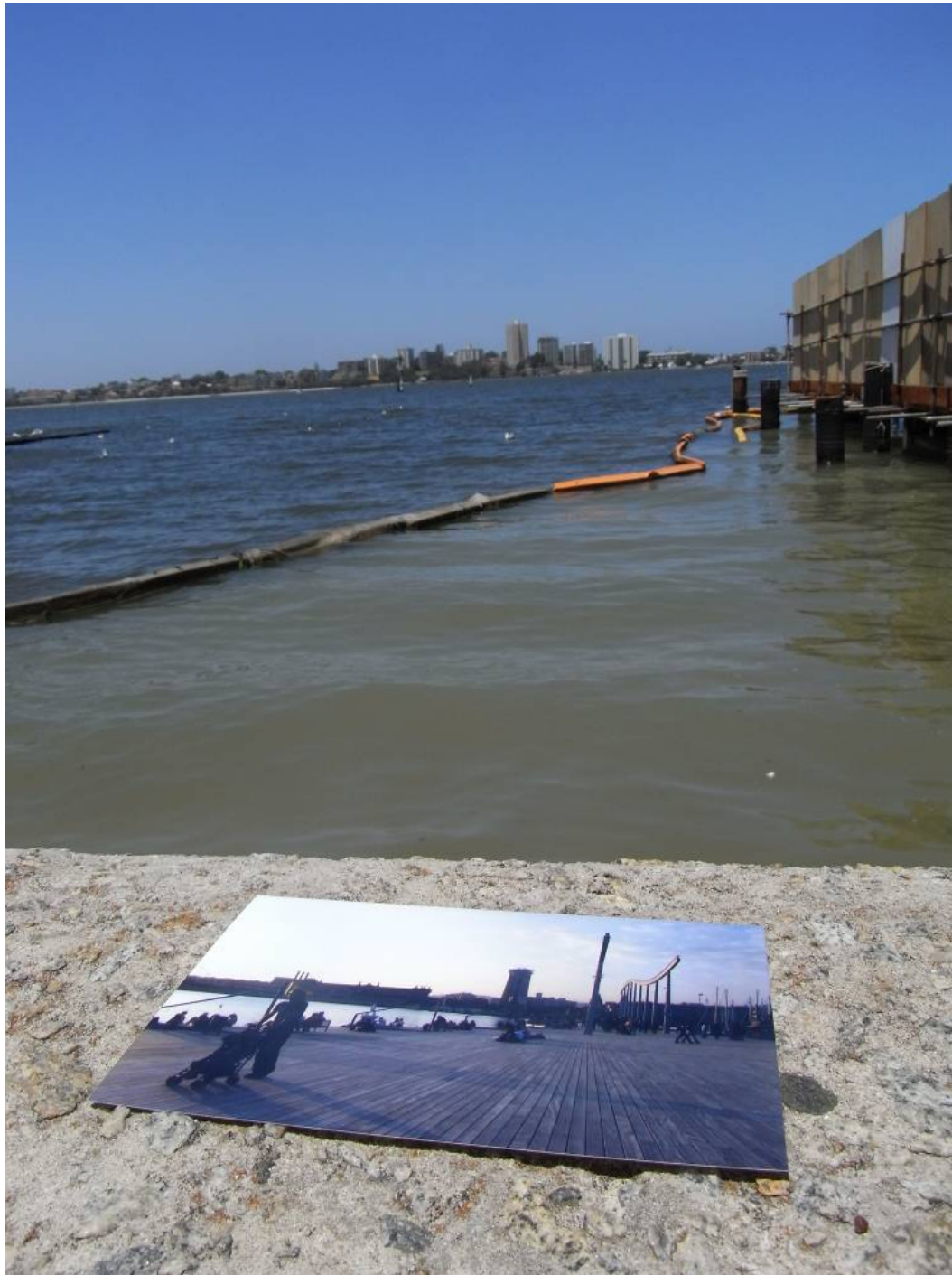
Figure 2: The postcard from Barcelona is re-photographed on the site of Perth's proposed foreshore development. The echo of perspective lines and the horizon in the two scenes emphasizes the contrast between the two. The image also brings to (my) mind the disparity between the experience of these places and the media rhetoric that surround them. This photograph is a starting point for the receiving and response phase of the larger research project.
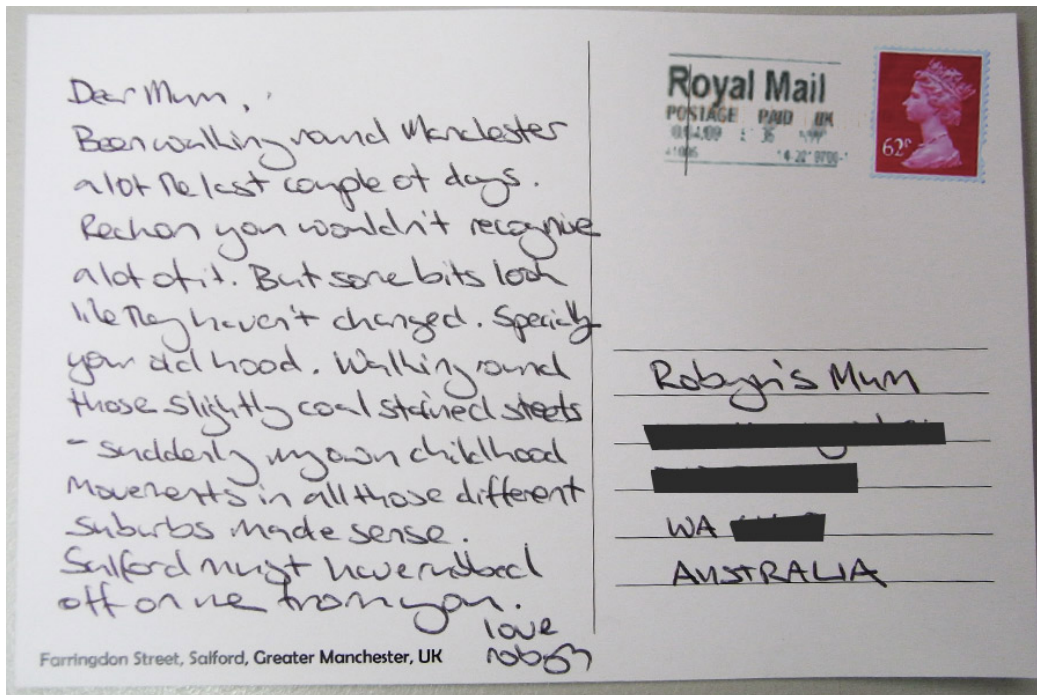
Figure 3. Postcard from Salford. The text and image pair of this postcards suggests ways in which my mother's childhood setting may have influence my urban and suburban experiences in various cities.
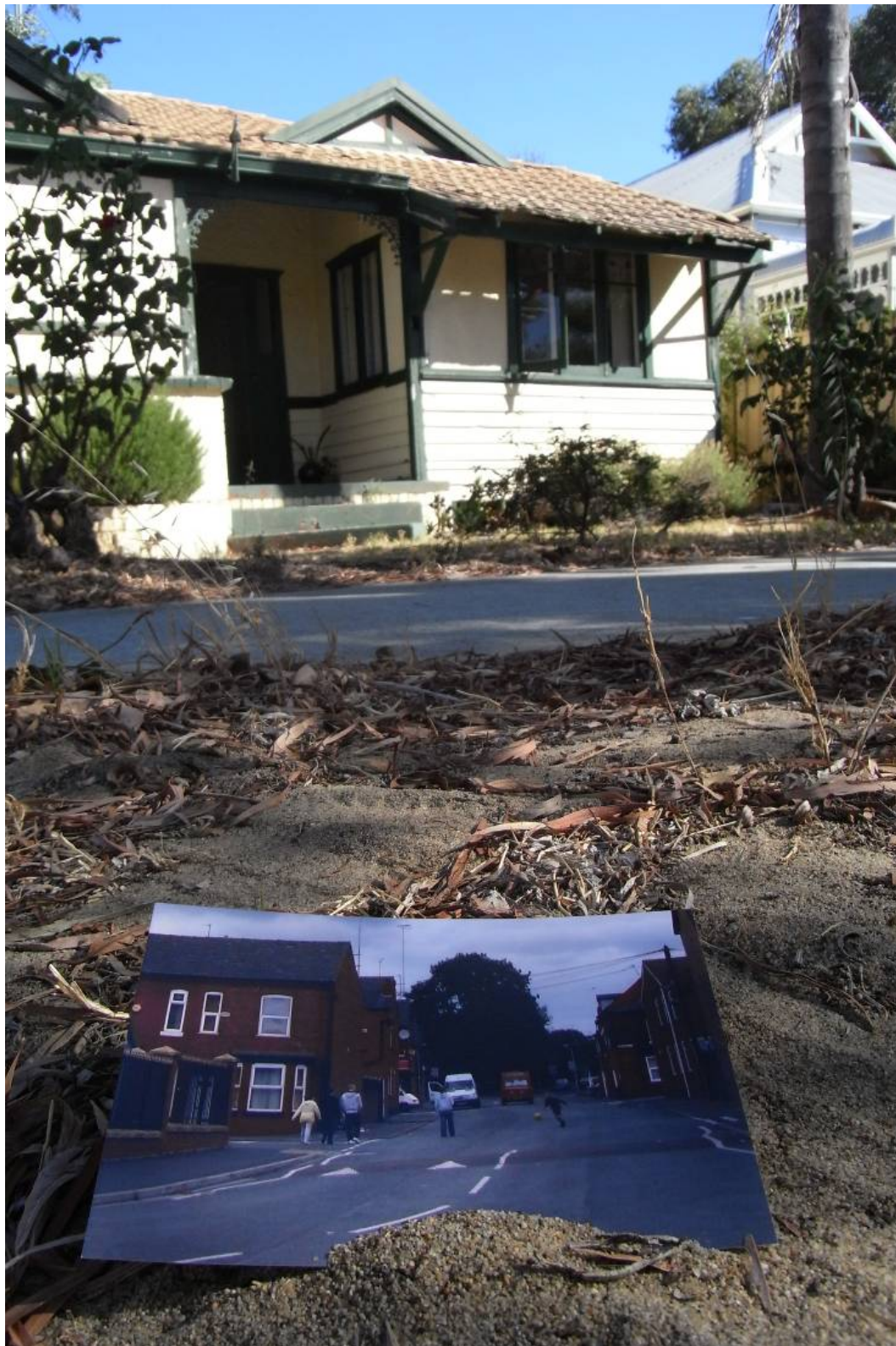
Figure 4. The postcard from Salford re-photographed out the front of my house in East Victoria Park. The juxtaposition is incongruous – despite the slightly shabby western domestic vernacular of both – the buildings seem almost chromatic inversions of each other. This image questions the relationship between the two. What is Salford doing in Perth? How did it come to be here?

Postcard from Salford: Engaging networks of inhabitation

The image face of this postcard is one that I took just around the corner from my Mum's boarded up old house in Salford (Figure 3). The park ahead is where she would go with her dog, or with other kids to play after school. This photo was taken in 2009, forty years or more after she was walking up and down that street on a daily basis. To my uninitiated eye the differences between then and now are not apparent. To me everything in this image looks old, even the kids seem to be from a previous decade. There are differences, however. Mum tells me everything used to be covered in coal soot. Those red bricks have been cleaned. The streets were black.

The message on the back of this image, is handwritten, in the affectionate, light style of postcards. It is an acknowledgement of my mother's roots, and how different - sheltered - my childhood was. I refer to our shared experience of 'endless rotating suburbs' during my childhood while the family followed my father's work to the other side of the country and then world. I affectionately make light of her cautious over protective mediation of my suburban encounters. Under this surface, (and for the first time between us) is an acknowledgement that her crazy-pomie-migrant, or perhaps ridiculous-over-protective-parent behaviour had a rational grounding. Back then, over there, and especially for her, the world was a dangerous and unpredictable place, divided into "your turf" and "the other gangs' turf." For her it seems, then as now, places are navigated through 'ways' which are safe through familiarity and proximity, no matter how screened from surveying view. Any deviation from established routs will result in threats of violence. No wonder as a child I was never allowed out of the yard.

The idea that sprouted in the paths I walked through Salford was that my mother brought fragments of Salford with her on the boat to Australia. Later, in the process of raising me, she passed them on. Imagine these fragments like old family photos in which you recognise no-one and nowhere. Just types - the backyard of a terrace house with a girl and a grandmother, a park on a hill with a child and a dog, a bucket castle on a pebble beach with a father and daughter. Now, I suspect these inherited fragments have had a significant influence on my understanding of suburban and urban places. They have indirectly guided the way in which I learnt to place myself in Perth, and how to move about within it,

perhaps even my continuing adolescent longing to get away from those endless suburbs of my childhood. This postcard presents a new reading, a more thoughtful one for me, about how relationships link and form place experiences (Figure 4).
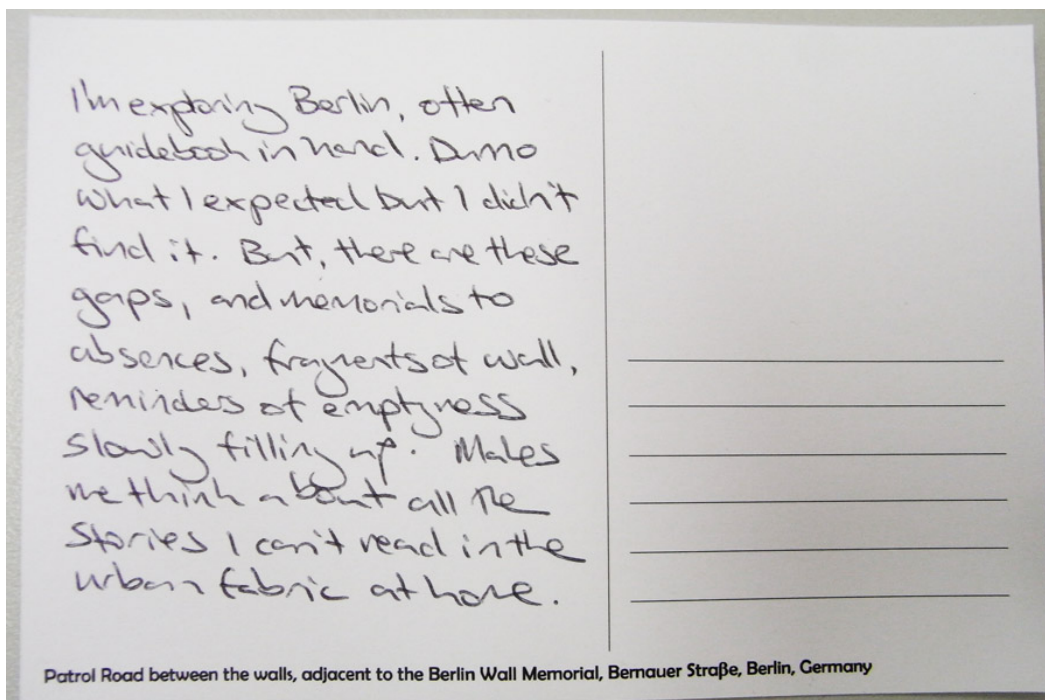

I'm exploring Berlin, often guidebook in hand. Dunno what I expected but I didn't find it. But, there are these gaps, and memorials to absences, fragments of wall, reminders of emptiness slowly filling up. Makes me think about all the stories I can't read in the urban fabric at home.

Patrol Road between the walls, adjacent to the Berlin Wall Memorial, Bernauer Straße, Berlin, Germany

Figure 5. Postcard from Berlin. The emptiness of the image, the vague message and lack of address—the gaps—of this postcard attack the neat narrative structure of the myth of research. Through it I seek to highlight the limitations and subjectivity of my research approach.

Figure 6. Berlin Postcard re-photographed in the reclaimed parkland in front of the Supreme Court on Perth's Foreshore. The juxtaposition of old colonial buildings and the remnants of a violent division of Berlin draws parallels of control and division of land and population in both histories.

Postcard from Berlin: Noting unreliability and chance

This postcard from Berlin was created in a spirit of honesty and subjectivity. "Dunno what I expected," I wrote on the postcard, "but there are these gaps…" (Figure 5). These two lines summarise the days of walking about Berlin taking photos, making small notes, and the evenings looking for the tingling scent of a story. My investigation of the spaces where the wall used to be often involved sneaking behind fence lines, through wet knee high grass. I am reminded of Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy* in which a character attempts to make sense, to read the language, of broken umbrellas and other inconsequential urban debris (1988, 59). While reading Auster's story I questioned the sanity of the character as he desperately tried to make sense from ephemera. This was an experience not dissimilar to my initial perplexed days of walking in Berlin, Manchester, Barcelona, and now again at home in Perth.

This postcard is a reflection on my approach to autoethnographic data collection. It discloses chance and subjectivity. There is the risk that this postcard will be one of Derrida's, lost in the postal system of communication. Both the image and the text suggest elements of being lost in the spaces of an unfamiliar city. On the image side the openness of the gap between the infamous wall-remains and the sparseness of the note on the reverse provide space to draw connections rather than relating directly to aspects of Perth. This postcard is unclear and unspecific. It questions the conventions of clarity, control, and intent in academic research projects.

What I found in Berlin, like many who visit as tourists, was the space where the Berlin wall used to be. I had not expected to be particularly engaged by "The Wall," what I imagined to be a relic-monument to a past war. But the wall had only been monumentalised in parts. The broad swath of land that divided East from West was now being put to a plethora of uses; from informal gardens, to massive high end retail developments with opportunistic bars and bulky apartment blocks along the way. This variety in use and means was fascinating and sparked reflections on how my own city grows and changes, and how Perth engages—or fails to engage—with the multiple histories of the city, land and people.

Being out of what I think of as the normal experience of the city (a planned and

consistently regulated urban developments, like Perth) linked my imagination to spaces in Perth I don't normally inhabit. In walking the wall-gap in Berlin, I found myself unexpectedly and uncomfortably separated from other people. As a thought path leading from this experience I wondered about what locations, experiences, and ways of living I push to the margins of my experience of Perth. This could become one of the sub-enquiries of my research, a chapter sized chunk in itself. However, there is a chance that this postcard will not be received. There must be the chance that it could be like Derrida's unreliable postcards. Unlike the other two sketched out here, there is not an explicit shared experience and reader brought to mind within the short message. The addressee is silent within the tiny narrative note. In terms of my larger project; this very unreliability opens a marginal space for criticism and re-engagement.

For Derrida, there must always be a chance that a postcard sent will not reach its intended destination. It may be read along the way, waylaid by an imperfect postal service or sent to the wrong person. In "Envois," Derrida (1987) uses the extended postcard metaphor to critique Lacan's presentation of communication as letters that always reach their destination. This criticism sweeps across many pillars of contemporary western thought, but these are not the focus of this research. The importance, here, of Derrida's postcard is as an epitome of imperfect communication. In the context of this research it is a reminder to critique the unproblematic presentation of the deductive approach to research and to be open to the role of the unexpected and trivial as part of the everyday experiences I am endeavouring to capture.[10]

In a productive way, this postcard from Berlin undermines the other two presented here. The reality of research and life, elements of subjectivity and chance, are evident. This throws into question the clear, seemingly self-evident connections presented in the postcards from Barcelona and Manchester. This Berlin postcard, after Derrida's postcards, can be used to critique the rational story traditionally presented by researchers: I had a question, I devised a test to discover this particular answer, I conducted the test, here are my results—they prove the answer! Ironically, this is the story structure that I lean on for clarity when telling you about my research here, in this academic paper. Through the revelation of potential broken connections, clear lines are disclosed as single threads in a loose

and tangled weave where many are broken, knotted, and unexpected.

To hazard a guess: there are two ways of being in the city that seem to be visible through the gaps in this postcard. Ways that appear to be pushed to edge of the dominant discourse. The first is the role of small interventions and occupations in making our experience of the urban landscape. The second, given the tangled history of missing persons and populations in Berlin, is an quiet allusion to the uncelebrated aboriginal stories of place in Perth, both contemporary and historic (Figure 6). The impact of colonial suppression of stories is hinted at in the re-photography of this postcard.

Postcards: A useful metaphor

In this early and limited engagement the postcard metaphor seems a productive mode for a grounded and intimate enquiry into the influence of other places on the lived experience of Perth. The metaphor responds to the existing field of discourse surrounding place and its meaning by building on Halberwachian sensibilities, but using Massey's network-place framework, Clifford's traveler-dweller and de Certeau's willful walker to find a position from which travel histories are valued in the reading of the city. As personal and textural objects, postcard can be seen to relate places through epistolary convention, and the surrounding practices of selection, making, sending and receiving. In the three cards included here rich and specific relationships have started to emerge. Developing these themes, and this practice of enquiry, will form the basis of future work.

The postcard model of place developed here paints individual urban inhabitants as enthusiastic travelers with pockets overflowing with postcards. These postcards are personalised summaries of attitudes to distant locations; experienced directly, acquired through media, or inherited as social practices. This alternate model for urban experience acknowledges the importance of personal spatial narratives and is open to the role of the unexpected, while distancing itself from essentialising notions of place.

Postcards appear to work particularly well as metaphor for the making of entrances, exits, bridges, and borders presented by de Certeau as the creative

engagements with places that are essential aspects of inhabitation. In the drawing of connections between places postcards sit well within Massey's model of networked places in process. The shared stories and remembered experiences inscribed into the cards gesture towards the 'routs', 'haunts' and 'connections' of individuals that generates the diversity and specificity of a place (Massey 1994). Important lessons from the influence of Haberwachian sensibilities have not been excluded. The inhabitant's understanding of space is prioritised, and everyday patterns are able to be located in relationships to other discourses, not presented as isolated events.

The three postcard fragments above form part of the reflexive autoethnographic process I have begun to explore the ways in which diverse moments of distant cities may influence the lived experience of Perth. They can be read as creative representations of a selected data set from that collected 'in the field.'[11] These postcard like summaries are some of the tiny stories I carry about Perth in my metaphorical pockets.

I have found the structuring conventions and brevity intrinsic within the use of small cardboard rectangles provide a helpful discipline within the narrative analysis process. The need for brevity and specificity is useful while identifying and narrowing stories and story fragments. The twinning of image and texts enables greater richness, and shifts of focus within the presented position.[12]

As sometime travelers or gazed at locals (Lippard 1999, 4) we know how a postcard works to capture a tiny fragment of a place and send it back home (Gordon 1986). Photographs and letters perform this same function, but the appeal of postcards to this research project is the combination of text with image. Hand scrawled or squeezed-in postcard text claims a fleeting ownership of a place even more declaratively than the purchase of the small printed cardboard rectangle. Writing a postcard locates the author in relationship to the place depicted, like the 'x' that marks the window of one's hotel room on the picture side. The reader is also located in relation to the place, at one degree of separation. As Derrida expresses and undermines over and over as a theme in his postcard epistolary "Envois" (1980) you are not here, you are there, it is because of this I am able to write to you, but in writing to you I am bringing you in some

way here to this very place with me (or am I always not?). A letter may also serve this function of drawing places together, but postcards again show themselves to be useful to this project in their paired image and text, brevity, and structuring conventions.

If we were to speculate on the text conventions of a postcard, that is, what you might expect to read or write in that little blank space on the back we might identify the following points. Postcards are addressed to someone at home, while the author is away. They are a gift of the author's experiences through the indication of activities (we went here and did this or that), and notes of things experienced (the weather, the locals, the vibe). Often a shared experience with the recipient is recalled. The postcard message concludes with an implicit or explicit "wish you were here."

I argue that these postcard practices and conventions[13] can be seen to align, or associate two places, the space of sending/writing and the space of receiving/reading. The recollection of shared experiences, the gifting of knowledge of new places, and the ubiquitous "wish you were here" that is so tied to the construction of a postcards that we feel we have read it even as we pull the postcard from the letter box, all serve to reinforce the bond between the two bodies of sender and receiver. All of these can be read, metaphorically, as spatial acts pulling bodies and places closer. These spatially acting stories bridge between places even as they describe them as necessarily separate (de Certeau 1984, 127).[14] By which I mean, that in the moment that a postcard illustrates that Barcelona is not Perth—through its arrival in my home postbox in East Victoria Park—it makes a (if only hair thin) connection between them. Within the metaphor proposed these postcard-like summaries are the tiny stories that provide ways into and out of the places of a city.

This paper does not delve into the lived experience of Perth in any depth, but instead presents sendings from three of Perth's many significant others. Nevertheless, themes for further investigation have emerged. Themes such as: cultural construction, the possibility of inherited ways of being, produced silence within the built environment and creative re-appropriation. The re-photographed images make a first gesture at receiving these sendings. The postcards are

photographed in locations in Perth in which some way they have been addressed. The self-elicited response to these will form part of the next phase of auto-ethnographic practice.

As a vehicle for grounded thinking and engaged research the postcard metaphor seems successful. However, the postcard itself does not carry all of the information needed for this project. It acts instead as a metonymic device, like the souvenir postcards found in stands outside small stores all over the world, to present a concise summary from which the sender, receiver, researcher, and reader can depart into their own memories and constructions of places. It is this deep, rich exploration that is the focus of the next phase of my research.

Endnotes

[1] My thanks the reviewer who pointed out that in my writing I had "place[ed] the individual at the centre of meaning making in cities." An aligned narrative practice is 'urban literacy,' a term coined by Charles Landry (2000) but fruitfully applied to the architectural practice of site analysis by Klakse Havik (2006).

[2] The census data of 2001 indicated that 39% of the Australia population have at least one parent born overseas. Only 36% of the population indicated Australian ancestry, that is over half the population reported overseas ancestry. Only 4.6% of the population did not submit a response to this question. The ABS document "Perth: a social atlas" indicates that the demographics of the city if anything are likely to be higher than the national statistics on this issue. In 2001 32.9% of Perth's population nominated as being born overseas compared to the national 21%. (Percentages provided by the ABS or calculated from ABS Census data (2001a; 2001b; 2001c; 2001d; 2002). See references list for specific sources.)

[3] Indeed, the use of the word 'space' in this extract is important. For de Certeau, place is a static concept, while space exists in the enunciation of place; it is alive through performance and use by people (1984, 117).

[4] The italicised sentence appears in the endnotes of de Certeau's original text. It has been included here within the main text for clarity.

[5] If travel stories are like de Certeau's walkers' tactics for 'walking in the city' we might expect the same parallels to speech acts to be helpful in understanding the relationships within and between places. Two such examples provided by de Certeau are 'synecdoche' in which a part stands for the whole, and 'asyndeton' in which linking words are skipped within or between sentences (1984, 101). These summary and linking acts in particular seem highly applicable to the interrelation of

distant places.Postcards might also be said to have these qualities of juxtaposition and summary.

[6]For a discussion of narratives employed during urban development see Finnegan's 1998 book "Tales of the city: a study of narrative and urban life."

[7] See for example the West Australian newspaper's coverage of the waterfront development proposals 2005 to today.

[8]From a brief review conducted so far, this appears to be evident across popular media - such as newspapers and forums - professional journals, government planning documents, and conferences. See for example: Letters to the Editor in the *West Australian*, FORM's *Comparative Capitals* publication, (2008), Jan Gehl's *Perth 2009 Public spaces & Public Life* for the City of Perth (specifically p. 72) and events such as the City Challenge Conference (1992).

[9]For an example of a more conventional analysis of Barcelona's port, see for example "City and Port" (Meyer 1999).

[10]The edited book "Dispatches From The Field: Neophyte Ethnographers in a Changing World" (Gardener & Hoffman 2006) collects writing from early career ethnographers presenting complex and problematic realities of fieldwork.

[11] An interesting parallel is created between the constructed postcards and Scott's explanation of experience as both an interpretation of a context and requiring interpretation in itself (Scott 1991). This is a path that requires further inquiry.

[12]These re-photographed images call out to be swapped over, as catalysts for reflection on the presence of Perth in my experience of Manchester, for example.

[13] The structural conventions of Postcards will be further explored in future work. Here they act as a starting point for creative work.

[14] I am drawing heavily on de Certeau's (1984) section on stories as the foundation of place (Chapter IX Spatial Stories). In a short story (unpublished) I speculate on the role of the sender and receiver's bodies in making these bridges across space.

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