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Re-placing the networked self: Place, identity, and the experience of being online.

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Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgement has been made. This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

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Date

Abstract

As human beings, we share a special relationship with the physical world in which we live. Through our actions, our interactions, our stories, and our reflexivity, we write the self into being as an actor in space; further, we write place into being by transforming abstract space into "location made meaningful" (Cresswell, 2004, p. 7; Tuan, 1977). Never has this been so prominent as it is in the present: bloggers, social media users, and smartphone users actively contribute to the authoring of place en-masse via the stories they tell about the physical world and their role in it. This process of writing and writing place (and the self-in-place) contrasts strikingly with the previous conceptualisation of the Internet as disembodied and placeless, indicative of an unprecedented interweaving of the material with the digital. Adopting a phenomenological perspective that grounds the self in embodied, lived experience, this research demonstrates that location and locatedness *do* matter in an increasingly networked world, particularly given that pervasive smartphone culture has made access location-independent but, at the same time, very much located. The research contributes to a growing body of digital culture theory that seeks to renegotiate increasingly intertwined notions of 'online' and 'offline', vouching for the fundamental role of Internet technologies in the experience of everyday life.

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Chapter One

Introduction

We are living in an exciting time. Technology and culture are more integrated than ever, with increasingly ubiquitous computing — especially smartphones and other mobile Internet devices — changing the way that we go about everyday life, and reconfiguring the way that we see ourselves and the world. The ongoing negotiation between materiality and technology punctuates daily life as media locates and reiterates physicality; as a result, Internet users find themselves *re-placed* in the world as location, mobility, and embodied experience garner salience in both the digital and material spaces. Today, the screen moves with the user. This idea of re-placing identity implicates and is influenced by locative media, shared-proximity online communities, an "always online" state of being, and lowered barriers to entry, each of which has contributed significantly to the changing nature of both identity construction and performance and the experience of social and cultural life. This thesis will address the issue of interactive, narrative identity construction and performance, examining how the experience of embodiment and locatedness — as pre-conditions of human experience — manifest socially and culturally in the context of mediating communication technologies.

This project has emerged from an almost-lifelong love of the Internet and an insatiable fascination with the way that people interact with each other and with the spaces they occupy. My love affair with the Internet most likely began the very first time I went online in the mid-1990s. I was still in primary school, but I remember being awestruck by the Internet's capacity to reach every corner of the globe. With a few keystrokes, I could access what seemed, at the time, to be all the information the world had to offer. Its potential was limitless; sitting at my computer, I could be in my home at the same time as I could be elsewhere. That "elsewhere" varied — it was the space of a chat room, the pages of a website, or perhaps a travel forum, wherein I could be in many places at once. Other times, I interpreted my secondary location as non-spatial as I found myself absorbed in conversation with distant strangers in other countries or engrossed in researching any issue I desired. In time,

as blogging gained popularity, I began using the Internet to turn the lens back on my own located existence: I became obsessed with locating others like me, others who shared my physical location of Perth, Western Australia. Over time, the list of Perth-based blogs and websites in my Google Reader account steadily grew.

This thesis presents an investigation of place, identity, communication technologies, and narratives. My primary interest is in the way that we perform narratives of self, and in particular how we construct narratives of physicality, with a focus on the ways in which bodies and places are mediated and enhanced by technology. I will draw significantly upon phenomenological theory in looking at the ways in which people and places are co-constitutive, and the manifestation of this relationship online. Additionally, I will explore the impact that locative technologies, such as location based services and mobile Internet, are having upon the way that we experience place and communications in the twenty first century. Importantly, this thesis aims to unpack the notion that we are all born storytellers and that we all write ourselves into being, and that it is through this storytelling process that we know ourselves and the world. Phenomenologically, we write place into being through the stories we tell about place online; accordingly, these are the stories that we use to identify a sense of self. This chapter will begin with an overview of the historical notion of physicality on the Internet. Following that, I will outline the research problems, before outlining the contents of each chapter.

A very brief history of identity and physicality in Internet research

Over the past twenty years, a wealth of scholarship has emerged that explores the Internet and its associated social, cultural, technological, psychological, economic, political, and scientific implications. The collective body of Internet research is immense and diverse. It is also in a state of 'perpetual beta' (Helmond, 2010b, p. 15), much like the identities, tools, and ideologies that so many of us study. Internet research is, relatively speaking, very new. We are still figuring out how to navigate and interpret the complexities of digital landscapes that crossover with, influence, and are influenced by the material world. My research deals directly with the physical aspects of being online: how embodied, located, lived experiences are enacted, mediated, and augmented by information and digital technology.

The corporeal and spatial aspects of online identity have always been subjects of intense scrutiny in Internet research. In the early text-based spaces, the self was often imagined as virtually disembodied. Without bodies, there was no need for space. Screens mediated and, in a sense, eliminated, the need for physicality. The ability to communicate instantaneously, exempt from the 'tyranny of distance' (Blainey, 1966), suggested the rise of a truly global existence; indeed, the term *global village*, a McLuhan-ism (Poster, 1990, p. 64), was adopted to describe the sense of unrestrained togetherness that new media engendered (McLeod, 1991, p. 69). The concept of the global village was especially significant in that:

> the Internet, more than any other feature of globalisation, has meant that one's location — or "place" — loses much of its importance of as territorial constraints are dissipated by the intense flows generated by globalization. And as territory loses its importance, so too, it is argued, does physical distance; the advances in communications herald the "death of distance" (Capling & Nossal, 2001, p. 444 citing Cairncross, 1997).

"Global village" is a term that today seems somewhat *passé*, along with "information superhighway" and "surfing the web"; these concepts that once seemed so extraordinary have, in just a short amount of time, become worn-out clichés that hardly begin to describe the experience of living in a world immersed in digital technologies. The metaphors of physicality and spatiality (Stefik, 1996; Graham, 1998, pp. 165–166), deployed almost as if to placate intrepid Internet users by injecting the virtual unknown with a dose of familiarity, did little to quell the questions of what happened to the body online, however.

If the global village eradicated distance and, potentially, exacerbated the homogenization of culture (Castells, 1996, p. 3), it also disembodied the Internet user. Although the Internet was developed in the 1960s, it was cyberpunk that brought Internet technology to the fore. Seminal works such as William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984) and Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982), adapted from Phillip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* (1968) — oft-cited in scholarship since the 1980s — introduced the general population to the notion of a non-corporeal existence. 'Gibson's cyberpunk,' writes Cavallaro,

> takes virtual technology a step further by positing the possibility of a direct neural connection between the human brain and the computer... (users) become able to access the ultimate virtual space, cyberspace, and interact with other bodies and minds in the construction of whole worlds out of data (2000, p. 28).

A worldwide network of computers and machines offered possibilities far beyond improved avenues for communication and knowledge sharing. People began to ask what life might be like if we could live inside the machine: 'how will we directly connect our nervous systems to the global computer?' (Speer, 1998, p. 94 citing Brand, 1987, p. 264). What would life be like if, 'unencumbered by physical burdens' (Cavallaro, 2000, p. 35), humanity could be freed from the restrictions of a fallible, mortal, fleshy existence? In the 1980s, the Internet remained "underground", relatively speaking, and such a question remained the subject of storytellers and researchers, their imaginative depictions of humanity in the grip of a cybernetic dystopia hardly affecting the mainstream social psyche.

The launch of the World Wide Web in the 1990s made the Internet more accessible to a greater number of people. Computers were becoming relatively inexpensive, as were Internet connections, although the barriers to entry were significantly higher in the 1990s than they are today. The earliest Internet researchers — Stone (2000, originally published in 1991), Hayles (1999, 2010), Poster (1990, 2001), Turkle (1995a, 1995b, 2011), Balsamo (1995), and countless others — turned their attention to analysing and unpacking the potentials and problems inherent to a non-corporeal existence and contemplating the meaning of communication, community, and civics in digital spaces. To many it must have sounded like little more than nonsense fantasy: how could human beings, their very essence built upon foundations of embodied experience, ever live without bodies? As quixotic as it may have seemed, the concept nonetheless cast new light onto issues of identity and personhood, and spoke volumes of the inherent physicality of issues that plague culture and humanity.

It is imperative to acknowledge that few researchers viewed the potentially "disembodying" qualities of the Internet as utopian or even realistic. Numerous studies certainly saw cyberspace as "freeing", however, interpreting the mediating presence of the screen as akin to an automatic erasure of physical presence and

being. Indeed, many perspectives of online sociality would be regarded as controversial at best today. For example, Dery's claim that '(the) upside of incorporeal interaction' is 'identity disengaged from gender, ethnicity, and other problematic constructions. Online, users can float free of biological and sociocultural determinants' (1994, pp. 2–3). Corporeal identity indicators — race, gender, age, and even class — have long been the basis for discrimination and dissent. Whether or not users could so easily remove their corporeal skin and 'float free' online (free, that is, from physicality or prejudice) was another matter. Every human being is limited, in some way, by the body: its mortality, its needs. We all live knowing that we will, sooner or later, be subjected to the failure of our organs, with our bodies possibly giving up long before our minds are ready to. Some people — writers, directors, researchers — saw an alternative. An existence entirely lived online was imagined, if not as a reality or necessarily desirable, then at least as an *idea* — it was a case of, "what *will we do*, if this is possible?". Meanwhile, the world inside the machine, not yet capable of becoming a permanent home, could reasonably allow the user to escape the confines of the body for a few hours at a time. The technology of the time lagged behind the theory, just as it continues to today; we cannot yet live only online. However, it highlighted the fact that there could be something else — something less restrictive and less final than human mortality: a 'fleshless ontology' (Richardson & Harper, 2002) wherein something bigger than the physical self could sustain us.

Taken at face value, the Internet provided the best opportunity yet for experimenting outside the bounds of the human body. In text-based social spaces (such as multi-user dungeons/domains — MUDs — and on bulletin boards, the precursors to forums), users played with bodily identity as part of the process of writing the self into being. The question of (dis)embodied identity in the context of Internet communications has been well documented over the past two decades. In online spaces such as MUDs, wherein interaction took the form of typed messages to other users in (often) themed rooms, also described in words, there was no way of knowing what kind of bodies your interlocutors had. As individuals described their physicality in text, users could be male, female, both, or neither; there are well-documented examples, for instance, of users playing as animals and inanimate objects (Dibbell, 1993; Kendall, 2002; Turkle, 1995b). Users' names and personal

pronouns were as fluid as their bodies, and there was no requirement for a user to return to the same MUD and play as the same identity day in, day out. In effect, users could experience relative anonymity and fluidity in their performance of identity.

The appeal of (dis)embodiment wasn't unanimously agreed upon, by any means. Whether "disembodiment" was used to describe the experience of chatting in a MUD or that of permanent bodily amputation, it always had its sceptics. Kendall (1999, p. 70), for instance, points out that 'nobody lives only in cyberspace'. No matter how free a user felt in cyberspace, they would have to eventually acknowledge their physical self in order to take care of the basic needs of human life: to eat, shower, use the bathroom, and move the muscles that would begin to ache after sitting at the computer for too long. Would it even be possible to forget the material self, or are the marks of physicality etched permanently upon humanity? Identity is, after all, so innately tied to physicality; as I shall discuss in the chapters that follow, we know the world and our place in it by virtue of our movement through space and time.

Turkle, intensely critical of utopian interpretations of computer-mediated communication, insisted that the body — indispensible to being — prohibited any real ability to go "fleshless". The problem with a Cartesian-style virtual disembodiment was that it offered respite from mortality, but this meant that psyche (formerly *of* the body) would be destined to live forever, digitally, with the memory of embodied existence. She argued that 'knowledge is inherently experiential, based on a physicality that we each experience differently' (1995b, p. 238), and whilst phenomenology might urge the extracorporeal individual to form a new consciousness based primarily upon disembodied experiences, would it really be so easy to forget what it was once like to be human? Even if the ultimate aim was not total disembodiment-via-machine, the opportunities for identity play that the early, text-based online interactions offered were similarly restricted by an historical ontology informed by the unavoidable presence of a formerly-embodied memory bank. The utopian ideal that the virtual realm offered, of freedom from bodily prejudice, was inherently flawed.

As Internet theory developed over time, the focus shifted from a purely technological existence (and the implications of such for the body and space) to one that argued for:

> the reconceptualisation of the human body as a boundary figure, belonging to at least two previously incompatible systems of meaning — "the organic/natural" and "the technological/cultural" (Balsamo, 1995, p. 215).

Balsamo's claim for the boundary status of the body spoke of the problem at the core of disembodiment: would it really be possible to overlook the physicality of the body at all? Instead, humanity needed to be able to inhabit both the physical and technological spaces at once — an adaptation that we've become rather expert at over the past decade or so. Online communication has moved far beyond the non-visual, non-aural, scrolling text of early online interaction. The rise of blogs and social networks around the turn of the millennium increasingly threatened the possibility for anonymity, but brought with it a host of new opportunities for self expression and community formation in a richer, more customisable environment. Over the past decade, online profiles have become more and more visual. Profile pictures accompany real-time updates on social network sites, video is easily uploaded to sites such as YouTube, and social platforms (such as Flickr and Instagram) built around the sharing of visual narratives have flourished. Today's Internet is *very* much embodied and spatial; then again, one could argue that it always has been. We just lacked adequate means of expressing embodied, located identity online.

In recent years, the status of physicality — particularly embodiment and location, and what they mean for self and society — has risen markedly. As access to the network becomes ever more mobile, the range of tools that can be used to concurrently navigate online and offline life grows. The work of Rettberg's work on blogging (2008a, 2008b) and boyd, with various others, on social networks (boyd & Ellison, 2008; boyd & Heer, 2006; boyd, 2006a, 2006b, 2008, 2012; boyd, Golder, & Lotan, 2010; Donath & boyd, 2004; Marwick & boyd, 2010) has documented a shift from the anonymity of what has become known as Web 1.0 to the *nonymity* (Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008, p. 1817) of Web 2.0 and beyond. From the moment that barriers to entry (such as the cost of computers, storage space, and

access, as well as connection availability) lowered, Internet communication tools *re-embodied* use.[1] It has become a space for everyone, rather than just the digital elite of decades past, but the caveat of such widespread use has been that users have sacrificed much of their freedom online — and done so willingly. The rise of Facebook provides evidence of this. The pseudonymous usernames and fanciful, fluid descriptions of digital bodies have been replaced with real names, photographs of users, and publicly articulated Friendships[2] (boyd & Ellison, 2008, p. 213) on social networking sites that, predominantly, replicate already-existing relationships. We used to go online to talk to anyone, anywhere in the world, without the barrier of geography to hold us back; now we go online to talk to our school friends, our families, our colleagues, and our housemates.

It is my contention that the experience of everyday life is inherently phenomenological, as the subject encounters the environment through and of the body, in a negotiation with space, culture, and technology. Throughout my research, I reinforce the primacy of the body as the site of experience and meaning. This is due to the fact that a sense of place is dependent upon experience in space; indeed, as Chapter 3 will further investigate, place has been defined as 'location made meaningful' (Cresswell, 2004, p. 7; Tuan, 1977). The experience of place and place identity also has the potential to engage all of the bodily senses; when we experience place, we are embodied and embedded in the physical world, as it involves the application of personal experience to otherwise abstract spaces. Just as physical environments provide the backdrop for lived experience, so too may digital environments be the sites of phenomenological experience.

While the term *cyberspace* came to denote a break from materiality, today's Internet, rather than operating as a "virtual" other-space, is becoming ever more enmeshed with physicality. To exclude online interaction from phenomenological experience

[1] I will explain throughout this thesis that the notion of "re-embodiment" is complicated, as Internet users were never truly *dis*-embodied.

[2] boyd & Ellison use an upper-case F when discussion relationships online to signify the fact that there is generally no distinction between friends, family, coworkers, and acquaintances on SNS. However, this is changing *to a degree* – users of Google+, for example, can segregate others into 'Circles'; however, these Circles are for the benefit of the individual only; they are not publicly articulated.

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would, I believe, be subscribing to the notion that "online" equates to "virtual" which equates to "not real". This dichotomy of real/virtual, corresponding roughly to offline/online and physical/informational (amongst others) has been defined by Jurgenson as 'digital dualism' (2012, p. 85). This concept refers to the tendency to treat online and offline as distinct entities with no overlap; offline encounters are privileged as real and meaningful, while anything that occurs online, as virtual (not-real) phenomena, is more inconsequential than its counterpart. As such, online experience, occurring in virtual space, could not be *lived* and thus phenomenology would not apply to online experience.[3] Jurgenson's concept of digital dualism rather effectively highlights the inconsistencies inherent to a reading of virtuality *as opposed to* (rather than as an extension of) reality. In recent years this dualism has progressively (albeit not entirely)[4] been abandoned as we come to better understand the nature of computer mediated communications. Today, augmented by mediating technologies that enhance, rather than replace, everyday life.

In my research, I intend not to diminish the significance of earlier interpretations of online life, but instead to use it as a contrast to what we encounter today. There is no need to live inside the machine: the machine lives inside us (or, at least, in our hands

[3] I am reminded here of Julian Dibbell's 'A Rape in Cyberspace'. First published two decades ago, Dibbell's account highlights many instances of dualist thinking. Due to the perceived virtuality of the situation (that is, interaction amongst interlocutors on a text-based MUD), the issue of a participant's assault at the hands of another participant was complicated. The emotional implications of the incident were palpable: 'Months later, (the victim) would confide in to me that as she wrote those words post traumatic tears were streaming down her face -- a real-life fact that should suffice to prove that the words' emotional content was no mere playacting' (Dibbell, 1993, para. 13). This highlights a problem with digital dualisms: although part of a 'disembodied enactment of life's most body-centred activity' (Dibbell, 1993, para. 15), the emotional fallout from a rape in the LambdaMOO MUD produced a *physical* reaction. The lines between real/virtual, embodied/disembodied, and offline/online have, it would seem, always been contentious.

[4] For example, in a November 2013 review of Internet researcher Alice Marwick's *Status Update* (2013), New York Times journalist Walter Kirn produced a review of Marwick's work that was laced with digital dualist rhetoric. 'On the Web', he wrote, 'we can be whoever we wish to be, editing the face we show to others in in ways that aren't possible in physical space... The result is a sense of freedom' (2013, para. 1). Whilst the wider public can't be expected to grasp the nuances of identity construction and performance, nor the current dominant academic stance on concepts as fluid as virtuality, Kirn's approach was largely indicative of the perception projected by the mainstream media regarding the Internet. It is still often depicted as having a life of its own wherein users push boundaries because they feel safe doing so in a space that isn't "real", devaluing the consequences of what is, in fact, an intensely "real" environment (for example, see Jurgenson, 2013; Stark, 2013).

and in the world around us).[5] We are always connected to the network, but we are simultaneously connected to the physical world. This is the foundation of my research, which investigates how technologies are being used to negotiate physicality, both in terms of bodies and the spaces we inhabit. Spaces and bodies have always been a part of Internet communications — we just hadn't, until fairly recently, quite worked out how to technologise them.

In this thesis

When I began this project in 2008, I had never heard of location based social networks. In fact, I didn't hear of them until late 2011, although I had been using them and other locative media for years. What followed was a revelation. Finally, I had come across appropriate terminology to discuss what I'd been seeing: online networks wherein communities emerged based upon shared physical proximity. Location-based social network (LBSN) research provided me with a framework for describing what I was already witnessing, both in my work and in everyday life: an increasingly prominent relationship between place, communication, identity, and community formation. In contemplating what a location-based social network might entail, I look at the recent work of de Souza e Silva (2004, 2006; de Souza e Silva & Frith, 2010, 2012; de Souza e Silva & Sutko, 2011; Gordon & de Souza e Silva, 2012), Farman (2010, 2012), Goggin (2006, 2010), Hjorth (with Goggin, 2009), Wilken (Wilken & Goggin, 2012a, 2012b; Wilken, 2012), Richardson (with Wilken, 2012) and others publishing in the field of locative media. This research will frame a broader discussion of narrative and place identity in the context of communication and the communities or networks that form based upon shared physical proximity. My research, having begun some years prior to my learning of LBSN and locative media, focuses on the development of LBSN in online environments that are not strictly intended to host shared-proximity networks, in particular blogs (as opposed

[5] One area that must be addressed is the impact that the increased "reality" of the Internet in recent years (in terms of using real names and images) has had upon those who used its affordance of relative anonymity to socialise without the immediate physicality of bodies that have traditionally, been regarded as Other, such as those of non-white, disabled, or trans* individuals. The scope of this particular project is such that I do not have the ability to investigate the issues further. However, it is imperative to acknowledge that the "always online" nature of the Internet today, with its almost-compulsory requirement of disclosure undoubtedly limits the appeal for many users, who would see the shift as anything *but* egalitarian. Users who were once afforded immense freedom by the mediating interface are now, for the most part, expected not to "play" with identity, but to perform their identity online as an extension of their "real life" self. Spaces of anonymity and identity play do still exist, however, as I shall discuss in later chapters.

to Foursquare and Path, two social networks that privilege proximity to other users and user location as the basis for community). In order to do this, numerous chapters are dedicated to unpacking four central themes: phenomenology, place, narrative identity, and interaction.

Thus, by investigating phenomenology and *being-in-the-world*, place, and narrative identities, this thesis contemplates a number of problems:

1. How does today's Internet facilitate and support phenomenological being-in-the world?
How are embodied, located, lived experiences encountered, comprehended, and performed via blogs, social media, and other online social networking platforms today, and do Internet-based communications allow for a phenomenological understanding of self and the world?

2. What is the relevance of place to the phenomenological Internet?
Have rapid changes in the way engage with, and write digital spaces change the way that we think about place and our role in cultivating place as 'location made meaningful' (Cresswell, 2004, p. 7; Tuan, 1977)?

3. How are places and identities written and performed online today?
Has the performance of self and construction of place changed in the context of near-ubiquitous Internet?

Employing a study that is both theoretical and practical in nature, this thesis aims to address the research questions above. The narrative framework of this investigation is detailed in the overview below.

Chapter summary

Chapter two: Phenomenology of lived, embodied experience.
This chapter establishes the theoretical framework for this thesis by investigating phenomenology, both in terms of its traditional interpretation and the way that it may be applied to online interaction today. The discussion begins with an outline of the

development of the theory through the work of Husserl and Heidegger, before moving on to the work of Merleau-Ponty. For the purpose of my research, Merleau-Ponty's work offers the most relevant interpretation of phenomenology. Merleau-Ponty adapted the older framework of phenomenology to include a treatise by which the embodied self presented as both subject and object, in and of the world. The theory in this interpretation envisioned the body as constituted by space, but also simultaneously as constituting space. Merleau-Ponty's understanding of phenomenology resonates strongly with symbolic interactionism, which also informs my research as I investigate the relationships between actors and audiences in later chapters.

Phenomenology faced a number of challenges in the postmodern era, as philosophers such as Virilio, cautious of techno-determinism, began to question the relevance of humanity in the face of rapidly expanding communications technologies. In contrast, Internet scholars were imagining the potential of existence unbound by physicality. Internet research, as I've already mentioned in this chapter, began to envision a life without bodies — one wherein we could, theoretically, live forever inside the network. This conceptualisation rendered corporeality and geography obsolete, and in doing so challenged the work of Merleau-Ponty and others who privileged the body in the experience of everyday life. As certain avenues of Internet research breathed new life into Cartesian dualism, tensions between the utopian and dystopian consequences of disembodied, immortal life in cyberspace began to emerge. Ihde, however, proved to be a voice of reason; his theory of *post-phenomenology* will be investigated in detail towards the end of this chapter.

Chapter three: Geography & place identity

In Chapter 3, I situate my study — with its emphasis on embodied, located experience — in theories of human geography and place identity. Against a backdrop of emergent cartographies and neogeography, I explore the core concepts behind the theory of human geography, turning to influential voices in the field, including Tuan, Relph, and Massey, as well as the work of communication geographers such as Adams. In doing so I will be able to further relate theories of geography and place, which were not originally imagined in the context of an

Internet-enabled existence, to the everyday experience of space and place in a connected world. This chapter looks to the previous, where Harvey's time-space compression was explained. Additionally, it acknowledges the fact that geography is often complicated, interrogating the nature of place identity across a number of contexts. This chapter offers the theoretical framework to support a discussion in later chapters of "virtual" geographies. Via location-based social networks and locative media (embedded into a range of online social platforms and smartphone applications), we are more connected to our physicality than ever before. In fact, Internet-enabled devices have become the lens through which we mediate and navigate our physical world. These key concepts inform both the discussion of what it means to be "always online" (Chapter 6) and the case study (Chapter 7) later in this thesis.

Chapter four: Narrating the self

Online, we have no *immediate* physicality, in the sense that the body (that from within which our face-to-face encounters with other people and the material world emerge) is not, by default, accounted for. That is not to say that we have no body, or that the body is irrelevant in this space; indeed, it is my contention that, in accordance with phenomenology, the body informs everything that we do. However, unless we *write the self into being*, we have no perceptible physical presence in online spaces. This chapter investigates the history of self-writing as an introduction to the notion of narrative selves, which are a key theme of my research. I suggest here that the practice self-writing is actually very old, dating back to Ancient Greece (and, in all likelihood, to the development of written language); it is just that in recent times, writing the self into being is something undertaken by anyone who wishes to participate in online communities. In this chapter, I also look at the origins of self-writing online, from textual chat-style self expression to the writing of the self without words, in the form of tags, likes (and check-ins), photographs and other acts of 'vernacular creativity' (Burgess, 2010) that offer relatively low-commitment participation whilst still contributing to the construction and expression of identity. The written self provides the locus for online presence and, as I shall explain, also influences the decisions that we make offline, too.

Chapter five: Performing identity, constructing place

One of the earliest theories that I came across when beginning research was symbolic interaction. Closely related to the work of Goffman (1956), who did not consider himself a symbolic interactionist, the theory reflects in many ways Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, in that it interprets human beings, social life, and the physical world as co-constituting one another. Goffman and others claimed that social interaction required the ability to interpret the behaviour of others in order to determine how one should also act in a given situation. Goffman referred to this as the wearing of masks, arguing that through repetition and experience, individuals would come to be able to negotiate behavioural expectations and would present the self in an appropriate fashion. In this chapter about identities and audiences, I look at how content creators and their audiences co-constitute each other. The work of Adams is again useful here; as a human geographer, his studies of the spaces of communication provide the key to understanding how Internet users negotiate the behavioural expectations of social spaces online. This chapter adds weight to my existing discussion of the persistent salience of physicality as it suggests that our understanding of online interaction is strongly influenced by the social skills acquired offline.

Chapter six: Being, online

As smartphones have been widely adopted and integrated into everyday life, spaces have become increasingly hybridised, characterised by a congruent relationship between digital information and material bodies, objects, and places. This chapter proposes a reading of phenomenology in the age of locative media before challenging the digital dualisms of the past, asserting that there really is no distinction between online and offline today. Then, the chapter looks at the rise of mobile media and its complementary service, locative media, along with Adams' notion that place is inherently communicative, a claim that links back once more to phenomenology. This chapter contextualises reifies the centrality of place and introduces location-based social networks as a precursor to the chapter that follows, wherein a non-typical form of location-based social network (one arising from a network, or community, of shared-location food bloggers) is studied in detail.

Chapter seven: Locating place networks

Having established the theoretical framework for unpacking the experience of place, narrative, and identity, I present Chapter 7 as a case study that, through network and content analysis, applies said framework to a real-world example of technology interacting with the social and cultural geographies. Here, I highlight the significance of the relationship between embodiment, culture, and identity through the lens of food blogging prior to using network visualisations to demonstrate the distinct relationship between online content (in this case food blogs) and offline socialisation. By using food as the nexus for involvement, I am also able to question the place of physicality online today. Given that eating *is* a highly embodied and located practice, what is the attraction of food that can't be consumed? What might it say about us that we are happy to consume food as simulacra — that is, as an image on the screen, so far divorced from the essence of food itself — knowing that we are unable to engage the other senses? I include a discussion of memory, suggesting that the lived experience of human beings is such that we are able to enjoy the unattainable (here, the food experiences of others) because we can identify what it is like to be in the position of the blogger. Food is something that unites us all, perhaps more so than any other topic commonly discussed in blogs. *Eat Drink Perth* is not the city's most significant or biggest festival, but unlike others such as the Perth International Arts Festival or Perth Fashion Week, everyone has a common interest in food, whether it's getting enough or not having too much. Not everyone can relate to arts or fashion in the same way. Thus, *Eat Drink Perth* offers a unique opportunity for investigating the links between physicality, networks, and self-expression.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of what is an incredibly dense and multifaceted field of study. Communication, technology, place, and identity are concepts so innately interlinked that it is difficult to discuss any one without referring to the others. As such, my thesis intends to explore the relationship between these factors, ultimately proposing that new communication technologies (particularly smartphones), combined with existing formats for online self-expression (such as blogs) are contributing to a sense of the self as networked and re-placed. Near-ubiquitous access and online communities that emerge from the shared

proximity of participants have ushered in a new era for Internet communication — one in which the influence of information upon materiality (and vice versa) and the co-constitutive relationship between people and places are prompting a reconsideration of what lived experience means in a connected world.

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Chapter Two

Phenomenology

Introduction

We perceive the world from our position as embodied, located beings. Through lived experience — encounters with people, objects, and places — we are able to develop our knowledge about the world. This extends to include those encounters mediated by communication technologies, which may not facilitate physical co-presence amongst actors, but which nonetheless occur as experiential phenomena. Because of this, a new understanding of presence, interaction, and experience has emerged. In this chapter I investigate phenomenology — 'the study or science of phenomena' — as a framework for conceptualising interaction and experience in the twenty first century (Cerbone, 2006, p. 1). Phenomenology, by asserting the fundamentality of the body as the source of perception, offers an interpretive schema through which to question the manner in which online activity can influence offline activity, and vice versa.

At the crux of phenomenology is the idea that the body remains at the forefront of lived experience. Although phenomenology predates the Internet by many years, when applied to this discussion it may be regarded as inherently critical of the Cartesian dualism that once dominated Internet theory, and indeed much of Western philosophy:

> The body has by and large been an orphan child of philosophical discourse. The alleged dark grotto or continent of corporeality has almost always been castigated and even "crucified" as an ephemeral and perishable commodity in favor of incorporeal immorality... (Jung, 1996, p. 3).

The fact that phenomenology focuses with such intensity upon the fundamental place of the body made it a contentious philosophy to ascribe to as the Internet gained popularity and became the subject of academic work. After all, as I outlined in the introduction, the body itself was contested (or, more accurately, denigrated) in much

early Internet theory. Without a body with which to experience the world, phenomenology had no application. However, I argue here that phenomenology is indeed a relevant position in the context of current Internet theory. As access becomes more mobile, the Internet is re-grounded in the physical, both in terms of bodies and geography. With the rise of locative media and other affordances that effectively re-situate lived experience, as expressed online, in the physical world, today's Internet user is now co-located in physical and data space.

This chapter includes a review of phenomenology's origins in the work of Husserl, before moving on to Heidegger's more liberal approach to the philosophy of lived experience. Specifically, Heidegger's *being-in-the-world* is utilised to engage with the struggle for authenticity inherent to the practice of identity construction and presentation via online social platforms, and the challenges that a technologically mediated existence poses to this. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, which regards the body as the beginning of perception (Csordas, 1990, p. 9) is also central to this discussion. I then propose that phenomenology is a useful framework for neutralising postmodern cultural anxiety over the compression of space and time that facilitated by immense and rapid technological development. In doing so, I reinforce the notion that lived, embodied experience has always been an essential part of human existence. Contrary to the dystopian, simulated, techno-determinist future forewarned by Virilio and other postmodernists, we in fact find ourselves living in an era defined by the act of being-in-the-world. Finally, dispelling common misconceptions of Internet-enabled technologies as isolating and socially destructive, presence is re-imagined through the scope of phenomenology. In this case, Ihde's philosophy of technology provides a framework for contemplating the possibility of the phenomenological reading of technology. Ihde regards presence as very much persistent, owing to the variety of networked communicative tools we have assimilated into the experience of everyday life. To begin, however, I will provide context for the phenomenological framework of this thesis.

Background

A primary aim of this chapter is to focus upon setting up the phenomenological framework of the body and embodiment, which will be deployed throughout the

thesis as the locus of lived experience. With the development of new tools for socialising and communicating, we find ourselves reassessing what it means to live and experience, as well as what it means to have a body and be embodied. To understand the significance of this change, it is useful to examine Cartesian dualism (see also Chapter 1, where a literature review offers some additional insight into the complexities of (dis)embodiment in early Internet research). Richardson and Harper frame the mind/body disassociation common in science fiction and cyberpunk, as well as early Internet research, as 'the logic of a disembodied post-corporeality...permitted by neo(Cartesian) metaphysics' (2002, p. 3). Descartes' approach opposes the lived, experiential referent residing at the core of phenomenology. Cartesian dualism endorses the mind as independent of and superior to the body; the body, seen as fallible, unreliable, and awkward, acts merely as a vessel for the mind. The Cartesian body has no impact or influence upon the psyche or identity of the individual who carries it. The rational and reasonable mind — the conscious, functioning part of human life — has often been portrayed as uncomfortable with the presence of its fleshy counterpart in the Cartesian tradition; to escape physicality is to achieve 'fleshless exultation beyond bodily corruption' (Jones, 1998, p. 48).

Phenomenology has, in the past, been a useful philosophy for interrogating the nature of experience and what it means to perceive the world as an embodied individual, placing an emphasis on first-hand encounters. In essence, this means doing things for oneself and making up one's own mind, rather than relying on others' interpretations of phenomena as the basis of knowledge formation. Phenomenology embodies perception by urging individuals to experience the world as it is. Murray and Sixsmith write:

> Having rejected Cartesian notions of a mind-body split, it is necessary to explicate in its place a sensorial phenomenology of the body. Phenomenology has proved to be a method well suited to exploring the experience of embodiment because it is fundamentally concerned with perception and bodily activity, enabling the exploration of phenomena as they are lived and experienced (1999, p. 322).

The notion of experience becomes somewhat more complicated with the introduction of new technologies that mediate human experience. A radical shift in

the way that we learn, share, exchange information, and communicate is reshaping the notion of what it might mean to have experiences — of people, places, information, and technology itself — and how we ought to deal with these experiences in ascertaining a sense of self and an understanding of the world. Increasingly, we interact with computers and other users as well as location-independent, mobile, Internet-enabled devices, and in doing so renegotiate the boundaries between self and other, as well as self and the world. The body is being re-located through the constant exchange of data, both with other users and with the networks that support and inform our every activity. In turn, concepts of presence and being are re-contextualised to fit Internet communications as the extensibility of human communication and existence expands far beyond the proximate (Adams, 2005, p. xi).

Elaborating on ideas presented in the introductory literature review, the body in the early days of the Internet was 'relegated to a difficult outside' (Barnacle, 2001, p. 5). This was particularly true for many Internet researchers who struggled with the image of a posthuman, disembodied cyberutopia that was being depicted by populist accounts of the time. As a post-embodied, post-spatial digital realm, cyberspace privileged the mind, as it was perceived as operating free from the body and was therefore not held back by the limitations of bodily or geographical physicality; 'a utopic Cartesian map sketched on a metaphoric "custom-made" canvas through a suspension of corporeality in exchange for virtuality' (Ajana, 2005, para. 14). Everyone has a body though, and this suggests a problem with the application of Cartesian dualism to Internet theory: the impossibility of divorcing mind from body. The body can never simply operate as a carrier for the mind. According to phenomenology, it is in and of the body that lived experience emerges (Merleau-Ponty, 2002). The Cartesian body is the elephant in the room. In a mind/body split, the body doesn't simply cease to exist. It remains, informing the identity of the individual, reminding them of its presence, no matter how subtly (nor how desperately one may try to ignore it). Further, embodied memory overrides disembodied possibility, as 'we have a corporeal history, an evolutionary and ontological development' (Murray & Sixsmith, 1999, p. 319). Even the Cartesian understanding of experience — 'deemed to be "real" only if deeply entrenched within consciousness and entirely detached from the corporeal' (Ajana, 2005, p. 3)

— is troublesome. It suggests that real experience may only ever be possible as the result of intense inner-dialogue, the result perhaps of social exclusion, sensory deprivation to mute the reception of bodily signals, and constant reflexivity. Indeed, "real" experience in the Cartesian sense may not be possible at all within these parameters, for it seems to disregard as plausible setting for experience all social and cultural situations in which experience would generally occur.

In contrast, at the heart of phenomenology lies the essentiality of the body. Lefebvre theorised that the 'development of the active side of consciousness and sensations in the process of becoming human' will always, 'more or less explicitly, involve the body' (Simonsen, 2005, p. 3). This idea is useful in the context of a phenomenological interpretation of lived experience. It is also a key element of my research, in which the embodied self (as part of identity, communication, and space) is paramount to experience — even those mediated by technology. Countering the myth of disembodiment and virtuality as unreal, the phenomenological body is the key figure in being. As 'an intrinsic part of the "lived experience"', the salience of the body is guaranteed due to the fact that 'each living body both is space and has its space; it produces itself in space at the same time as it produces this space' (Simonsen, 2005, p. 4; see also Chapter 3 of this thesis). Jung similarly addresses the primacy of the body, taking a cue from Merleau-Ponty (1968) and Marcel (1952):

> there can be no "disembodied reason"...We are our body or we exist as body. As an existing subject, the body as flesh is capable of "authoring" the world before "answering" it (1996, p. 5).

Bodies "author" the world as they occupy space and construct place; this is significant as we are all in and of, and we live through, our bodies. I believe that Cartesian dualism cannot work; too much of our concept of selfhood arises from our experiences as embodied (and, by extension, located) beings. Significant to my research is the fact that a critical link between bodies, places, and communication persists despite (and, indeed, due to) an existence increasingly mediated by technology. In order to comprehend this the philosophy of phenomenology, from its origins in the work of Husserl to its deployment as a philosophy of technology today, will be discussed in the pages that follow.

Husserl

Phenomenology prompts us to simply look at the world as it is, doing away with the preconceived assumptions and prejudices that usually inform opinion, and instead interpreting phenomena as it is experienced on the personal, individual level, resulting from first-hand experience. It demands that we pay attention to appearances (how things are) rather than pre-existing attitudes (how things are thought to be), by stripping away the layers of social and cultural presumption about things. Instead of allowing prejudice to inform understanding (thus resulting in a cycle of persistent pre-judgment wherein new experiences will always be tainted, or will be avoided altogether, due to pre-existing attitudes), one should approach phenomena as a conscious act, thinking about how, in that particular place and time, phenomena can be objectively assessed without a search for "essence" or "truth" (Greaves, 2010, pp. 10–11). Phenomenology is interested in the study of the everyday, encompassing anything that can be considered 'phenomena', including people, objects, and places, with an emphasis on organic discovery, from which the individual can form their own opinions about the significance of the phenomena they encounter (Orbe, 2009, p. 750).

Phenomenology is credited to the German philosopher Edmund Husserl who, in the early 20th century, became aware of 'a tension and a conflict between our search for facts and objectivity and our desire to understand values and subjective perspectives' (Hampe, 2010, p. 151). For Husserl, the experience of being was presupposed by consciousness:

> repressed or obscured within the technical thought and activity of modern science but which remained nevertheless a stable world of immediate givenness or straightforward experience back to which all scientific activity could be traced, and in which it was necessarily rooted (James, 2006, p. 34).

Husserl, in the early twentieth century, would have witnessed rapid and immense scientific and technological change. He lamented that such change had necessitated a

new way of looking at the world — that is, via the technological gaze.[6] Technologies, as they are integrated into society, change the way people perceive life and the world, and thus the way they act. Husserl, realising the potentially catastrophic impact that technology could have on humanity, prompts us to question who and what we are and to contemplate the extent of the power we are willing to hand over to technology. For example, the telephone markedly restructured the way people experienced phenomena such as space, time, presence, and privacy by bringing distant others into the private home — or their voices, at least (Shapiro, 1998, pp. 280–281). Husserl fashioned phenomenology as a means by which people could experience phenomena — that is, the everyday — without the blindsiding prejudices inherent to technological change. Husserl's phenomenology sought to offer an antidote to increasingly pervasive technology and its mediating effects on interaction and the experience of life.[7]

Husserl used the concept of the *lifeworld* to argue that experiential consciousness ought to dominate the understanding of phenomena (Husserl, 1970). The lifeworld was, according to Ihde:

> clearly conceived of by Husserl to be the most basic (foundational) stratum of World and also the broadest in scope. Any secondary or specialized "world," such as that of any science, must somehow refer to this basic world (1990, p. 35).

Made up of 'the routine and the unusual, the mundane and the surprising', Husserl's lifeworld, according to Seamon, 'refers to the tacit context, tenor and pace of daily life to which people normally give no reflective attention' (2000, p. 160; see also

[6] For example, the development of the printing press changed the nature and understanding of literacy, prompting a new way of thinking about knowledge and access to information (Fischer, 2001, p. 293). Another example comes from the Industrial Revolution, where the rapid and immense development of new technologies for manufacturing emerged alongside advances in transportation, prompting a rethink of almost every aspect of life, from work to private lives and from youth to leisure. It was a gaze that privileged some but not all, and continues to do so to this day.

[7] The technological gaze, feared by Husserl for its transformative potential, remains apt even today. Ibrahim, writing about mobile technologies, notes that 'the moving body, the agency of the self and the aesthetics of the banal and mundane (combine) to construct a new media environment in which the act of private consumption and production is connected to a wider data infrastructure and information economy'. As a consequence, she perceives 'a society of familiar strangers whose sense of identity, place and community is continually shaped by their consumption of mobile technologies' (Ibrahim, 2007, p. 26). In the Husserlian reading, it would seem that the ubiquity of mobile technologies is, in Ibrahim's, leading to 'new ethical and moral dilemmas over new boundaries that may be transgressed and violated'; it is possible that we are placing meaning and expectations on events and individuals that are culturally constructed, rather than essential truths.

Seamon, 1979). The lifeworld also situated human beings as objects just like everything else — objects which, in and of themselves, were free from meaning and prejudice, for these could only be applied *to* objects by subjective beings. Ihde, however, criticises the restrictiveness of such a perspective. Life was stripped back to its simplest form, and individuals were able to experience life as it was, rather than as mediated by technology, which was impacting upon every aspect of life (Seamon, 2000, p. 4). 'From an actual human point of view, a lifeworld without technology must be at best an imaginative projection', writes Ihde (1990, p. 31). The tension between object and subject presented a further problem though, for humanity could not escape its reality as either:

> In this world we are objects among objects in the sense of the life-world, namely, as being here and there, in the plain certainty of experience, before anything that is established scientifically, whether in physiology, psychology, or sociology (Husserl, 1970, pp. 104–105).

As objects, we are free of presumption and prejudice; experience can, supposedly, be pure. However, objects are incapable of interpreting phenomena, adding to the complexity of Husserl's theory. He continues:

> On the other hand, we are subjects for this world, namely, as the ego-subjects experiencing it, contemplating it, valuing it, related to it purposefully; for us this surrounding world has only the ontic meaning given to it by our experiencings, our thoughts, our valuations... (Husserl, 1970, pp. 104–105).

The challenge here lies in reconciling the subject-object paradox. We can attempt to do so by being conscious of negating prejudgment in a process known as *phenomenological reduction*.

This process involves being aware of subjectivity whilst at the same time trying to avoid the subjective tendency to prejudge. The focus of everyday life must be on '(attempting) to bracket off all experience except that which is given immediately to the present moment of conscious perception':

> The reduction, therefore, allows the philosopher-phenomenologist to isolate a moment of "absolute givenness" imminent to consciousness and therefore to describe intentional structure and meaning constitution within the act of perception (James, 2006, p. 331).

This reductionist 'stripping back' of phenomena shifts the focus away from nuances that have been culturally or socially inscribed upon phenomena (such as attitudes towards and preconceptions of a person, thing, place, or experience), and onto the experience of encountering the world as it really is. Through this, we should be allowed to etch our own meanings onto phenomena, based upon first-person experiences. The reality, though, is not quite this simple. Husserl 'claimed to redeem philosophy from academic abstractions by enabling us to return to the origin of ideas in our concrete lived experience of the "things themselves"' (Kearney, 1986, p. 3).

Within such a framework, the individual was supposedly freed from the rigidity, and indeed impossibility, of searching for the truth or essence of phenomena. An entity could have any meaning bestowed upon it that an individual wanted, without that meaning needing to align with an official stance or interpretation. The ability to achieve this reductionist perspective is questionable, however. In a time of immense technological change is it possible to view the world and its people as distinct from the technologies and movements that are shaping them? There may be something essential about human existence; on the other hand, what it means to be human is possibly far too inextricably defined by the social, cultural, and technological context of a particular time. Technologies influence emergent ideologies and sociocultural values, and are influenced by them; similarly, technology influences human life, and to be human is to be influenced by technology. Other philosophers recognised the limitations of Husserl's phenomenology and expanded upon it, and in doing so provided a reading of the theory that is more useful to my research.

Heidegger

Phenomenology is, according to Jung, characterised by its 'capacity to transform itself' (1996, p. 1). As such, it is a theory that has been manipulated many times to fit evolving social contexts. Heidegger, a student of Husserl's, was influenced by Husserl's phenomenology, but felt that the insistence upon reductionist experience-as-all was limiting. It overlooked the fact that, as subject-object identities, we experience phenomena as situated in the world — as Being — and can't be expected to constantly analyse phenomena solely on the basis of experience. Heidegger's interpretation of Husserl's phenomenology was more forgiving, in that the individual

wasn't expected to overlook existing personal knowledge. Heidegger's phenomenology, as with Husserl's previously, privileges experience as the basis for knowing, whilst recognising that we are aware of the world from the position that we occupy in it; that is, that we come to experience phenomena from within a personal milieu of prior experience and awareness. Heidegger also argued that some things just *are*, and that it was futile to attempt to reduce these to their individual parts.

> Heidegger pointed out that Husserl's attempt to describe everything as correlates of consciousness overlooked such basic dimensions of existence as dread, anxiety, forlornness, and death...The method of investigating these aspects of existence cannot be that of bracketing the world (the epoche) but rather finding the basic modalities of being-in-the-world (Stewart & Mickunas, 1974, p. 69).

Certain experiences, Heidegger believed, produce so visceral a reaction that it is illogical to attempt to assess them on their own merit. For instance, anxiety cannot be considered as a phenomenon in and of itself, as it is always related to something. Death does not just happen; it is the result of illness, disease, old age, accident, and so on. These are experiences bound to their context, and so a reductionist stripping away of layers of meaning (the aforementioned bracketing) isn't available as an option for considering phenomena in these instances.

Greaves interprets Heidegger in another way, using the example of our awareness of space and time. From a young age, we deploy space and time as contextual markers to make sense of life and the world. Space and time are used to impart order onto chaos. However, our comprehension of what space and time mean change significantly over the lifespan. As a child, one's height might be noted on a doorframe. In that moment, it doesn't matter to the child how many centimetres tall they are; all that matters is that they're taller than they were last time, and that they're still taller than a younger sibling. Likewise, just as centimetres are meaningless to a child without a solid understanding of distance, the time on a clock is useless to a child who, too young to need to tell the time, possesses no frame of reference for that information. Time becomes useful when we begin using it to organise life: time to go to work, time needed to bake a cake, time zone difference in a holiday location to that at home. For a child, time exists only in terms of what they can comprehend: how many stories are to be read before bedtime, or how many

sleeps until Grandma visits (Greaves, 2010, p. 93). As we grow older though, our understanding of space and time change:

> Space becomes what we measure with a ruler. It becomes something composed of lines and points and the measurement of space comes down to picking out sections of those lines... Time becomes a vastly extended and perhaps endless line. Measuring time becomes picking out sections of this line. Eventually this line becomes, to a large extent, the time that we inhabit (Greaves, 2010, p. 93).

What Greaves demonstrates here is the fact that whilst certain aspects of life become more difficult to separate from extant knowledge about those phenomena as we mature and come to have a use for that information, the experience of life — specifically space and time, in this instance — can still occur phenomenologically. It is simply that we must come to phenomena (whether other people, inanimate objects, experiences, places, and so on) from the current perspective of being-in-the-world, wherein the conditions of the present are understood as part of a broader life context, rather than demanding objective consciousness in all worldly interactions, as per Husserl's phenomenology.

Heidegger emphasised the "right now" of life, but acknowledged the role that prior experience would play in interpreting current experiences. Heidegger used the term *Dasein* in his interpretation of phenomenology. A portmanteau of the German words *Sein* ("being") and *Da* ("here" or "there"), Heidegger insists that 'we must start our interrogation of the being of phenomena by interrogating ourselves' (Greaves, 2010, p. 21). So, rather than the Husserlian repression of both the subjective instincts of the individual and the influence of external others upon one's view of the world, *Dasein* prompts us to question not only the external world of objects, but to question why we, as subjects, feel the need to investigate phenomena in the first place. Heidegger prompts us to interrogate why *Dasein* moves us to contemplate our place in and the meaning of the world. In this questioning, the individual is free to draw upon extant knowledge to formulate an answer. *Dasein* 'emphasizes the situatedness of human reality in the world,' given that 'human existence is always existence in the world' (Stewart & Mickunas, 1974, p. 70). Simply put, in understanding any object in the world, we need to acknowledge our existence in it, in a particular time and place, as an object-in-space, but also as a perceptual, subjective entity.

Dasein is used to demonstrate that personal experience should, above all, inform opinion and attitude, but that further meaning could be garnered from careful consideration of previous experiences — both one's own, and those of others that have been passed on (as narratives or in lessons, for instance). Phenomenological consciousness (although Heidegger preferred the term 'perspective') allowed individuals to active engage in the process of self-reflexivity during experience:

> Every approach we make to the phenomena and every manifestation of phenomena can only take place in and through what the Greeks called logos, a logic of appearance that does not come after the fact but allows us to experience things in the first place (Greaves, 2010, p. 11).

Heidegger's philosophy moves closer to one that fits my approach, positioning experience as central but sanctioning reflexivity as a way of knowing. Still, though, phenomenology appears conceptually abstract, for it says little about how humans — as worldly objects possessing the subjective capacity for reflection — use the information that they collect during experience. This Heidegger explained using the expression being-in-the-world.

Being

> *Cogito ergo sum (I think, therefore I am), claimed Descartes. Heidegger was unsatisfied with this account, claiming that though it may prove human existence (albeit in an incorrect fashion, he contended), it certainly said nothing about the nature of human existence—what it means to be human (Zahorik & Jenison, 1998, p. 82).*

Heidegger deployed the concept of *being-in-the-world* with the belief that, as subjective entities with the capacity to experience phenomena, we ought 'to dwell in the world and enjoy its openness' (Sloterdijk, 2012, pp. 37–38). Whilst still demanding experience as the basis of knowledge (as with the phenomenology that preceded it), being-in-the-world eradicated the need for every experience to be a conscious one in which the subjects were acutely and persistently aware of their own subjectivity. Zahorik and Jenison write,

> This 'being-in-the-world' is our primary and everyday mode of existence... Being, then, in this Heideggerian sense, is defined in terms of action within a worldly context. Existence is action and action is existence (1998, pp. 84–85).

In a sense, being-in-the-world feels quite removed from Husserl's consciousness-heavy focus on intentionality. Intentionality requires a somewhat "meta" approach to experience, dependent upon the persistent, conscious realisation that phenomena in and of itself contains no inherent meaning, combined with the acute awareness that our understanding of phenomena represents something else. McIntyre and Smith state that 'the events that make up our mental life — our perceptions, thoughts, beliefs, hopes, fears, and so on' are always,

> A representation of something other than itself and so gives one a sense of something. This representational character of mind or consciousness — its being "of" or "about" something — is "intentionality" (McIntyre & Smith, 1989, p. 147).

Intentional experience requires the experiencer to acknowledge to the representational nature of whatever it is they are experiencing (or, more accurately, the feelings and/or attitudes they have about that experience).

According to Husserl, 'the intentionality of an act is independent of the existence of its object' (McIntyre & Smith, 1989, p. 150), and such independence — as opposed to interdependence — means that individuals should be able to experience phenomena as separate from any representative meanings or attitudes that have arisen in relation to that phenomena.[8] Lee unpacks Husserl's conceptualisation of intentional and non-intentional experiences:

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[8] A less complicated way of looking at this could come in the form of the following example: A rose is a flower. It is a flower about which certain attitudes have emerged; its colour (roses are red) and scent ('would a rose by any other name smell as sweet?') are two such nuances. However, roses in and of themselves posses no such inherent characteristics; indeed, not all roses are red, and not all roses smell sweet. Going one step further, the name "rose" is only indicative of that particular object because it was bestowed upon it at some point in history. (It seems that Shakespeare's aphorism is replete with unintended complexity.) We could refer to it by its scientific name, *Rosa rubiginosa*, and it would surely smell no different than it would if referred to as a rose, but the point is that there is no intrinsic sweetness that is bestowed upon all roses, nor is there any particular colour, nor any essential relationship between roses and romance. These are all cultural associations that we have come to accept as facts about roses, when in fact they are all distinct from the rose-object itself. Husserl would urge the individual to experience the phenomena without any preconceived notions of what it should look or smell like, and certainly without taking into consideration culturally-imposed definitions of what a rose is and ought to be.

> Husserl gives, as an example, the distinction between perception and sensation, and insists that the former is an intentional experience, whereas the latter is a non-intentional one... it is obvious that a perception, let us say, that of a tree, refers to something objective, and, thus, can be called an intentional experience (2000, p. 50).

In this example, the perceived experience of the tree is intentional because it refers to everything else that we know about trees: their role in creating oxygen, the destruction of old growth forests, the fact that their wood can be burned in fires, over which food can be cooked or around which people can gather in communities. None of these things are inherent characteristics of the tree itself, though; they are all imposed upon the tree by the mind in an act of intentionality. Being-in-the-world, on the other hand, permits meaning to arise out of experience without the need to overlook the influence of attitudes (derived both from previous experiences and from the experiences of others) upon phenomena. Perceptions and sensations in this case needn't be thought of as distinct, but instead related to one another as part of the lived experience. One can encounter a new experience aware of the preconceptions of others, but needn't use them to form the basis of one's own understanding of the experience. Heidegger's approach is more realistic because it acknowledges the fact that we really cannot help but be influenced by others.

Being-in-the-world suggests that the value of meaning is in the experience itself, rather than facilitating a completely new, uninfluenced understanding of phenomena. It is appropriate as a basis for the discussion of experience in my research as it helps to explain the relationship between human beings and the places they move through. Taken literally, being-in-the-world is about just that — existing and living in the physical world — and this, in turn, raises the possibility of experience-in-the-world as being facilitated by embodied existence. It is not until French philosophers pick up phenomenology (particularly under the influence of Merleau-Ponty), however, that this shift truly takes place. 'For all intents and purposes,' writes Hart, 'Heidegger dropped the reduction and explored intentionality with respect to *Dasein*... rather than continuing to think of a subject animated by consciousness' (2004, p. 140). Heidegger regarded consciousness and being as inextricably bound to each other. Additionally, an 'authentic life' based upon the simple experience of being-in-the-world was thought possible. For Heidegger, authenticity arose from the

rejection of 'anonymous mass opinion' in favour of the 'individual freely (choosing) his way of being-in-the-world' (Stewart & Mickunas, 1974, p. 70). Such freedom of choice doesn't necessarily mean the rejection of all other opinions, but instead is indicative of the individual being able to choose between the preconceptions of others as well as one's own first-hand experience. The more time a person took to personally experience the phenomena of the world, the more authentic their life could be.

Merleau-Ponty

Just as Heidegger before him, Maurice Merleau-Ponty recognised the need for phenomenology to evolve in order to retain relevancy in his social context. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology emphasised the pivotal role of the body in lived experience. Although influenced by Husserl and Heidegger, as well as the work of existential phenomenologist Sartre,[9] Merleau-Ponty worked on 'exposing the unexamined assumptions concerning the nature of experience' (Cerbone, 2006, p. 97). Merleau-Ponty was particularly interested in embodied experience as 'the starting point for analyzing human participation in a cultural world' (Csordas, 1993, p. 135), but acknowledged that 'perception was always embedded in a cultural world' (Csordas, 1993, p. 137) in a manner which his predecessors did not. For Merleau-Ponty, experience was perceptual, and perception — being 'pre-objective' — 'precedes and makes possible an objective conception of the world' (Cerbone, 2006, p. 107).

Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology reinforced the mind-body synthesis and the status of embodiment as paramount to experience, but explained that experience was always inherently perceptive. It was less about being aware of happenings, and more about simply living them — existing — through the material body. 'Merleau-Ponty extols the body as the "subject of perception",' writes Ajana (2005, para. 6), 'demystifying Descartes' maxim "I think, therefore I am" and almost overriding it by what could be termed as "I perceive, therefore I am"'. She continues:

> Merleau-Ponty's teleology is all about existential politics, which clearly seek to re-establish the fundamental union between the self and the world, redirecting our attention to the fact that this union is but

[9] Sartre's work, although influential to studies of lived experience, embodiment, and the everyday, lies outside the scope of this project.

> embodied, and hinting to the notion that identity by virtue of the latter is a cognitive accumulation of phenomenological bodily experiences (Ajana, 2005, para. 7).

The way that we perceive the world is based upon a lifetime of knowledge gathered about the relationship between bodies (individuals) and the spaces they occupy. This knowledge, when contextualised in the phenomenal spaces occupied by other objects and other bodies (all of which co-constitute each other), give meaning to life through phenomenological perception and interaction. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology thus concentrates on the experience of being, rather than questioning the experience of being that Heidegger had emphasised.

Perception, rather than focusing on *consciousness* as per Heidegger's phenomenology, promotes an embodied state of being wherein experience is existential and comes as second-nature to the individual. *Consciousness*, on the other hand, requires a hyper-awareness of the body, conflicted as both subject and object. Heidegger's focus on consciousness as the condition for lived experience dictated that although embodied, individual must still think about how (and why) they "fit in" in to the physical world. This presents as contradictory, given that Heidegger's body was read as being co-constitutive of space. Explaining *perception*, Merleau-Ponty used the example of a woman being able to *feel* the extra space that a feather in her hat brings to her body, or a driver being able to *feel* the dimensions of the car they drive in order to know whether it will fit in to a particular opening (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p. 165). Therefore, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological body is extensible, in that perception allows for the individual to "feel" (or sense) beyond the limits of the physical self, to a degree. This was possible due to the close relationship between the body and the physical world. 'Our own body is in the world as the heart is in the organism,' writes Merleau-Ponty (2002, p. 236). All experience was embodied experience; thus, at the centre of his phenomenology was the notion of fundamental embodied perspective.

The phenomenology of bodies raises important questions about the subjective relationship with the self and the world. Embodiment is the precondition of human existence, and therefore must be that of knowing, too:

> The body is both something that I am and something that I have. My body is the basic condition for any act of having, inasmuch as control over one's body is the sine qua non of any possible relationship with the world of objects (Stewart & Mickunas, 1974, p. 78).

Because of this, it must be considered as more than just an object, and yet to others, and in space, the body is just that: another object. Yet, our understanding of what it means to be a subject — intersubjectivity — informs our sense of kinship and empathy towards others. That is, to 'be human is to be bodily' (Stewart & Mickunas, 1974, p. 78):

> the body is the umbilical cord to the social... Only because of the body are we said to be visible and capable of relating ourselves first to other bodies and then to other minds. The body is our social placement in the world (Jung, 1996, p. 5).

We understand what it means to be in and of a body, and we recognise it as being different to other objects because of this intersubjective awareness:

> Phenomenology argues that the human body cannot merely be understood as another thing in nature or an object amongst physical objects such as trees, stones, and starts, for the reason that the body of a person is that from which all such natural objects are experienced (Stewart & Mickunas, 1974, p. 96).

The advantage of such a theory for this research is that it gives us a point of reference for considering our own being, but it also proved particularly useful for debunking earlier interpretations of the Internet as a disembodied utopian space, and rewriting it as an extended domain of embodied, lived experience.

Technology

> *Supposing that our railroads, even at our present simmering rate of travelling, were to be suddenly established all over England, the whole population of the country could, speaking metaphorically, at once advance en masse, and place their chairs nearer to the fireside of their metropolis...*

> *As distances were thus annihilated, the surface of our country would, as it were, shrivel in size until it became not much bigger than one immense city. (Schivelbusch, 1978, p. 32)*[10]

Technology changes the way that the space and time is perceived and experienced (Ihde, 2012, p. 326). One only has to consider the above quote to get a sense of this: two hundred years ago with the birth of the rail travel people spoke of the annihilation of distance by train travel. We can now travel across the world in a day and have seen the outer reaches of the known universe thanks to astronomy and astrophysics. Time and space are enmeshed so perfectly that the understanding of space is irrevocably linked to that of time; as space is conquered by developments in transportation or telecommunications (each having a flow-on affect that impacts upon the mechanics of society), time takes on new meanings. However, 'temporal shrinking, permeable spatial boundaries and the establishment of new electronic spaces draw a...complex picture of mediated time-space experiences' (Tsatsou, 2009, p. 15), and it is such complexity that I explore in this section.

Time and space are established as social institutions — what Giddens has referred to as 'the *separation of time and space* and their recombination in forms which permit the precise time-space "zoning" of social life' (Giddens, 1991, pp. 16–17) — as well as social constructs (Bluedorn, 2002, pp. 14–20). Bluedorn states that 'the concepts and values we hold about time are the products of human interaction' (2002, p. 14, citing Lauer, 1981, p. 44); it is, according to Relph, 'amorphous and intangible and not an entity that can be directly described and analysed' (1976, p. 8). For example, the modern understanding of space and time has been closely related to capitalism; money is used as 'a symbolic token whose most important function is its ability to "bracket" time and space' (Friedland & Boden, 1994, p. 30). That is, a person's time is valuable, and the exchange of hours of work for remuneration places individuals in a particular place (the office) for a certain length of time (the working day multiplied by work week multiplied by working weeks per year). In this example, time and space are entirely manufactured to keep up with the needs of society. Time

[10] Schivelbusch quotes from an uncredited article published in the *Quarterly Review* 63 (1839).

and space represent more than 'just material constraints to be overcome or resources to be used':

> Rather, they have different qualities depending on the historically specific discourse through which they are understood. Thus, new interpretive frames by which space and time are understood are integral to the creation of institutions which achieve new forms of control over the spacing and timing of human activity (Friedland & Boden, 1994, p. 29).

What we see emerging in the present is a new schema for understanding space and time, articulated via instantaneous communication and access to knowledge. Time and space are in a state of flux, as our perspective of what it means to be together (and indeed apart from each other) changes according to the new 'interpretive frames' of human organisation and lived experience.

Evidence of space and time as social constructs can be seen in the fact that 'different societies produce qualitatively different conceptions of space and time' (Harvey, 1990, p. 418). Here, I think of the example of China. More than 5,000 kilometres across, China has only one time zone. By contrast, Australia is nearly 4,000 kilometres from west coast to east coast, and occupies three time zones with a two-hour distance between west and east — three in summer, when most of the east coast adopts daylight savings, but Western Australia and Queensland do not. In this interpretation, space and time are social fabrications that have been accepted as the norm and institutionalised in an attempt to 'constitute the social order through the assignment of people and activities to distinctive places and times' (Harvey, 1990, pp. 418–41; see also Bourdieu, 1977). Baker too acknowledges this, explicitly linking the modern understanding of space and time to capitalism:

> Capitalism, involving reciprocally confirming calculative practices, rests on the belief that iterative, repetitive recurrent actions can be relied upon the measure and regiment time and space and thereby create order (Baker, 1993, p. 408).

The collapse of institutionalised notions of space and time is what Harvey calls 'time-space compression' — a concept distinct from Giddens' space-time distantiation that nonetheless similarly addresses the changing relationship of space and time with the physical and social world. He notes that 'the experience of it

forces all of us to adjust our notions of space and time and to rethink the prospects for social action' (Harvey, 1990, p. 426).

The way that space and time are imagined evolves in line with socio-cultural needs. The most recent significant development to impact upon the imagination of space and time was the creation and then widespread adoption of the Internet. In the presence of a worldwide mass communications revolution, the traditional markers of space and time — as experienced largely through capitalist economies and structures — lost some of their salience. When the tyrannies of distance and time are less formidable, opportunities arise for socially accepted structures (such as space and time) to be modified. Harvey writes:

> societies change and grow, they are transformed from within and adapt to pressures and influences from without. Objective conceptions of space and time must change to accommodate new material practices of social reproduction (1990, p. 419).[11]

The phenomenology of space and time is such that the experience of it is pursuant to the social context within which they exist. The day is still measured in hours and minutes and distances still in kilometres or miles, but the experience of these phenomena changes depending upon the way that individuals experience them, in their own personal context.

Science and technology continue to constitute and be constituted by our relationship with space and time, reworking and building upon what society presumes to be fixed phenomena:

> Via the instantaneous transmission of modern communications we can perceive something as immediate in a manner which bypasses the way in which the situated physical body engages with its surroundings. Something can be perceived as near when it is distant; its appearance in

[11] Such shifts result from need. There needn't always be a marked, indicated shift in attitude; it just occurs over time. One of the examples of the way in which the compression of space and time is witnessed is in the workplace, with multinational corporations able to conduct business more seamlessly than ever from multiple offices across the globe – including the option for a significant number of people to telecommute. As is discussed in chapter six, this has also had the effect of blurring the distinction between work and home (and, indeed, vacation time), impacting upon concepts of public and private/professional and personal life, as the telecommuting employee is no longer restricted to working in a particular place.

> space is not subject to the temporal delay of physical movement in space... (James, 2006, p. 324).

Technology — especially telecommunications and the associated tools and applications that are responsible for the current conceptualisation of space and time — is such that with very little effort at all, the furthest corners of the globe are, seemingly, within arm's length. Distance is not quite so oppressive when you can communicate at will with a loved one anywhere in the world, and the planet doesn't seem quite so vast when you can view it from above and zoom down to street level at almost any location on Earth with just the click of a mouse. As James suggests, echoing the work of Virilio (a critic of the time-space compression inherent to technological development in the late twentieth century), the reconfiguration of the accepted notions of space and time symptomatic of the rise of the Internet has resulted in the undoing of a number of dichotomies traditionally upheld by these phenomena:

> the very oppositions of near and far, departure and arrival, presence and absence do not, on the fundamental level of perception in the life-world, function as stable opposites... (2006, p. 324).

Without 'stable opposites' to guide perception, individuals must rely upon lived experience (that is, their phenomenological reading of situations) as the socio-cultural reference point for understanding. In the context of fluctuating space-time contexts, experience is re-routed through the mediating lens of technology, which in turn causes a rethink of the way that we see both ourselves and the world.

Virilio and virtuality

A prominent critic of 'neo-liberal techno-determinism' (Tuschl, 2012, p. 3), Paul Virilio, like Merleau-Ponty, sees the body as the emergent point of awareness, and occupying a dual role as an object in space and as the site of subjectivity. However, Virilio is also wary that 'technology has slowly appropriated our "logistics of perception", and has therefore come to mediate all understanding of reality' (Otero-Pailos, 2000, p. 104). Virilio, in the mid-1980s, lobbied for a 'return to bodily experience' (Otero-Pailos, 2000, p. 104); in doing so, he succumbed to the rhetoric of the time, espousing the incompatibility of the body and technology. In the context of phenomenology, the body constitutes space and the space constitutes the body;

without one, the other cannot exist.[12] Therein lays the problem: whilst our perception of space may alter with the evolution of technology, and thus society, into a more connected and less geographically encumbered, it still exists as a physical reality. A metre is still one hundred centimetres; the oceans are still vast and occupy more or less the same geographic space as they always have. The veracity of bodies in the context of space and time compression remains persistent; they are just encountered through different paradigms. Virilio, although not strictly speaking a phenomenologist, anticipated with regret that a movement away from lived, embodied experience was in sight.

Cubitt points out a flaw in Virilio's seemingly unwavering insistence upon the purity of perception over mediation: 'consciousness has no present. Moreover, since the world itself is never self-present either, perception is already mediation' (2001, p. 135). He states:

> communication is not about the recuperation of some prior truth of things, but rather a perpetual and mutual building and negotiation of truth, reality and subjectivity. Virilio's representation theory understands truth as an impossibly total content of communication: that is why it is perpetually disappointed, or forced to confront the human impossibility of rendering in mediated form the totality of truth associated with an object (Cubitt, 2001, p. 135).

That is to say that it makes more sense to accept that mediation is an essential part of communication, and as communication falls within the bounds of a potential part of lived experience, the fact that it is mediated cannot be seen to detract from the authenticity, phenomenologically, of the act of communicating. The phenomenological understanding of 'space as spatiality – that is to say, as a spatial perception or awareness which is inseparable from the manner in which bodies are positioned' (James, 2007, p. 27) – appeals to the lofty foundations upon which Virilio sets the body. However, it is also problematic. As embodied entities in an age of time-space compression, as the fundamentality of space recedes, one could be

[12] The reciprocity of the body-space relationship that so concerned Virilio is echoed throughout this research, and indeed is a theme that has transferred to many cultural studies through the paradigm of human geography.

forgiven for believing that bodies – both conceptually and symbolically – become less significant too.

Virilio argued that technology – in compressing time and space and eradicating distance and the unenviable wait that, ultimately, has always punctuated every desire – was forcing perception away from being that of embodied, experiential being-in-the-world and instead casting it through the mediating lens of technology. Cyberspace – 'the technological capacity to bring the remote near' (Ihde, 2012, p. 326) – confounds the notion of what it means to wait, to be apart from someone or some place, and in some way, what it means to experience human life. Virilio warned of a 'crisis of dimensions and of representation' (1991, p. 50), prompted by concurrent advancements in transportation and telecommunications that, as they compressed space and time, threatened the way that individuals experienced presence and absence, from one another and from phenomena, conflating perspective and removing opportunities for lived-body experience (James, 2007, pp. 56–57). Ihde, in contrast, claims that 'the experienced instantaneity of distance is the same in the infotechnologies of e-mail and the Internet and, except for slight time factors, the audio technologies, telephone and radio' (2012, p. 326). Ihde saw the 'instantaneity' of Internet communications as evidence of history repeating, rather than a serious threat to human values. The experience of presence and absence were not negated by mediating technologies that allowed for the reconfiguration of what it meant to be distant or to wait for something. For Virilio, 'the "presence" of lived experience is always viewed in terms of a primary spatiality and temporality that are constituted in, or along with, the appearance of phenomena to perception' (James, 2007, p. 57). Thus, Virilio saw in new technologies the end of absence and distance, and regarded this as inherently detrimental to humanity.

The end of absence

The 1980s and 1990s proved to be a trying time for phenomenology, as the Internet, with its potential to bring distant people together and distant places nearer challenging what had been a stable conceptualisation of presence and absence. Presence, according to Lee, denotes 'a psychological state in which the virtuality of experience is unnoticed' (2004, p. 32). This idea speaks closely to ideas at the heart

of my research — namely, the notions that all experience is mediated and that virtuality and reality are one and the same; one is merely an extension of the other, and today the two are closely enmeshed. Lived experience and interaction are not as straightforward as they were traditionally, owing to the fact that presence is no longer always a matter of physical, shared co-presence,[13] but phenomena and the opportunities for experiencing it are still very much real. The direction taken by communication technology development over the past decade has lain to rest some of the fears of a techno-deterministic existence, although that does not stop almost-daily news reports lamenting the lost opportunities for interaction allegedly faced by today's social media-obsessed young people. However, the notion that technology has reconfigured presence – rather than replaced it with some kind of social disconnect – is nothing new.

Adams discusses this notion of the 'extensible self' by looking at the ways that communication technologies throughout human history have influenced the way that presence is imagined. One's extensibility (or presence) is limited by the ability to forge connections with those outside of one's proximity. Our knowledge of pre-literate history is limited because such societies, lacking written language, were unable to create meaningful permanent records:

> People could talk about the past and future and about distant places, constructing a virtual world in the mind, but the senders and receivers of any communication act were limited to the present moment and to the range of the unaided voice (Adams, 2005, p. 25).

Virtuality, as a concept, remains problematic. Over the past two decades, there has been a propensity to automatically associate cyberspace with virtuality and an absence (or, at best, simulation) of reality. However, as Adams attests, presence – our idea of what it means to be present, anyway – has evolved as technologies of communication have provided new ways to transgress the formerly unconquerable institutions of space and time. The development of written languages, Adams argues, marked the beginning of extensibility – that is, the ability to be present in a place that one does not physically occupy. This was most significantly exemplified in the

[13] Although we tend to think of presence as the physical encounter of being with another person it has not, since the development of the written word, been exclusively so. When we read a book, listen to the radio, or talk on the telephone, we are present with – or experiencing the presence of – another.

notion of virtuality: not only could the individual be present in places that they did not occupy, but they could also be present in *non-places*, as cyberspace was interpreted as a setting without a location. Users could talk to anyone, anywhere in the world in neutral non-space, free from bodily encumbrance and the tyranny of distance. The Internet has become markedly more physical in the past decade, but still extensibility is a key drawcard of the technology. Users may not necessarily go online to communicate in the perceived non-places/spaces that were once imagined, but they can still go online (or, as I shall discuss in Chapter 6, *remain online*) to traverse smaller spaces and smaller times, connecting and reconnecting with existing networks of acquaintances. Presence has been, and will continue be, adapted to suit new technologies.

Technology has always contributed to the interpretation of space and time as cultural constructs. Through our own words, we are able to communicate with the future; by reading others' words, we communicate with the past. Technology allows people to communicate beyond the limits of their natural life, through the creation of audiences 'at once imaginary and real' (Adams, 2005, p. 1) with which presence is shared:

> at the moment of writing, it is imaginary; at the moment of reading, it is real. You are a figment of my imagination (in my time-space), but you are not only a figment of my imagination, having materialized somewhere like I imagined you (in your time-space) (Adams, 2005, p. 1).

The power of technology is such that it 'allows us to make something present to ourselves, which we have neither experienced nor could have experienced personally' (Bronfen, 2010, p. 9). Here, what is imagined is the experience of co-presence; it is what enables a writer to imagine their audience. Similarly, it enables individuals to interact with others across the dimensions of space and time in such a way that simply would not have been possible without that technology.

Virilio warned that the end of absence could have catastrophic consequences for human nature. Instead, what we are witnessing is a change in the way that presence is experienced. Today's Internet users are becoming remarkably adept at managing simultaneous presences in a number of spaces, both physical and "virtual". One's

presence is distributed across platforms, offering snippets of the self to other users. Indeed, what we are seeing is the latest incarnation of an incredibly old practice — one that involves imagining audiences and simulating togetherness:

> Recently, researchers have begun to realize that the feeling of presence...lies at the center of all mediated experiences...from reading a novel...to riding an immersive virtual reality (VR) simulator. The ancient desire to overcome the limit of human sensory channels through the use of technological devices is the major impetus for the development of media and reality-simulation technologies (Lee, 2004, p. 27).

Whether or not one is to consider the Internet to be a 'reality-simulation' technology (and to suggest that it is may be to edge precariously close to the digital dualisms that characterised early cyberculture theory), Lee's assertion is appropriate. Presence is not always about sharing geographic proximity, nor is it about "being together" (whether physically together or communicatively together) at the same time. Instead, presence is about the feeling of *being there*, with the Internet providing new and sometimes challenging ways of experiencing presence. As Chapter 6 in this thesis will further investigate, the rise of smartphones — pervasive, mobile, Internet-enabled, pocket-sized computers — over the past five years has contributed significantly to the end of absence. Instead, we are granted an existence in which we are always online and ever-present. Later in the thesis, I will return to Virilio in assessing the impact that the so-called end of absence has had upon human interaction. However, unlike Virilio's concern that constant contact would replace the distance and absence so vital to identity construction, I will argue that today's communication technologies supplement — rather than substitute — absence. Communication is swift and accessible, but the experience of being together (or being in a place) continues to have salience.

(Post)phenomenology in a connected world

What lacked in Virilio's interpretation of technological mediation of everyday life was the basic understanding that technology doesn't necessarily detract from lived experience, nor does its prominence indicate a loss of agency on the part of humanity. In fact, what we are experiencing — with "experience" being the key word — is a reconfiguration of what life means, from what it means to be human to

what it means to operate in the current-day physical and communication spaces that we encounter. Ihde has most effectively promoted the prospect of human-technology co-existence via his theory of *postphenomenology* — an interpretation of phenomenological theory 'different from, but owing to its ancestry' (Ihde, 1993, p. 1). Postphenomenology arose from Ihde's realisation that a new school of thought needed to be considered that could account for the increasingly prominent role of technology in every aspect of society, from education to healthcare to science and social life (Ihde, 2008, p. 5). Ihde argues that 'postphenomenology emphasizes both a strong sense of embodiment, including perspectivalism or situated knowledge, and a sensitivity to materiality' (2008, p.7). On the topic of embodiment, he writes:

> so long as I am aware, conscious, I continuously perceive multidimensionally, I see, I hear, I feel, and so on. And while I may switch my attention from one dimension to another, what remains continuous is a whole-body experience of my immediate environment. I can selectively focus upon sight or listening, but I cannot turn them off. This is, simply put, old-fashioned phenomenology (2011, p. 110).

Most importantly, Ihde's understanding of embodied experience extends to that which is mediated by computers and other screens, and thus postphenomenology is fitting for this project.

Ihde's theory is most useful in contrast to the work of Virilio, who feared that the end of absence, propelled by the speed of new communication technologies, signalled a degradation of human essence. Unlike Virilio, Ihde identified the opportunity to expand the limits of humanity:

> clearly I cannot (directly) experience beyond the limits of my experiential horizons, nor can I even place my embodied, situated experience there perceptually—I cannot recognize my limits by getting outside myself and my situation, noting it from 'above' as it were. Yet, I recognize that I have come up against my perceptual limits—but how? My answer is by means of technological, instrumental mediation' (2011, p. 110).

Here, Ihde interprets technology as allowing people to experience that which otherwise would not be experienced due to the limitations of physicality. For instance, the tyranny of distance imposes spatial barriers upon human movement and

communication; (technologically) unmediated interaction allows us to only reach those people and places that are proximate to oneself. The time it takes to traverse space further inhibits our reach; without, say, social networking sites, one must either a) physically move through space to see another person or place, or b) arrange, via the use of older communication tools (such as the telephone), to contact someone who is not easily accessible physically. This can be problematic, taking time zones into consideration: just because the technology is there, doesn't mean that you, in Perth, will be able to easily phone a friend in Buenos Aires, given the thirteen hour time difference. Social platforms have further extended the reach of human beings and enhanced relationships by offering the ability to communicate asynchronously. Time and space are both less restrictive in the modern world. Ihde sees new technologies as allowing humanity to surpass said limitations, in order to experience more; this relates well to Adams' 'extensible self' theory discussed previously. The body is still the site of perception and experience, with the tools for experiencing (that is, communication technologies) allowing for a greater capacity to do so.

For Adams, Internet communications are simply the most recent incarnation of a long history of practising virtual extensibility, building upon previous notions of what it means to be present with another (in Adams' case, this is manifested in writing and imagined audiences). This too fits with Ihde, who emphasises that an important part of adapting old philosophies to suit new technologies is to recognise the role that past developments have had in getting humanity and theory to where they currently are. He presents the example of Democritus who, thousands of years before the invention of technologies that allow scientists to view and manipulate atomic matter, predicted their existence and their role in the building of life. Ihde points out that modern science has dispelled many of Democritus' theories, but instead of determining that 'the Democritean atoms never existed',

> we could turn postphenomenological and note that through improved new instrumental technologies, we can now mediatedly "see" the carbon structures noted (Ihde, 2012, p. 330).

Ihde believes firmly in the nature of discovery and technology as building blocks for human development, in a way that others such as Virilio could not. Whereas Virilio perceived technology as an impediment to humanity and lived experience, Ihde's postphenomenology interprets and reapplies the phenomenological theory that came

before it, recognising the potential of technology in today's society. Lived, embodied experiences and technologically mediated experiences are not incongruent, but can — and do — complement each other.

Conclusion

Phenomenology, developed by Husserl and adapted over a century by the likes of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Ihde (amongst others), provides a useful framework for thinking about the nature of human interaction with the physical world and the technologies that we use to negotiate that world. Doing away with Cartesian dualism, it returns the mind to its rightful position in and of the body, and situates the body, as the site of perception, in the world. More than ever, people are focused upon interaction and what it means; it is a topic that arises in academic literature and pop culture alike, and is propagated by a fear-mongering mainstream media that wishes for us all to believe that the future is doomed if today's youth don't learn how to interact away from the screen. It is partly in reaction to this that I turn to phenomenology, because modern phenomenology asserts that all interaction — be it face to face or via communication technologies — constitutes lived experience.

This chapter provided a background to phenomenology, moving from a discussion of Husserl's original theory to Heidegger's more functional interpretation which, with its emphasis on *being-in-the-world*, explained experience as something based first and foremost in lived experience, but was less rigid regarding influence and consciousness than Husserl's outline for phenomenology. The theorist perhaps most important to this thesis is Merleau-Ponty, who ranked the body as the most important object in the world — and defined it as an object that also doubled as an empathetic subject, able to identity with other people on the basis of understanding what it means to live an embodied existence. For Merleau-Ponty, the body was the site of all experience and perception. This is a particularly significant idea in the context of my research, as we have progressively witnessed a re-embodying of Internet users over the past decade. I briefly discussed location based social networks earlier in this chapter; a more thorough discussion will follow in chapters three and six. As I have already explained, early Internet research tended to follow the postmodernist Cartesian understanding of embodiment: that is, that the body and mind were

divorced from one another in the act of going online. In the context of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, such an act would render all online interaction non-phenomenological. The mediating screen, by amputating the physical self from the psyche, became a barrier to authentic lived experience, as the body (the site of perception, according to Merleau-Ponty) had no place online. Users could actively choose to disregard their physicality when communicating online, at least to an extent. (The need to eat, sleep, and use the bathroom would violently draw the user's attention back to the reality of their physicality.)

This concern was reflected in the work of Virilio, who envisioned a world mediated by technology wherein the speed of communication and travel would have the effect of removing some of the essence of human existence. Virilio was troubled by the impact that technology had upon the experience of absence. According to James, Virilio:

> suggests that modern means of communication and the instantaneous transmission of information are fundamentally mediated forms of experience which distance us from the immediate perception of a lived world (2006, p. 323).

Prior to telecommunications, absence was always characterised by the experience of distance between two people, or between a person and a place. The telegram and telephone modified absence by allowing individuals to communicate across space in an instant. The Internet, though, was responsible for the end of absence, according to Virilio. What users had access to was not just distant others, but a wealth of information that enabled one to never leave their home, if that is what they desired. In this reading, the instantaneous nature of communication, information and knowledge sharing has had the detrimental effect of causing humanity to forget what it is like to be apart from one another, away from home, or forced to wait for information — all integral elements of natural lived experience.

To counter Virilio's nihilism, I turned to Ihde, whose theory of postphenomenology brings the old continental philosophy into the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. His philosophy combines the elements of lived experience, embodied perception, and *being-in-the-world* to present a reconceptualisation of phenomenology that is congruent with the mediating technologies of today. Ihde

places importance on understanding that today's communication technologies have not *replaced* old technologies or the lived experiences we have. Instead, he argues that new technologies supplement old ones, and in doing so add to the extensibility of the individual (Ihde, 2012, p. 330). Ihde believes that technology allows us to experience more than ever before due to the fact that we aren't encumbered by the limitations of space and time. Ihde's postphenomenology works as a theoretical framework for my thesis, because I am concerned with demonstrating the nature of lived experience in a cultural context wherein both interaction and the physical world are increasingly mediated by ubiquitous technologies.

Technology is as much a part of us as we are a part of the physical world in which we live. This reconceptualisation of life and the phenomena we experience forms the context for the emergence of the self. The connection between bodies, spaces, and communication technologies that echoes throughout this thesis reflects that situation which typifies life in the twenty first century: one that is complex and always in flux, but which persists and demands a new way of being. Thus far, the focus in development has been upon streamlining the human-computer connection and pushing the technology to its limits. It has been about forging new connections between embodied individuals and the spaces they occupy, facilitated by the affordances of emergent communication technologies. Most importantly, I hope that my research contributes to the development of theories for understand what those connections mean — individually, locally, and globally, across every facet of social life.

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Chapter Three

Location & Place

Introduction

'Geography', writes Bonnett, 'is rooted in the human need for survival; in the necessity of knowing and making sense of the resources and dangers of our human environment' (2008, p. 121). Geography provides a framework for making sense of the physical world and our place in it, as individuals and members of society. Understanding the geography of a place means being better equipped to survive in it; this awareness has, throughout human history, enabled us to manage our lives on the land. Humanity and geography are locked in an ongoing negotiation between physicality (both the landscape and the built environment) and society, wherein belonging, safety, and occupation are regularly re-contested. An equally important idea comes from Relph, who states that 'to be human is to live in a world filled with significant places: to be human is to have and to know your place' (1976, p. 1). It has been said that the 'fundamental human experience of the world as the world — a set of places — gives geography a fundamental role in ascribing particular sets of values to particular actions' (Cresswell, 1996, pp. 9–10). These ideas — geography and survival, and the experience of place as essential to human life — provide the basis for discussion in this chapter.

Each of us has a personal geography that this is central to our identity. My geography is the story of where I am, where I've been, and where I'm going, and it is also part of a bigger story: one of culture, society, and human survival. It is the story of place — 'location made meaningful' (Tuan, 1977; Cresswell, 2004, p. 7), an idea that I will return to throughout both this chapter and the project in general. We are connected via emotion and memory to places, with this relationship embodying the experience of *being-in-the-world*. Geography is about more than the physical landscape; it is the study of human life. Maps, for example, bear the tracks of great empires, mass migration, and times of both abundance and scarcity, what Harley called the 'second text within the map' (1989, p. 9; Crampton, 2001, pp. 238-244). Geography informs and influences almost every element of identity formation, including gender, class, and race, because where one lives (and, more importantly, where they are born) has consequences for the way that life unfolds. The lottery of

birth means that geography has immense consequences for the life one has the opportunity to live. The country in which one is born can determine the cultural values one holds, as well as other outcomes too: health prospects, financial security, and political values may be dictated in part by the geography of birth (Schachar, 2009, p. 3). de Blij similarly notes that 'place is a crucial element in the fabric of destiny' (2009, p. 234). On a micro level, geography informs the experience of everyday life. For example, the roles of employment and home life are enacted in particular spaces, set aside for these tasks.[14] The way that spaces are used is also influenced by and influences factors such as gender, class, and race; the relationship between geography and human life is interdependent (Dear, 1988, p. 269).

The study of people in places falls under the auspices of human geography, with the outcomes of such studies operating as a form of storytelling. The stories of others tell us about the places that constitute their history; through this, we can learn their plight and the cultural significance of their location(s) to garner a better understanding of the world. In the previous chapter I emphasised the phenomenological idea that bodies and space are co-constitutive. This is a concept carried on in this chapter, as identity is formed and enacted when we express our sense of place, which in turn contributes to the construction of places and impacts upon the way that we interact with space and each other. This can result in finding new perspectives on situations, forming communities, and creating new place identities — significant threads that tie together the themes of this project. At the same time, distance is less consequential than ever. We are in the midst of a newfound fascination with geography, locatedness, and mobility (Wilken, 2012). Bissell points to the recent explosion of travel review websites as exemplifying (and complicating) this interest (2011), whilst the success of location-based social networks and augmented reality games (such as Foursquare and Ingress, respectively), as well as the systematic incorporation of location data into other online social networks, hints at an indelible link between communication and geography.

[14] As will be discussed in chapter six, this is rapidly changing, with the proliferation of smart phones meaning that people are more and more often experiencing a blurring of the division between home and work life, with various implications for both.

Locatedness, in the context of communications, has changed significantly over the past five years as individuals have begun to use technology to reconnect with the physical environment. Smartphones, which allow Internet access from almost anywhere, have largely been responsible for this occurrence. Re-location follows on from two decades of geographical and corporeal acrimony, in which the status of the body was in flux as the Internet challenged existing notions of presence and absence. While location-independent communication, in access-from-anywhere terms, is now the norm, we find ourselves more located than ever, owing to the GPS affordances of mobile devices, which track our movements and geo-locate users. As a precursor to discussing locatedness in later chapters, this chapter will investigates the role of geography and place in the construction of identity. Place is framed as a phenomenon that is both essential and conflicted, and will be encountered here via a discussion of human geography and place identity. I will also look at the history of cartography and its evolution to the neo-geography of today, as facilitated by tools such as Google Maps. These have had a considerable impact upon the way that people think about geography, re-routing human experience in a world where everything, essentially, is within reach (or within a mouse click, as it were). Finally, in looking broadly at the meaning of geographies, I delve further into a discussion of lived experience, mobility, and complicated geographies, taking the opportunity to present geography as a narrative device that can be deployed to tell the stories of individuals, societies, cultures, and humanity.

Introducing human geography

In examining human geography, it is useful to begin with a definition of physical geography. Together, the two traditions — one from the humanities, and the other a science — bridge the gap between studies of life and studies of the world. Physical geography is:

> a study of the workings of an environment that not only nourishes or stimulates life processes, but also places constraints and limitations upon those processes (Strahler, 1975, p. 1).

Physical geography is concerned with not only the study of the earth's surface, but also with astronomy (the impact of the sun and moon upon the environment), ecology, biology, and climate studies (Holden, 2011, p. 1). Human geography, on the

other hand, is the study of how people live in and make use of the physical world, creating what Dear calls 'human landscapes' (1988, p. 269). In the previous chapter I put forward the phenomenological notion that human beings, through embodied, lived experience, constitute the physical world, and vice versa. Just as the phenomenologists were concerned with space (and, by extension, time, as constituted through embodied perception), and lived experience, so too are human geographers:

> In a most fundamental sense...the central object in human geography is to understand the simultaneity of time and space in structuring social process. Human geography is the study of the contemporaneity of social process in time and space (Dear 1988, p. 270).

Human geography recognises that humanity has a marked impact upon the physical world, and tracks the evolution of culture and social life by surveying the use of space. It is a way of narrating both lived experiences and physical landscapes, concerning both space and time as the human experience of the everyday is situated in the context of history and geography (Dear, 1988, p. 267; Massey, Allen, & Sarre, 1999, pp. 270–273).

Massey, who advocates for history, geography, and culture to be interpreted as co-constitutive and interrelated, notes that both physical and human geography has 'struggled to understand space (and space-time) as constituted through the social, rather than as dimensions defining an arena within which the social takes place' (Massey, 1999, p. 262). Similarly, Curry writes:

> The invention of the concept of space was, in a fundamental way, dependent on the development of a particular set of technologies, those used for the storage of knowledge, or of what we might today prefer to call information (2005, p. 681).

Despite this, 'space is naturalized, taken to have always existed' (Curry, 2005, p. 681); its social construction is often overlooked, complicating the human-spatial relationship. In such scenarios, humanity is depicted as occupying the landscape, rather than being actively involved in its creation and continuation. In reaction to this, human geography tells stories about how life is lived as though people are an integral part of the places that people occupy:

> Spatial identity designates the physical/geographic dimension within which houses, streets, even whole communities can bound, intensify, and provide a spatial locus for identification and community attachment linked to social group identity (Harley, 1989, p. 2).

This is the metanarrative to traditional geography's grand narrative; a form of '(post)phenomenological storytelling, wherein personal, experiential geographies are conveyed in narrative form' (Cameron, 2012, p. 575). Contrasting with the 'grand, scholarly stories' (Lorimer, 2003, p. 200), these metanarratives are able to tell us more about how people actually live: how they use the spaces they inhabit, how place is created, and the challenges that are faced.

The 'small stories', Lorimer has argued, reveal 'how in minutia it is possible to find small kingdoms of worldliness, and to craft short stories as outcrops of global history' (2003, p. 269). Cloke states that these 'small stories' have the potential to subvert the 'male, white orthodoxies' of traditional cartography — especially in the hands of 'feminist and post-colonial geographers' (2013, p. 64). Caquard states that critical cartographers have:

> dramatically modified the relations between maps and narratives in two ways: by deconstructing and exposing the metanarratives embedded in maps, and by envisioning maps as a compelling form of storytelling (Caquard, 2011 p. 136).

The role of cartography will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. Next, however, I will introduce two key elements of human geography: place and place identity. Human geographies have never been so visible as the technologies for mapping and storytelling become more ubiquitous. We are telling more stories about where we are, where we go, and what we do in places than ever before.

Place & place identity

> *Place, unlike space and landscape, permeates our everyday life and provides meaning in people's lives. Places are quite clearly 'lived' (Cresswell, 2004, p. 5).*

Earlier in this chapter, I defined place as 'location made meaningful' (Tuan, 1977; Cresswell, 2004, p. 7). This understanding of place underpins human geography. As 'a way of understanding the world' (Cresswell, 2004, p. 11), place may be understood as the sum of space and culture, encountered as lived experience. Place implies interaction and narrative, too — we tell the stories of places to others and to ourselves. Places are significant to individuals, communities, societies, and nations. Place is, according to Cresswell, 'a mixture of "objective" and "subjective" facets including location but adding other, more subtle, attributes of the world we inhabit' (2013, p. 485). Here, Cresswell's definition of place fits well with phenomenology (Smith, 1970, p. 123). It arises with the intersection of space and experience, signifying a human connection to a physical environment. As 'location made meaningful', place is thought to encompass location, locale, and emotion; in order for a place to be a place, it 'must have some relationship to humans and the human capacity to produce and consume meaning' (Cresswell, 2004, p. 7; Agnew, 1987). Place is embodied and communicative, 'presented as a model for understanding... the body's spatial orientation and movement, and its action in language' (Low & Lawrence-Zuniga, 2003, p. 2; see also Adams, 2009).

Place has ties to memory, as it is deployed in the construction of both individual identities and collective identities. Accordingly, we are thought of as being endowed with a sense of place, which encompasses feelings of belonging and home, as well as dis-location and outsiderness (Morley, 2001, p. 433). As Relph writes, having a sense of place is closely related to embodied experience, because these experiences will trigger the memories and affections that make us aware that sense of place exists:

> Sense of place is the capacity to recognize and respond to diverse identities of places. A place affects us directly through sight, smell, sound, and touch and sense of place is the synthetic faculty that combines these impressions with memory, imagination, and reason (Relph, 2010, p. 11449).

The collection of place-memories has been described as the 'environmental past', consisting of:

> the places, spaces and their properties which have served instrumentally in the satisfaction of the person's biological, psychological, social, and cultural needs (Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminoff, 1983, p. 59).

Places are implicated in personal and collective narratives. A sense of place is 'an organised world of meaning' (Tuan, 1977, p. 179) which enables us to tell the stories of lived experience as a way of remembering the past and forging an identity.

Place originates from and is innately associated with identity, belonging, and knowledge of the self. Keeping with the theme of phenomenology, the definition of place could be extended to propose that place represents the intersection of space and time, as it emerges from being in a particular location at a particular time in one's life. The relationship between physicality (both spatial and corporeal), meaning, perception, and action forms the basis of identity:

> the subjective sense of self is defined and expressed not simply by one's relationship to other people, but also by one's relationships to the various physical settings that define and structure day-to-day life (Proshansky et al., 1983, p. 58).

This is *place identity*: it dictates our sense of place and the feeling that we are, in some significant way, the product of our environment. More than that, though, it extends the notion of 'location made meaningful' as the individual (or community) internalises the meanings associated with particular locations, deploying them in the construction of a sense of self.

Gieryn notes that as well as 'the ability to locate things on a cognitive map', place identity involves 'the attribution of meaning to a built-form or natural spot' (2000, p. 472). It refers to a sense of being intertwined with one's physical surroundings, indicating both one's awareness of the past and the present. Further, the construction of place identities can also influence the spatial context of one's future (Kianicka, Buchecker, Hunzicker, & Muller-Boker, 2006, p. 55). This is similar to the understanding of the embodied self as essential due to its role in constituting (and being constituted by) the physical world. Self and place in this sense are seen as one and the same, and are indelibly linked. Human geographers refer to *topophilia* — the 'affective bond between people and place' (Cresswell, 2008, p. 20; see also Tuan,

1977 and Relph, 2010, p. 11449) — to explain the relationship between place and self. Place manifests as memory and is very much experiential:

> Places can retain a position of significance for individuals because they are repositories of personalised memories and centres of everyday routines. They are therefore distinguished by the uniqueness of personal place attachments (Kong & Yeoh, 1995, p. 3).

As well as being significant for individuals, the experience of place can be a collective one. People can share a similar sense of place (for example, many people may feel an affinity for the beach), although the way place is interpreted comes down to individual meaning and memory (Kianicka et al., 2006, p. 55). A sense of place primarily arises from the routine of the everyday life and the interactions with others and the environment are more markedly responsible for the construction of a sense of place and self than life-changing encounters (Kong & Yeoh, 1995, p. 3). However, Dixon and Durrheim point out that although place identity is primarily constructed via everyday activity, 'when the bond between persona and place is threatened, the significance of place identity becomes apparent' (Dixon & Durrheim, 2004, p. 458).[15]

Identity originating in place is one of the most intrinsic elements of being human, central to the formation of a sense of self. The places each person occupies throughout life forms a point of reference for understanding both the physical world and the internal psyche. de Blij writes:

> The power of place defines an aggregate of circumstances and conditions ranging from cultural traditions to natural phenomena, into which we are both, with which we cope, and form which we derive our own multiple identities' (2009, p. 234).

The sentiment reflects both phenomenology and symbolic interaction (discussed in Chapter 5) as the construction of self plays out in the physical settings that one encounters whilst being-in-the-world and interacting with others. Place presents a challenge as the experience of place is essentially individualised and unique, making it the idea phenomenological encounter. However, we share places with others. 'Meaning making', write Auburn and Barnes, 'is social in that through joint

[15] This concept will be discussed later in this chapter, in the section 'Complicated geographies'.

activities, and in particular talk, members of a community act together to construct (or resist) a version of place which makes shared sense' (2006, p. 41). Intersubjectivity, integral to understanding the world of individual actors in physical locations, is at the core of phenomenology and symbolic interaction. In the phenomenological tradition, there exists a natural state of being 'where in their everyday dealings with the world, people fundamentally take-it-for-granted that there simply is a material world existing independent of them and that this world is the same for others who they encounter in their life-world' (Auburn & Barnes, 2006, p. 41).

Mapping places and histories

Along the shorelines, tiny ships are under sail,
blown by the pursed mouth of a cloud with an angry face,
and sea beasts prowl the waves that lap at the margins
where knowledge trails off and ink lines squiggle
into a vast unknown, an incognita

far from the old garden of Europe in the centre
where the mapmaker sits bent over his slanted desk,
touching the contours of the earth with the tip of his pen (Collins, 1990).

As recently as a few hundred years ago, there was so little known about this planet. Without the technology to facilitate exploration and documentation, humanity was limited as to how much they could learn. With a history that dates back millennia, cartography has long influenced the way that people perceive the world. Cavallaro argues that maps hold 'ideological and psychological significance' (2000, p. 158). This claim draws on Haraway's assertion that maps are fetishised as "real" in a world of metaphors, wherein there exists the perception that the real is waiting to be discovered and can be accurately portrayed as "true" in map form (1997, pp. 135–136). Cavallaro continues:

> Geographical maps are the product of complex practices aimed at rationalizing the world in systematic ways. No map is ever fully faithful, for maps fix into stable images worlds that are actually constantly

> changing. However, maps are often presented as accurate and reliable in order to lend a sense of permanence to human experiences of both space and time (2000, p. 158).

Although maps may be able to represent an aspect of reality, they can only ever represent a version of that reality, for the world is much more complex than a series of lines and symbols could ever account for. At best, cartography is a cultural practice and maps are cultural texts that represent an interpretation of the world (whether on a macro or micro scale) at a particular point in time, telling the story of 'the culture that produces them as much as they are a representation of a section of the earth or activities upon it' (MacEachren, 1995, p. 10; Farman, 2010, pp. 873–874). However, the inclination has long been to perceive maps as true depictions of the physical world (Farman, 2010, pp. 878–879). Naming and labelling the physical world is a way to both comprehend and control its immensity.

Mapping pre-dates literacy, as the most basic map requires only the ability to draw, in however basic a form, the space that one wants to depict. Cartography, relating to movement and exploration, is a way to illustrate the discovery, naming, and subsequent ownership of "new" territories. According to Edney, 'the empire exists because it can be mapped, the meaning of empire is inscribed into each map' (Edney, 1990, p. 2; Farman, 2010, pp. 869–870). Cartography is a plane along which science and culture intersect, affording mapmakers a firm grasp on the known world:

> By adopting the discourse of science, thus claiming to grasp the whole, to assume a commanding position, the surveyor "captures" the world in miniature. The world is mimetically reduced to the text (Duncan & Ley, 1993, p. 2).

The problem with this is that traditionally, topography has been 'a totalizing gaze, rational and universal, which sees the whole and orders it'. However, 'it is usually a white, male, elite, Eurocentric' gaze 'whose observations and classifications provide the rules of representation, of inclusion and exclusion, of precedent and antecedent, of inferior and superior' (Duncan & Ley, 1993, p. 2). Thus, cartography is only ever

partially capable of representing world, and it is controlling and limiting more often than not.[16]

Cartography defines space and spatial relationships. There are symbols for physical objects (roads, rivers, and mountains, for example, as well as man-made objects) and a way of depicting cultural, economic, or social lines, such as the borders of states, countries, or continents. These symbols help to represent a three dimensional landscape that can be viewed in two dimensions, "from above", in order to comprehend the relativity between spaces. Through the practice of mapping, we become conditioned to think of the world in terms of what is known and measurable (the height of a mountain, the distance from point A to point B, or the terrain of a far-away destination), and to assume that what is known and measurable is true. The popularity of maps increased as mobility (and thus exploration) expanded. O'Connor and Robertson suggest that it wasn't until the fifteenth century that cartography was 'revolutionized' (2002, para. 18–20), largely owing to the invention of the printing press. This allowed the publication of Ptolemy's second-century seminal text *Geography*, which had been translated into Latin at the beginning of the fifteenth century. Ptolemy described maps as 'a representation in picture of the whole known world together with the phenomena which are contained therein' (1999), a clear acknowledgement of the storytelling capacity held by a map. As more of Earth's surface was explored, it came to be an object that could be depicted, demarcated by a series of lines and symbols, and widely distributed (Adams, 2009, p. 192; Godlewska, 1997; Lefebvre, 1991). Thus, a map is an artefact (Adams, 2009, p. 193; Casati & Varzi, 1999, p. 192): a 'spatial object' that is used to 'represent spatial objects' (Casati & Varzi, 1999, p. 189). However, they are more than this, as maps often reveal much about the world in which they were created. They can be allegorical, portraying physical geography on the surface but telling stories of social, cultural, and political struggles.[17]

[16] This trend is changing, though, with the prevalence of personal mapping and online mapping, as I discuss in the following section.

[17] An example of this can be seen in maps that privilege particular world perspectives or depict the site of important historical battles (Biggs, 1999, p. 377). It is also increasingly common in the practice of mapping human geographies, as the following section attests.

Maps exude a certain degree of power, which is in the hands of the creator and the reader. It is a sense of power that is present in the creation of maps, and the rules by which maps are drawn adhere to the requirements of the power brokers (Harley, 1989, p. 1989). However, cartography has also been a practice through which power is exerted, by 'monarchs, ministers, state institutions, (and) the Church' (Harley, 1989, p. 12), each of whom have historically deployed maps to suit their own purposes. There is a sense of subjugation at the hands of a controlling body — one of conformity and truth and accuracy inherent to the world as depicted on a map. The theme of control is central to the practice of cartography:

> In modern Western society maps quickly became crucial to the maintenance of state power – to its boundaries, to its commerce, to its internal administration, to control of populations, and to its military strength (Harley, 1989, p. 12).

Indeed, 'as a spatial form modelled on the map's linear boundary and homogenous space,' the concept of the modern state was created through cartography (Biggs, 1999, p. 374).

Among the earliest maps are the medieval *mappa mundi.* They reflected the immense unknown quality of the earth at the time, and 'depicted a sacred, cosmological space, where Earth and Heaven cleaved together' (Biggs, 1999, p. 377). They combined elements of the physical and spiritual worlds; they told the stories of fifteenth century society, with an omnipotent god and his angels perched in the space surrounding the land and sea on the map. As Harley observes, however:

> From at least the seventeenth century onward, European map-makers and map users have increasingly promoted a standard scientific model of knowledge and cognition. The object of mapping is to produce a 'correct' relational model of the terrain. Its assumptions are that the objects in the world to be mapped are real and objective, and that they enjoy an existence independent of the cartography; that their reality can be expressed in mathematical terms; that systematic observation and measurement offer the only route to cartographic truth; and that this truth can be independently verified (1989, p. 4).

The *mappa mundi* depicted a world before mass transit, vacations abroad, space travel, and the Internet. It was a world in which mobility was not taken for granted,

unlike today, when almost every person has access to a vehicle of some kind, and many will have the experience of viewing the world from above, whether out of a plane window, or from in front of a computer monitor. This mobility — both physical and informational — is a relatively new phenomenon.

Maps can indicate belonging (or not) to a particular area, and to this day both individuals and collective identities rely on popular interpretations of the physical world as demarcated in cartographic narratives as means for defining a sense of self. From an early age, children are taught to recognise their location on a map and how this location fits in to the greater world geography. They taught in classrooms and at home about the world's cities, countries, regions, and continents, and how the pieces of the geographical puzzle come together to construct the physical world. The lines on a map tell us about more than just geography, though. Like symbolic interaction, maps tell us what we are, in part, by telling us what we are not. A map can tell the story of nationhood, of socioeconomic status, of oppression and Others. Topography is the science of surface shape and terrain, but it can also be applied to the process of ascribing particular sociocultural characteristics to the land:

> It is a practice which describes boundaries, including property relations, and thereby objectifies them, rationalizes them and makes them seem like objects of nature through the legitimizing tropes of the discourse of science. Topography is a system of knowledge which can encompass the world; its purview... takes in the rural and the urban, the secular and the religious. Its theoretical reach even extends beyond the edge of settlement to empty tracks of land. Topography is also therefore a science of domination — confirming boundaries, securing norms and treating questionable social conventions as unquestioned social facts (Duncan & Ley, 1993, p. 1).

Topography is the science that legitimised the domination of European nations over indigenous inhabitants in Africa, Australia, Asia, and the Americas, and it is the science that continues to legitimise the control that some groups have over others, based upon the status of the spaces they occupy.

Although there is something distinctly negative about the fact that maps strive for 'objective empircism' (Farman, 2010, pp. 869–870), they have become images that

influence our knowledge of the physical world. Indeed, cartography today goes far beyond mapping spaces and spatial objects, with data visualisation offering maps of human geography and geographic narratives, too. Neo-cartography is providing us with direction in a world of infinite choices. One could argue that maps are more important than ever:

> A map says to you, "Read me carefully, follow me closely, doubt me not." It says, "I am the earth in the palm of your hand. Without me, you are alone and lost" (Markham, 1983 in Harley, 1989, p. 1).

Most significantly, neo-cartography is providing us with clues about how to navigate the spaces wherein geography and information intersect. Contrary to earlier imagining of an apparently spaceless, placeless, virtual existence, today we are more intimately and innately connected to geography than ever before.

The cartographic democracy[18]

> *Just a few centuries back,*
> *they made maps of a flat world by candlelight.*
> *Now the whole world's at your fingertips,*
> *mapped right down to the street by satellite (Horrorshow, 2009).*

Twenty years ago, in the early days of the Web, Batty and Barr wrote:

> There is a new geography in the making. It is composed of a vast web of communications whose fixed points are computers of many sorts. Its traffic is information, and the vehicles that navigate its highways are intelligent software animals sometimes called knowbots. This is "cyberspace"... It is almost upon us and, within a generation, it is destined to change our view of geography as dramatically as anything since the cartography of Claudius Ptolemy (1994, p. 699).

Batty and Barr were on to something. The Internet — 'the skeleton of cyberspace' (Batty & Barr, 1994, p. 700) — has undoubtedly changed geography. However, the way that geography and the Internet have melded has taken a direction few would have predicted. Digital mapping tools such as Google Maps and locative media applications, such as those embedded in smartphones, have augmented our perception of both the physical world and the world of information. It has implications for community and communications, too, with digital mapping causing

[18] Caquard, 2011, p. 137

the ‘deconstruction of traditional place boundaries’ (Ewalt, 2011, p. 29), facilitating the growth of global community. However, rather than ‘community (becoming) disassociated from a sense of place’, as Ewalt claims (2011, p. 29), I suggest that both sense of place and community are encountered as simultaneously local and global experiences.

In recent years the narrative capacity of geography has increased considerably with the rise of locative media. Geographic storytelling has traditionally been preoccupied with ‘a longstanding concern with the ways in which personal experience and expression interweave with the social, structural, or ideological’ (Cameron, 2012, p. 574). With the right equipment (these days, a smartphone) and Internet access, we can use tools like OpenStreetMap (openstreetmap.org), Google Maps (maps.google.com) and other open-source or application-integrated visualisation tools to tell personal geographic stories, with each of these stories ‘in minutiae’ adding to the grater narrative of human sociocultural life:

> Once limited to those specifically trained in cartography, map-making is now open to ordinary people — online amateur cartographers — who are described as having the power to chart the world and re-imagine how to spatially represent it (Wall & Kirdnark, 2011, p. 701).[19]

I have introduced already in this thesis Lorimer’s concept of ‘small stories’ (2003) — stories of everyday life. Small stories have a number of functions, but one important role is that they diffuse the indoctrinated discourses of imperialism, colonialism, and authoritarianism that have dominated metanarratives of geography for hundreds of years. They are also employed to tell the kinds of personal stories that physical geography, and even grand narrative critical geography, simply hasn’t been able to do; for instance, stories about a down-on-itself, isolated city on the edge of an isolated country. Human geographers have engaged in small story narrative geography, but with locative media tools and (big) data, geographic storytelling is entering the realm of other fields, too: both academic and personal. Online mapping tools are said to be ‘reshaping cartography, international relations, and global representation’ (Parks, 2009, pp. 535–536), but they are also reshaping everyday life.

[19] The impact of smartphones upon geography will be discussed in more depth in chapter six.

Google Maps offers 'a hyper-real perspective on the world through its pervasive mapping applications, a perspective that is often brighter than reality'; in a sense, they are 'more interesting than the territory' (Caquard, 2011, p. 141; Houllebecq, 2010). The now familiar feeling of accessibility is an omnipresent element of using online mapping platforms; the user feels as though they have the world in their hands as they zoom into far away locations with the click of the mouse. A criticism of such services arises from the fact that Google Maps, Google Earth, and other digital mapping platforms only tell part of the story. Although the landmasses and built environment as well-represented, it could be argued that the lives of those who live in those places are diminished, reduced to data visualisations overlaying the map. On the other hand, such projects, with their roots in human geography, are representing lives within maps more than ever before. This sentiment is echoed by writers who have described digital mapping platforms as tools for 'global awareness', owing to their usefulness for sharing information about 'environmental and human rights campaigns' (Ewalt, 2011, p. 28; Tulloch, 2007, para. 16). Farman too contends that Google, and digital mapping platforms in general, have become 'a key node of command over the "information empire"' (2010, p. 877). The balance of power (that is, the ability to make maps and tell stories using geographies) is being returned from the hands of a few to the hands of many.

With the rise of Internet-enabled mobile devices that collect immense amounts of data about human life, maps are no longer just taking the form of traditional cartographic representations of earth. The centrepiece of the locative data revolution has, in many ways, been the Google Earth software and browser-based Google Maps. Google Maps offers a gods-eye view of the world, but it does much more than that. The platform aims to provide users with information based upon their location and search terms:

> Google Maps provides a living laboratory for the competition between application vendors and their data suppliers. Google's lightweight programming model has led to the creation of numerous value-added services in the form of mashups that link Google Maps with other internet-accessible data sources (O'Reilly, 2007, p. 28).

O'Reilly's vision of Google Maps as a vehicle for 'application vendors' has been realised. Part of the key to the success of Google Maps lies in its pervasiveness: the

application is everywhere, to the extent that it is invisible. Numerous applications share data with Google Maps, from Urbanspoon and Foursquare to local businesses, with Google Maps' API, making it simple to integrate Google Maps into new or existing applications – and to visualise that data on custom maps (Geller, 2011, p. 186). The simplest application of Google Maps arrives in the form of its basic web search, with results and recommendations displayed on the map's sidebar, or as maps embedded into the website of businesses and into social platforms such as Urbanspoon. Indeed, many web- and smartphone-based applications are using Google Maps in a much more sophisticated manner. Beyond the search applications of Google Maps, there are other uses for the platform that are of more interest to my research:

> The base map – or grid map – is quickly becoming the reference to locate ourselves in the world, to reach a destination and to share all variety of data, including narratives, associated with places (Caquard, 2011, p. 137).

The storytelling nature of maps, both traditional and digital, is evident. Maps indicate 'hybridization', with the stories they tell existing in the spaces of 'fiction and reality' and 'the map and the territory' (Caquard, 2011, p. 140).

The ubiquity of Google Maps and other digital mapping platforms has led to an increased interest in cartographic narratives. Caquard writes:

> the relationship between maps and narratives is ... reflected in the growing presence of personal and collective narratives on digital maps. With the extension of Web 2.0, any internet user can easily geotag places with stories and geocode journeys and narratives. These stories can be individual and anecdotal, as well as collective and deeply politicized (2011, p. 135).

With smartphones becoming a more common utility, our everyday activities are increasingly geo-coded and tracked; the data collected via smartphones allows for the mapping of personal narratives of mobility and locatedness — that is, of *being-in-the-world*. With in-built GPS capabilities smartphones are useful, geographically speaking, in a number of ways. As the user sends locative data to the network, services such as Google Maps, Foursquare, Urbanspoon, and a host of others can return useful information to the user about the facilities in their proximity. Therefore,

although network access and communications are becoming more location-independent, the increased use of locative media means that users are potentially more 'located' than ever. Farman writes:

> Location aware programs — from the various ways users upload their own geotagged data onto the maps of Google Earth to mobile phone applications that utilize a person's location for a variety of uses — will continue to change the way users define and inhabit spaces as embodied interactors (2010, p. 885).

Digital mapping is about having the tools to tell detailed, sophisticated stories of human movement, and is casting new light upon our use of the physical landscape and the built environment. It facilitates the narration of everyday life on the grandest or most minute scale. However, that is not to say that geography is not, at times, complicated. The following section will consider the issue of mobility, or a lack of mobility, and what this might mean for geographic storytelling.

Mobility, isolation, and complicated geographies

It is important to acknowledge that the study of geography is not without its complexities. The 'increased mobility of people and information' has, according to Bonnett, 'contributed to the sense that an understanding of geography is synonymous with the desire for "universalism"' (2008, p. 24). This universality manifests in many ways: the death of culture and simulacrum effect is one way of looking at it. This perspective sees critics arguing that there is no wonder left in a homogenised, globalised world:

> transnational corporations and a global economy strive to provide familiar goods and services to consumers... The result is that the same products, the same companies, similar buildings, and similar landscapes can be found almost everywhere (Relph, 2001, p. 11450).

Relph refers to universalism as 'placelessness', a condition wherein regional distinctiveness is abandoned in favour of the profitability of a global market offering familiar products, landscapes, and experiences. The poster-child of globalised geography has long been the international airport; once a 'badge of the exotic', it has gradually become 'a marker of the everyday'. Airports are:

> global crossroads, in which people from all over the world are thrown together in a dizzying variety of cross-cultural mixtures, but also networked environments that testify to globalization's virtual command of a huge number of interconnected global flows (Huggan, 2009, p. 2).

The experience of placelessness is symptomatic of people at the 'global crosswords'. The globalisation of daily life is a profitable business: many people want to be able to access the comforts and familiarity of home, no matter where they are.

Thus, universality and diversity become co-occurring phenomena. By leaving our home — our own geography, with its particular culture and localised idiosyncrasies' — we are 'at one moment saying "respect difference", the next "we are all the same"' (Bonnett, 2008, p. 25). The desire to travel presumably indicates an interest in seeing the world, and yet it is often disrupted by an even more powerful longing for the comforts of home. Heterogeneity and cultural distinction may be seen as dispensable in an era of hyperconnectedness and hypermobility. On the other hand, narratives of transnationalism and mobility operating under the guise of globalisation often fail to acknowledge the potential benefits of increased mobility. Conradson and Latham point out that there is not 'much attention paid to how inevitably implaced forms of sociality — such as kinship, friendship and national identity — are being reworked through such movement and mobility' (2005, p. 228).

We all, in the process of living, construct personal histories or environmental pasts, consisting of the places we have been. It is this sense of the past that informs the performance of the present and planning for the future (Proshansky et al., 1983, p. 66). Our geography goes beyond our immediate time and place — personal narratives, based upon memories of events and experiences, tell the stories not just of what happened, but where it happened, and why it was significant in that place. Geography offers a way of making sense of the physical world, but it also helps in comprehending the cultural, social, and personal landscapes, too. It enables us to make sense not just of the land, but also of the lives lived within it. However, much of the scholarship on human geography suggests that one's identification with a particular place — an inherent part of self identity, whether the product of positive or negative experiences within a place — comes to the fore when they are separated, or

"dislocated" to borrow Dixon and Durrheim's term (2004, p. 258), from the place they call home. Radstone echoes this notion:

> The contemporary ubiquity of these distressing, unwelcome and forced dis- and re-locations, as well as the pervasiveness of more privileged and planned modes of global transit can appear to render long-term attachments to, and located in place anachronistic (2011, p. 109).

Internet communication is, for many people, changing the nature of dis-location. Radstone continues:

> Along with these actual mobilities, the virtual mobilities of the digital realm can *seem* to render our place of home and its location, with all of its historical and affective dimensions, merely contingent and on the whole, irrelevant (2011, p. 109).

However, for many people, the "always online" nature of life today means that whilst we may be physically separated from the place we call home, we do not have to be absent from it entirely. This is because the experience of place — the sense of place, one's experience of being-in-the-world — is present during online communication. With this in mind, it is useful to consider how traditional definitions of place compare to present day experience of place and physicality in the online context.

Being able to travel beyond one's 'home' geography has complicated undertones, too. Whilst for the most privileged 'the immediacy and accessibility of the world's nations and environments allow individual biographies to be structured about moments of adventure and travel' (Bonnett, 2008, p. 86), few have the means to travel significant distances (such as internationally) for pleasure. Many of those who leave their home country do so as the result of displacement — physical, political, economic, religious, or otherwise — from their homeland. The émigré experiences space and place in a far different way to the holidaymaker. Nevertheless, geography, and the process of belonging (or not) and choosing to leave (or being forced to leave) with the option of returning (or not) can contribute to the identity formation of both. Every person in the world possesses their own geographically-oriented sense of self: a place identity, a sense of being-in-the-world that refers to a connection with the landscape, the built environment, and the people who occupy it, as well as the

cultural and social circumstances of that place, and these geographical ties leave their mark on the individual, and on the communities they belong to.

Conclusion

My primary concern in this thesis has to do with communication, communities, narratives, and identities. A crucial part of all of these themes is place. In this chapter, I introduced the concept of place, looking into the broader ways in which geography is experienced and understood. Key concepts thus include mapping, locatedness, and the process of creating meaning in location: the experience of place. The Internet plays an important role in the construction of place identities, particularly as we spend more time online. There is little doubt that this is occurring; however, we are spending more time *being-in-the-world* too, thanks to mobile Internet access. Information about our physical location is fed to the network, enhancing our embodied, lived experiences. I have also demonstrated the considerable influence that geography has upon identity construction and the lived experience of everyday life. One of the purposes here was to establish the significance of geography and, by extension, place and locatedness. In later chapters I will look at the "always online" culture of everyday life via a case study that focuses on Perth, a city whose unique, isolated geography strongly influences the identity construction of the people who live here.

This chapter has enabled more focused discussion in the chapters to come by investigating the concepts of human geography and place identity, both of which are concerned with lived experience in physical locations. In grasping the role of geography in the construction of identities, it is useful to consider the influence that cartography has. Here, I have also looked at two forms of mapping. I began by discussing traditional cartography and the social implications of mapped territory and the practice of mapping, before moving on to what Caquard has labelled 'democratic' cartography: the digital mapping revolution, enabled by tools such as (but certainly not limited to) Google Maps. The movement of geography to online environments is significant as, with the rapid uptake of smartphones, we are rarely *offline*; Google Maps and Google Earth have become lenses through which we see the world, and which have had a considerable influence upon the way we see the

world, as will be discussed in Chapter 6. Finally, I discussed mobility, both in terms of the impact that an increasingly mobile society has upon communications, as well as the further effect of this upon the construction of identity and experience of locatedness.

My interest in communication geographies emerges from a concern with the dislocation and disembodiment narratives of early cyberculture theory and late-twentieth century fictive works and philosophy. I struggled to reconcile these tropes with my own experience of communicating and community-making online, wherein I regarded myself as very much an embodied and located human being. The fact that I could go online and communicate with others across the globe was a revelation, without a doubt. Why should the ability to transgress space mean that I also had to consider myself space-less, a mere ghost in the machine? This was especially true as I began not only talking to people from around the world, but talking to, and then meeting "in real life", others from Perth. The geography I shared with these people was evident in the way that we imagined and talked about our city; the particular set of circumstances that informed our identities was evidence of the effect of Perth's isolation and boundary-status as an international city that considers itself a large country town.

One of the themes of early writing about cyberspace considered the notion that being online meant being separated from reality and physicality. So used to being embedded in the physical world as embodied, experiential beings, the Internet presented a challenge to the way that experience was understood. The disconnection of the real and the virtual rendered the online realm space- and place-less; in doing so, the physical world — that is, the "real world" — was privileged as a space of authentic experience. We experience dislocation in the physical world too, however. Our identification with a particular place is most apparent when we are 'dislocated' (Dixon & Durrheim, 2004, p. 458), from the place we think of as home. Thus, as the Internet dislocated experience from reality, concern for place and embodiment manifested as nostalgia (Radstone, 2011, p. 109) — an affliction that Lowenthal has called a 'deadly disease' (1975, p. 2), so pervasive and incurable can it be. What is becoming apparent with the advent of social and locative media is that place is entirely present during online communication, potentially eliminating the experience of disconnection and nostalgia for home or other distant places. This has been due in

no small part to pervasive smartphone use that allows us to be online and offline at the same time, and has removed the experience of being online from sitting in a particular room, peering into a bulky desktop computer, with access to a telephone outlet to provide the Internet connection. The implications of this change are considerable. Being able to access information about places *whilst experiencing them* changes the way that we construct a sense of place; life is augmented by technology. From a phenomenological perspective, lived experience is re-located in the overlap of information and physicality. As I will discuss further in Chapter 6, this re-location of everyday life in the crossover of digitality and physicality is ushering somewhat of a second coming for cyberspace, suggesting that the concept itself is not passé, but certainly in need of redefining.

New technologies for collecting and mapping geographic data are changing the nature of cartography. At the same time, they render communication as a phenomenon inextricably tied to that of geography. This relationship has always existed; Graham points out that geographic terminology as been used for the past three decades to describe the Internet: the "information superhighway", the "frontier", and even "surfing the web" are terms suggesting that being online has always been grounded in physicality (1998, p. 166; see also Tulloch, 2007, para. 3). Indeed, we are so comfortable with the use of geographic terminology that it made sense to deploy such concepts to make sense of Internet communications:

> Debates about the Internet use spatial metaphors to help visualize what are, effectively, no more than abstract flows of electronic signals, coded as information, representation and exchange...Such spatial metaphors help make tangible the enormously complex and arcane technological systems which underpin the Internet... (Graham, 1998, p. 166).

Previously this geographic terminology may have been used in order to endow the relative unknown space of the Internet with a sense of familiarity; it was a way of 'mapping the unmappable' (King, 2000), rendering the Internet 'visualizable and imageably constructed as giant, apparently territorial systems' (Graham, 1998, p. 166). Today, however, this way of thinking is apt, as with the rise of locative media users are more firmly embedded in the physical world than ever before.

Smartphones have seen access to the Internet become more constant, and GPS-enabled applications mean that users' location is tracked and used to offer relevant information about their physical surroundings. Geography still matters, and it is being applied and explained in entirely new ways as more and more data about life in spaces becomes available. Ratliff writes:

> Today the power still lies in the hands of the mapmakers. The only difference is that we're all mapmakers now, which means geography has entered the complex free-for-all of the information age, where ever-more-sophisticated technologies is better able to reflect the world's rich, chaotic complexity (2007, para. 27).

The ubiquity of the Internet has not rendered space and place obsolete. Just because we have access to the world via Internet-enabled devices, doesn't mean that we're happy to substitute information, simulation, or virtualisation for lived experience. Graham predicted 'immersive, 3D environments...so life-like that "real" places will become easily substitutable' (1998, p. 170).[20] This hasn't quite happened yet. We are still living our day-to-day lives in the physical world – albeit one that is heavily mediated by technology. This, however, means that there is less need for such 'immersive' environments.[21] Mobile Internet access via smartphones and tablets allows us to access the network independent of fixed location; we are now immersing ourselves in the 3D environments of real life. Devices such as these allow for the extension of physical place, using augmented reality technologies to enmesh the physical with the informational in a re-rendering of cyberspace that privileges both bodies and space – for example, via the location based social network Foursquare, which will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

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[20] Graham was referring to an immersive virtual reality system that made use of broadband connectivity. This is quite distinct from the Internet environments we experience today, and I question how useful such a platform would be, given how seamlessly the Internet continues to integrate with everyday life. There are clear benefits in being able to virtually visit a direct copy of a place for those who are disabled or otherwise restricted in movement, however, and for that reason such systems are possibly worth pursuing.

[21] As I have discussed elsewhere in this thesis, the "un-virtualisation" of Internet communications presents limitations to certain groups of users. For able-bodied people whose particular set of corporeal circumstances excludes them from discrimination, the technologisation and networking of everyday life, wherein the physical world *becomes* the immersive, 3D environment, replete with information-enhanced physical world experiences, is a boon. To those who aren't able bodied, who lack mobility owing to social or cultural limitations upon their movement, or whose bodies are, for whatever reason, basis for attack (such as race, gender, age, weight, and so on), the enhanced physicality of the Internet (and the increased technologisation of everyday life) doesn't offer such appeal.

Leading into the next chapter, where I consider what it means to write the self into being, it is useful to think about the connections between place and the narrative self. Adams writes,

> our physical movements through communities...have brought us 'here' to this virtual encounter by many routes, and these tortuous routes have left tracks on each of us (2005, p. 3).

As a communications geographer, Adams perceives the self as a network, wherein communication, geography, and identity are indelibly linked. This reading of the self as a network ties the lived experience of individual actors to others and their personal networks, rendering the relationship between self and place inherent to the construction of interactive, narrative identities. The self-as-network is multifaceted and distributed. Identity is expressed on a number of platforms, the nodes of which connect to other users in the network. These network connections form the basis of communities that too may be distributed and multi-conversational. The online self is an extension the offline self; indeed, the two are not easily separated, as the Internet is now a space compiled from artefacts of the physical world: bodies, locations, and experiences form the basis of our online storytelling.

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Chapter Four

Narrating the self

Introduction

Writing is not a *given* ability in the same way that breathing or thinking or orality are. It is something that we learn, and whilst it becomes second nature, but nobody is born with ability to write, nor do they possess innate knowledge of the language that is required as a precursor to writing. 'By contrast with natural, oral speech', writes Ong, 'writing is completely artificial. There is no way to write "naturally"' (1982, p. 81). For the vast majority of human history, writing was not a necessary skill; indeed, it wasn't even an option. Writing is only a few thousand years old — its history spans a mere fraction of human existence. In a relatively short period of time, writing systems have moved from cuneiform inscriptions carved into stone to the complex and diverse written languages that we see today. 'It has become', writes Fischer:

> human knowledge's ultimate tool (science), society's cultural medium (literature), the means of democratic expression and popular information (the press) and an art form in itself (calligraphy)...Writing changes as humanity changes. It is a gauge of the human condition (2001, p. 8).

Writing serves the purpose of its era; it has always adapted with changing technology. Over time, literacy has become the norm, but it wasn't always so. Now, written language shapes the way that we experience life and understand the world. Writing is phenomenological as it is used to make sense of the world and our experiences in it. It positions the author in a particular place and time, and even if this is not directly expressed in the writing itself, the sense of having *been there* influences writing. The act commits lived experience to history.

Writing the self into being is part of the process of creating meaningful lived experiences. In writing the self, whether privately (in a diary or letter, for instance) or more publicly (for example, online), the individual gains objective distance from their thoughts and experiences — a crucial element of identity construction. An important part of writing the self into being involves the telling of 'small stories' (Lorimer, 2003, p. 197), introduced in the previous chapter. These are often the most

compelling narratives as they make tangible the otherwise fleeting experience of everyday life:

> Day-to-day events seem best understood through the embodied acts that were their central features — walking, navigating, writing — and the contrasting emotional effects that gave them their dramatic expression — liberation, tears, laughter (Lorimer, 2003, p. 202).

This thesis frames embodied, located experience as the precondition of all human action and communication across all contexts, despite (and indeed due to) the presence of mediating technologies. Lorimer perceives everyday, embodied, located events as pivotal in the creation of biographies, geographies, and histories. The repetition and routine of day-to-day life provides the backdrop against which much of our identity is formed, as I discussed in the previous chapter. My focus, therefore, is the intersection of narrative identity, culture, geography, place identity, and technology, in the milieu of the everyday narratives of the self that we share online.

Writing the self into being — quite literally the act of creating a presence for oneself in words and images — is a prerequisite of participation in the social life of the Internet. This chapter offers a concise history and theoretical overview of the ways in which we write the self into being. Three traditional styles of writing are considered: the hypomnemata, epistolary dialogue, and diary or journal writing. The hypomnemata was a form of Ancient Greek writing wherein everyday events (such as quotes, important notes to remember, and lessons) were documented in a notebook for later use, both by the author and others. Epistolary invokes the written self for a particular audience (that is, the recipient of a letter), and is quite often intensely personal. Diary or journal writing is undertaken for oneself, and yet the voice adopted in many such projects is one that speaks to an unknown, external reader. Following these discussions, I look at some early online writing practices that have contributed to the experience of writing the self into being today. These include the self as written for chat-style interaction, such as that on MUDs and IRC, as well as longer-form self-writing on personal home pages on blogs. This will provide background for a more in-depth study of contemporary online self writing, including blogs, social network contributions, and non-text writing (such as smartphone photography and metadata) in Chapter 5. All of these various practices offer clues as to how we have arrived where we are in today, wherein writing the self into being is

a daily, ongoing activity. First, however, I wish to investigate some of the most important concepts and theories that contribute to practices of self-writing, including discussions of the nature of reflexivity, writing as a technology, and what it means to write the self into being.

Narrative identities, reflexivity, and storytelling

> *We are the stories we tell ourselves. In this universe, and in this existence, where we live with this duality of whether we exist or not and who we are, the stories we tell ourselves are the stories that the define the potentialities of our existence... We tell our stories, and a person without a story does not exist (Farman, 2012, p. 118, quoting Kapur, 2010).*

Storytelling is an inherently human act and narrative identities are something we all possess. Narratives are used to create order in an otherwise-chaotic life and to make sense of the random experiences of the everyday, drawing events together into a cohesive, logical story of the self. Through narrative, we can gain a sense of what life means and what particular identities entail on an individual, community, societal, and global level. Ochs and Capps remind us, however, that (like maps), 'narratives are versions of reality' (1996, p. 21). As 'real events simply do not hang together in a narrative way', narratives are an 'extension' of real life, used to make sense of experiences (Carr, 1986, p. 117). Through storytelling, we order and re-order events, share them with others, and modify the story to align with narrative identity — an ongoing creative process. Narratives of the self assemble life experiences and reflexive awareness into a coherent whole. That's not to say that the narrative identity is not diverse and multifaceted; on the contrary, it is complex and complicated, with narratives that may conflict (Ochs & Capps, 1996, p. 22). Narrative coherence and fluidity of identity are not mutually exclusive concepts, but rather evidence that multifarious identities can be expressed as a unified, but complicated, whole, with disparate elements of the self reconciled via the reflexive process.

Reflexivity is an inherently human trait — we all think about who we are, what we have done and where we have been. In doing so, we contemplate what life's experiences may mean:

> Narrative and self are inseparable in that narrative is simultaneously born out of experience and gives shape to experience. Narrative activity provides tellers with an opportunity to impose order on otherwise disconnected events, to create continuity between past, present, and imagined worlds. Narrative also interfaces self and society, constituting a crucial resource for socialising emotions, attitudes, and identities, developing interpersonal relationships, and constituting membership in a community (Ochs & Capps, 1996, p. 19).

Evidently, narrative identities are bidirectional. We share our experiences and ideas as stories and receive feedback from others, which in turn contributes to the ongoing process of identity construction. Our narrative selves needn't always develop in the company of others, however. We possess the innate ability to build a sense of self in the form of a narrative identity and do so by storytelling *to* the self, for example, in the form of inner monologue or by keeping a diary. This reflexive process can be troublesome due to the fact that as the co-incident central character, narrator, and audience, the individual may find it difficult to achieve adequate *distance* from the self (Bruner, 1987, p. 13). Feedback from others provides a sense of perspective that can be difficult to attain which we search for meaning in our own life narrative.

'Narrative identity', writes McAdams, 'is the internalized and evolving story of the self that a person begins to work on in late adolescence and emerging adulthood and continues to rework for much of the rest of life' (2011, p. 111). Similarly, Ochs and Capps claim that narrative 'emerges early in the communicative development of children' (1996, p. 19). The construction of narratives is implicit to personal and social development, with the acquisition of narrative skills and, eventually, narrative identities being a shared experience for all. In fashioning a narrative sense of self, whether through storytelling our own experiences to others or to ourselves, we take on the simultaneous roles of experiencing subject and narrated object. Ricoeur approaches narrative identity construction from a similar perspective:

> Far from being a Cartesian immediate and transparent first-person intuition, identity is always an artefact constructed through words, tools

> and interactions with other beings. Self-understanding, according to Ricoeur, is never an "immediate intuition of the I" but always involves mediation by a "long detour through objectification, making reflection an interminable Odyssey" (Ricoeur, 2008, p. 143 in de Vries, 2009, p. 18).[22]

Ricoeur depicts the narrative self as a social being, occupying simultaneously the roles of subject and object. We must step away from our own subjectivity in order to assess the life narrative objectively. The intersubjectivity with which all human beings are endowed — the phenomenological quality that allows us to experience empathy towards others (see Chapter 2) — also prevents the dissociation of the objective and subjective selves. We narrate the self in order to be able to reflect on the past, through selves that become objects by way of being artefacts of the past. In the process, we are able to make use of those past selves to construct current and future selves. Identity is fragmented by time and subjective distance, but reconstructed through personal narrative.

Narrative is interpreted by Ricoeur as 'a "semantic innovation" in which something new is brought into the world by means of language' (Carr, 1986, pp. 119-120, citing Ricoeur, 1983, p. 113). For de Certeau:

> Narrative does indeed have a content, but it also belongs to the art of making a *coup*: it is a detour by way of a past ("the other day," "in olden days") ... made in order to take advantage of an occasion and to modify an equilibrium by taking it by surprise ... It produces effects, not objects. It is narration, not description (de Certeau, 1988, p. 79).

Both Ricoeur and de Certeau's depictions of narrative speak to the notion of narrative identity performance as 'versions of reality', as mentioned earlier in this section. They emphasise an element of creativity inherent to the storytelling process, demonstrated as embellishment of the facts in certain places, and withholding of information in others. The narrator draws upon experiences from the past to map out a narrative future. This is common to the telling of personal narratives and, as Goffman and the symbolic interactionists suggest, is therefore constituent of identity

[22] Ricouer (2008) was published in French, and translated by Katja de Vries for her publication.

construction itself, due to the fact that identity emerges from interaction with others.[23]

Narrative and identity are linked by process of social storytelling. Stories in which one is the protagonist do more than simply communicate; they are the means by which each person makes sense of their own life. In this sense, identity is performed through personal narratives. The individual chooses what stories they will tell in a particular situation, and those they will withhold (Black, 2008, p. 101). In doing so, they don't simply share information — they also elicit feedback, which facilitates identity construction. Storytelling allows a person to practice reflexivity and recollection, and in doing so, to uncover pieces of the self-puzzle:

> Identity is constituted by memory — not memory understood as an epistemological gaze but as a mechanism of iteration that — when practiced at the limits of ourselves — allows for self-transformation... "But this involves thinking of the past as it is condensed in the inside, in relation to oneself" (de Vries, 2009, p. 19 citing Deleuze, 2000, p. 107).

Identity performance demands interpretation of an individual's context and an understanding of how they should behave in that situation. In doing so, 'individuals... tell their stories to listeners whom they feel will appreciate and understand their experience' (Thorne, Korobov, & Morgan, 2006, p. 1009). This performative process facilitates identify formation. The narrator is able to exert a certain degree of control over the storytelling process by delimiting elements of the self to performance in particular situations. At the same time, 'autobiographical accounts (even the ones we tell ourselves)' are 'notably unstable' and 'susceptible to cultural, interpersonal, and linguistic influences' (Bruner, 1987, p. 15). As discussed later in this thesis, narrative identity performances can overlap: for example, one may be required to perform as friend and family, student and teacher, or parent and child in the one situation. Additionally, personal narratives change over time, owing to those external influences indicated by Bruner, above.

Adding to the instability of autobiographical narratives is the notion that identity performance in social situations is shaped to fit a particular setting, meaning that it is

[23] Symbolic interactionism is outlined below, and discussed in detail in chapter five.

only ever the partial self that is performed; at times, this performance would predictably conflict with other elements of the self. One of the ways that human beings reconcile these often-disparate elements of the self is through telling stories to others:

> narrative and identity have a dialectical relationship in that people construct their senses of who they are through telling others about their experiences, yet their senses of identity shape which experiences they choose to narrate and how they go about narrating them in a given context (Black, 2008, p. 101).

As Black suggests, the narrative construction of self is a conscious act of selecting which stories to tell and to whom they will be told. Dealing with this challenge requires the ability to negotiate social situations by conjuring elements of the identity, and performing it in a particular setting.

The idea of identity performance and impression management is largely credited to Goffman (1956), who proposed that we each play a number of roles, donning 'masks' in order to negotiate social contexts. This idea was influenced by the work of Park, who proposed that:

> everyone is always and everywhere, more or less consciously, playing a role ... It is in these roles that we know each other; it is in these roles that we know ourselves ... In a sense, and in so far as this mask represents the conception that we have formed of ourselves — the role we are striving to live up to — this mask is our truer self, the self we would like to be (1950, pp. 249–250).

The idea of conscious identity construction informs much of this thesis, and provides a useful launching point for discussing the way that individuals have come to perform roles across the ages in a variety of written contexts. Just as Goffman proposed that we perform the self in social situations, so too do we see this performance in the self-writing that we have practiced for centuries. The intended audience of a letter, a diary, or a blog post determines the identity that the author summonses from within and performs in the social space of the page.

McAdams' definition of narrative identity as 'an individual's internalized, evolving, and integrative story of the self' (2008, p. 242) reconciles the idea of a multifaceted

and fragmented self. It provides direction for contemplating the evolution and emergence of the self, but it needs to be adapted to fit a context in which narratives are not simply internalised but performed in a way that is at once seemingly inconsequential (a status update here; a photograph uploaded there) while at the same time challenging the ephemerality of social interaction. Now, social life is not always enacted face-to-face or voice-to-voice; it is (often) asynchronous, persistent and indexed (Helmond, 2010b, pp. 19–21). The immateriality of the digital context is contradicted by the permanence of the digital artefact, and although people have always vocalized their narrative identities in the form of stories, it has not been done so ubiquitously — or as publicly — as it is in the present. The Internet offers new opportunities for reflexivity as narrating the self is almost second nature given that that storytelling has become a requisite condition of presence and participation.

We now often tell the stories of ourselves in the form of blog posts and social network contributions. Our storytelling tools include video, photography, audio, and the written word, all of which, when uploaded to the Internet, become endowed with a degree of permanence that outstrips the ephemerality of face-to-face storytelling, and a degree of publicity that narrative traditions like diary and letter writing could never offer (certainly not during the lifetime of the author, at least). This presents both challenges and opportunities to the writer. We all, at some point in our social and emotional development, experience an 'identity crisis':

> This identity crisis and turning point in psychosocial development involves a reconciliation between "the person one has come to be" and "the person society expects one to become" (Code, 2013, p. 40).

The Internet may problematise the identity crisis due to the fact that much of the process of narrative self-creation and self-discovery now plays out in public. These public, permanent, multi-media forms of storytelling undertaken online do not come without challenges. The Internet may offer unparalleled opportunity for feedback from others, but it also exposes the individual to a degree of vulnerability. Code continues:

> The Internet has played, and continues to play, an important role in this "identity crisis" and social identification, as it allows individuals to

> explore their values and beliefs within any number of social contexts easily and virtually' (2013, p. 40).

"Virtually" is a complicated term. Code's use of "virtually", however, can be interpreted not as a condition analogous to "fake" or "not-real", but instead as a way of expressing the ability to experiment online without immediate, physical world consequences.[24]

Indeed, figuring ourselves out is challenging at the best of times; faced with writing the self into being on a daily basis in order to participate online, navigating the perils of narrative identity formation can be anxiety inducing. It has been suggested that 'individuals actively select and tell their stories to listeners whom they feel will appreciate and understand their experience' (Thorne, Korobov, & Morgan, 2006, p. 1009). This notion is appropriate in the context of face-to-face conversation, or even forms of communication such as letters, where the intended recipient is written into the narrative. The Internet, however, complicates this concept, as storytellers can rarely be sure exactly who constitutes their audience.

Yet, in many ways, the Internet provides an ideal environment for encountering and experiencing the identity crisis, and it also offers a unique opportunity to reconcile this struggle. Through publicly articulated narratives, such as forum posts, blogs posts, and status updates, we are able to question, document, perform, and re-write the subjective self. Grant, citing Ellis and Bochner (1996), writes:

> we grasp our lives in a narrative and the narrating self offers temporary lodging for transient experiences. In this context, in order to make coherent who we are and where we are going. This may represent an attempt at re-storying the self as a whole rather than fragmented (2010, p. 113).

[24] Even this is complicated, however: there are few examples in which online activity can be said to be truly free of physical world or "real world" consequences, as is evidenced on a daily basis in the form of individuals losing jobs due to something they have done or said online, or people suffering abuse at the hands of cyberbullies. It's difficult to think of any situation in which one's identity crisis can be played out "virtually", without any serious implications should one step outside societal norms. It is perhaps best to think of Code's use of "virtuality" as akin to Adams' use, wherein "virtuality" is used to describe the condition of the imagined audience, present during the process of writing to a distant, asynchronous other (Adams, 2005, pp. 1–3).

If the self is going to be conceptualised as fluid, multifaceted, and ever-changing, as it so often has been (see Adams, 2005; Barth, 2000; Flaskas, 1999, amongst others), then writing the self may present the most tangible means by which one can attempt to make sense of the self-in-flux. Indeed, 'people construct narratives to reconcile apparent inconsistencies across time and situations' (Vignoles, Schwartz, & Luyckx, 2011, p. 6). Applied to online writing, such an approach enables individuals to 'reconcile apparent inconsistencies in their sense of identity and to preserve a subject sense of self-continuity' (Vignoles et al., 2011, p. 6). However, it must be recognised that writing has not always been a part of narrative identity formation, and the origin of the technology of writing is itself worth investigation.

Writing as a technology

Writing does not come naturally to human beings. Writing is a technology, in that it requires the knowledge of language itself and the ability to shape spoken word into visual patterns using an instrument, be that a pen, a keyboard, or a finger in the sand. Writing is said to be 'a secondary representation of the primary speech'; it is the verbal textualised (Powell, 2012, pp. 16–17). It is 'a technology with a material basis, while speech is never a technology and never material but an essentially human aptitude' (Powell, 2012, p. 18). Ong contends that the technologisation of language is more significant than this transformation of speech to text. Writing is not only a technology that allows for the inscription of thought and speech, making the ephemeral tangible, but also something that has changed the way that we, as human beings, think and understand:

> Technologies are not mere exterior aids but also interior transformations of consciousness, and never more than when they affect the word. Such transformations can be uplifting. Writing heightens consciousness (1982, p. 82).

Ong maintains that the transformation of consciousness provided by writing has clear benefits, offering 'not only proximity but also distance' (1982, p. 82) from the self. The reflexive distance engendered by writing means that we are able to garner a more sophisticated understanding of the world. The individual can, in writing, step outside of the self temporarily, observing innermost thoughts as an outsider.

‘Writing casts a veil across the human past’, writes Powell, ‘separating the million human years that came before from the turbulent last five thousand years’ (2012, p. 11). Other than ‘how to make a fire’, Powell claims, writing has been the world’s most significant technological development. It marked the beginning of an era of communication that could persist in original form across space and time, far beyond the reach of the author and largely free from the ‘distortion falsification’ that is accepted as part of an oral storytelling tradition (Schumacher, 1986, p. 55). It is telling that we think of the pre-literate era as pre-history, itself ‘a narrative space auto-populated by features that define temporal Otherness for the self-consciously modern observer’ (Smail & Shyrock, 2013, p. 713). Since its origins around 6000 years ago (Schmandt-Besserat, 1986, p. 32), writing has been ‘the lens through which literate peoples see the world, feel the world, hate the world, love the world, defy the world, and imagine change’ (Powell, 2012, p. 11). Haraway reminds us of the co-dependency of ‘writing, power and technology’, posited as ‘old partners in Western stories of the origin of civilization’ (1987, p. 6). Writing — both textual and other forms, such as cartographic narratives — offers a way of exerting control over others, a form of dominance via language, and has done ever since written language consisted of pictographs carved in stone (Fischer, 2001, p. 62). Those who are literate can hardly imagine what life could be like without the ability to read and write, and yet humanity, for tens of thousands of years, knew no different.

Writing acts both as the lens through which we see the world and through which we see ourselves. Writing changes human perception and memory (Ong, 1982, p. 79; Schumacher, 1986, p. 56). It has also had implications for the evolution of culture as literacy, in increasing the capacity for knowledge sharing across space and time, has ‘led to the evolution of a more common culture’ (Schumacher, 1986, p. 56). Certainly, writing has taken an element of the mystery out of the world — the stories documented in journals and the places documented on maps limit the potential for discovery (and, indeed, lead to the establishment of long-standing bias, based upon stereotypes, against other cultures). At the same time, with the technology of writing, we have been able to ascertain new ways to understand the self, setting off on internal journeys rather than discovering new lands. Importantly, writing has provided new ways of understanding and projecting the social self. The ability to write the self into being gives us tools for communicating and changes the way that

we choose to live. ‘Narrative imitates life,’ writes Bruner, conjuring Aristotle and Wilde, ‘life imitates narrative’ (1987, p. 13).

Writing has become an intrinsic human experience, particularly in the early decades of the twenty first century. Haraway claimed that ‘writing is pre-eminently the technology of cyborgs, etched surfaces of the late twentieth century’ (1987, p. 31). How true this now is: words once spoken are written as we engage in mediated, textual conversation via computers and mobile devices. We are still embroiled in a ‘struggle against perfect communication’ (Haraway, 1987, p. 31) as moral panics — ‘technopanics’ — continue to focus upon the potential detriment that computer mediated communication may be doing to a generation that has never known a world without the Internet (Marwick, 2008).[25] Haraway perceives ‘real-life cyborgs’ as ‘actively rewriting the texts of their bodies and societies’ (1987, p. 32). It is in this way that we have come to embody Haraway’s cyborg more than any other. We are entangled beyond return with technology; the smartphones in our pockets have become the digital prostheses of Haraway’s manifesto with which we write and rewrite self and world. By writing ourselves into being, we lend a sense of permanence to otherwise fleeting existence.

Schwartz notes that ‘an oral utterance is not an object but an event ... it does not leave any physical residue, existing only when going out of existence’ (2012, p. 78; Ong, 1982, p. 79). The concept of online written conversation transgressing the boundary of technology and sociality resonates in the work of Lovink, for whom blogs are ‘a digital extension of oral traditions more than a new form of writing’ (Lovink, 2007, p. 4). Through the use of writing technologies, we rewrite our own histories — on social media and in blogs — as they happen, just as we would traditionally tell stories to others. Our narratives take the form of distributed

[25] Marwick uses the term 'technopanic' to describe the 'fear of modernity as represented by new technologies'. Technopanics, she writes, 'focus on new media forms, which currently take the form of computer-mediated technologies' and 'pathologize young people's use of media, like hacking, file-sharing, or playing violent video games', resulting in 'an attempt to modify or regulate young people's behaviour, either by controlling young people or the creators or producers of media products' (Marwick, 2008, para. 28–29). There is a causal link, writes Marwick, between legislation, the media, and moral panic; in this case, 'Internet content legislation is directly linked to media-fuelled moral panics that concern uses of technology deemed harmful to children' -- a list that ranges from the use of social media and text messaging, through to the ability for minors to access pornography and illegal content (2008, para. 25).

conversations that are, at the time, synchronous, but quickly become written histories, indexed for asynchronous consumption by future, distant others. These documents are the archives not only of our own lives but of society and culture in the early twenty first century. The written word is taking the place of spoken utterances, and as such the histories of today's youth (and, indeed, all generations) will be more thoroughly documented than ever before.

Writing the self into being

Writing the self into being involves creating a textual representation of the self, usually in words, to act online in place of the physical self. The self that is written into being does not accurately reflect the physical self, necessarily, but the person that one imagines oneself to be. According to Kitzmann, 'the autobiographical page can... be seen as a "place" for constructing and celebrating the centred, enlightened and self-aware subject' (2003, p. 52). This definition of autobiography is fitting; it echoes Lejeune, who attests that autobiography is:

> Any retrospective prose narrative by a real person concerning his own existence, focusing on his individual life, in particular on the development of his personality (1982, p. 183).

The page these days is, of course, rarely made of paper, and the writing does not necessarily consist entirely of words, but the act of projecting subjectivity as text continues to 'accommodate the "internal world"' of the writer (Kitzmann, 2003, p. 53). The present opportunity to experiment or play with the process of writing the self into being is prodigious.

Grant has proposed that the autobiographic writing of autoethnography 'blurs the categorical distinctions between self and culture, as culture is expressed through self and vice versa' (2010, p. 113). He adds:

> We move through culture and culture moves through us. In this sense, we are both the inventors of culture and simultaneously invented by it. The individual story leaves traces of at least one path through a shifting, transforming and disappearing (multi-) cultural landscape. This could be viewed as either a quest for stability in an era of rapid change or a story of instability and ambiguity (2010, p. 113).

Whilst I do not intend to suggest that all who write (or, as it may be, photograph, film, or record) the self into being do so as autoethnographic study, Grant's assertion speaks to the themes of this project on many levels. The notion of constituting and being constituted by culture echoes the phenomenological understanding that we are constituted by space and, by way of lived experience, constitute it. The notion that one 'leaves... at least one path' echoes Adams' assertion, revisited throughout this thesis, that 'these torturous routes have left tracks on each of us' (Adams, 2005, p. 3). There is a common and distinct thread that continues to arise: one that links places, movement, experiences, identities, narratives, and histories, all intertwined and relational:

> As an interpretive and narrative activity, autobiographic accounts constitute a moment when a lone self risks display in the cultural dimensions of time, space and language... the real question of autobiographical ethnography is not who I am, but where do I belong as this moment in time? Culture is mobilized to address the question of the self's location in the world (Grant, 2010, p. 113).

In writing oneself into being, the individual writes autobiography whilst performing autoethnography, taking stock of their own personal history and experiences and using these as the influence for current and future shaping of the self. The stories that we write online form part of our longer, ongoing autobiographies.

For Kitzmann, writing the self into being is evidence of an awareness of one's mortality. The writer takes stock of their existence and contemplates their purpose. An act of 'regulating one's inner life so that progress and improvement become easier', writing works as insurance against a life wasted. Kitzmann writes:

> Indeed, to make the self modern is to make it the centre of attention: to reflect upon and articulate one's self as an individual, as one capable and perhaps even destined to determine one's fate and future. The place of the page thus becomes the place of the future, of the self made man or woman, of the isolated, focused and internally driven agent of history, will, and power. I write about myself, therefore I am (2003, p. 53).

The 'place of the page' is both the 'place of the future' and the past. We live in a time of immense over-stimulation; writing the self into being gives the individual the opportunity to be remembered in some way, as demonstrated by Facebook memorial

pages that live on long after the passing of the individual (see Marwick & Ellison, 2012; for the darker side of online memorials, see DeGroot, 2013 and Phillips, 2011). Ong refers to the association of death and writing as a 'startling paradox':

> the deadness of the text, its removal from the living human lifeworld, its rigid visual fixity, assures its endurance and its potential for being resurrected into limitless living contexts by a potentially infinite number of living readers (1982, p. 80; see also 1977, pp. 230–271).

As the written word transcends space and time, authors and audiences are always imagined into being by each other. Ong's 'resurrected' author is Adams' 'extensible' self: one whose presence reaches far beyond the living, physical self (2005, p. 1). At the same time, storytelling the self to others also allows individuals to grow and move forward in life (Grant, 2010, p. 113). 'Life arguably has to be lived as a story,' says Grant, 'for it is in the story that orientations, meanings and questions of identity are reinvented and worked through' (2010, p. 113). It is a story to which the author does not own the final rights — it is impossible to write the exact circumstances of one's death into an autobiographical text, after all — but this positions personal narrative forms as living stories, particularly online. In these spaces, the self is developed, performed, and compiled piece by piece over time.

Writing the self into being takes on an entirely different characteristic in the online context. Whilst in the physical world, 'by locating a person in space and time, a body signals presence by its very being', such immediate, physical presence does not exist in the same way online. Physicality, by default, is indicated online as 'little more than an IP address' (boyd, 2008, pp. 126–127). Presence is created in online environments by 'actively, and more or less consciously, having to write oneself into being' (Sunden, 2002, p. 88). Similarly, boyd writes:

> Much of what people take for granted in unmediated situations cannot be accounted for in mediated ones. Online, there are no bodies in the corporeal sense, obscuring both identity information that is typically written on the body and presence information that makes a person visible to others. To exist in mediated contexts, people must engage in explicit acts to write themselves into being (2008, p. 121).

Here, boyd is not arguing that bodies are neither consequential nor present online. Rather, she highlights a problem inherent to computer-mediated communication: the

screen always initially obscures physicality. The physical self is there — it is typing the words that appear on the screen, appearing in photographs, and informing the identity of the user — but in the flesh-and-blood sense, it is not there in the same way that it would be if interaction were to occur face-to-face. Thus, the body (and, by extension, the self) is actively written into being via profile pages, status updates, shared digital artefacts (such as photographs), and by activities that indicate personal preference: likes, shares, retweets, and favourites. Every action we take online is implicated in writing the self into being. Even if a user chooses not to actively participate by joining communities, posting to social platforms, writing a blog, leaving comments on news articles, or innumerable other acts, they nonetheless leave evidence of their activity in search histories and page view analytics (the aforementioned IP trace). No activity online is entirely anonymous, nor is it entirely isolated. Our movements are meaningful, consequential, and social, impacting upon the lives of others.

Textual meditations: The ancient Greek hypomnemata

If personal narrative, identity construction, and writing the self into being are social activities, then blogs must be one of the best examples on the Internet of the self being constructed, explored, managed, and performed for others. This section, however, isn't concerned so much with blogs as it is with one of the earliest forms of self-writing: the Ancient Greek hypomnemata. The parallels between hypomnemata and blogs are evident. A blog is constructed piece-by-piece, with the narrative structure emerging over time. It is never really finished, although plenty of blogs are simply abandoned, marking the end of an incomplete narrative. The ongoing, incremental nature of blogs (as well as the fact that they enable "life lessons" to be stored for later reference and/or use by others) aligns the practice of blogging with that of hypomnemata.[26]

Danielle Hampton is a blogger and stay-at-home mother in her early 30s. Her blog, *Sometimes Sweet* (http://sometimessweet.blogspot.com), receives around 10,000

[26] Hypomnemata is also, at times, spelled *hupomnemata*. To my knowledge, there is no distinction of use between the two spellings; hypomnemata appears to be the more common spelling in English language texts. For that reason, because it is the most common spelling in the texts I am citing, I use this spelling in my writing, except in the case of quotes that originally used the spelling 'hupomnemata'.

visitors a day — a hefty figure, considering the fact that *Sometimes Sweet* merely chronicles Hampton's everyday life as a mother, wife, fashionista, and tattoo enthusiast in Prescott, Arizona. Hampton exemplifies the fascination with the everyday that we have adopted through the proliferation of the web as a social space, and her story is just one of many. Personal blogging is big business. Much of what she writes about takes the form of features, many of them series of weekly posts wherein she invites other bloggers and blog readers to share their experiences and wisdom with her audience. This aligns with the philosophy at the core of blogging; as Mortensen and Walker have written, 'weblogs straddle the boundaries between publication and process, between writing towards others and writing for oneself'. They continue:

> A weblog is always both for oneself and one's readers. If it were only for oneself, a private diary would be more useful. If it were only for readers, and not a tool for oneself, a more polished and finished form of publication would probably be more appropriate (2002, p. 256).[27]

The blog-as-hypomnemata is both a personal documentation of lived experience and a dossier, of sorts, to guide others. The audience does not have to follow the lead of the blogger; instead, by presenting information in a personal, conversational setting, the blogger invites readers to participate in achieving a particular goal.

In 2011, Hampton embarked upon a series entitled "8 Weeks to a Better Me". The weekly posts, comprising guest posts from friends and a short list of goals she hoped to achieve in the coming week, detailed her efforts to improve her life by becoming more engaged with the process of being-in-the-world. Hampton tells her audience:

> I usually will write them down in the notebook I always keep with me, or on a small chalkboard in our kitchen. They can be as simple as "eat more green veggies," "workout five times," or even "blog more about my daily life." Anything... And even though I was only working on each goal for a week at a time, I found that after that week was up, my good habits carried over (Hampton, 2011).

[27] Mortensen and Walker liken blogs to the French *salons* of the 19th century, which 'existed on the borderline between the private and the public: it was situated in private homes, but part of the public sphere through being the site of performance that was the salon-experience' (2002, p. 257). It is a useful metaphor for thinking about the phenomenon of personal blogging.

This kind of project is not uncommon in the world of blogging as many bloggers use their site as a space for practising and documenting in the style of hypomnemata. An individual's desire to improve their life by keeping a record of habits and changes is hardly extraordinary, but the fact that these are documented publicly and shared with others (usually with an open invitation for readers to join in the experiment) set the practice apart from other forms of self-transformation.

In ancient Greece, hypomnemata took the form of notebook-like documents in which the individual recorded matters of importance. These recorded minutiae, it was thought, would remain in one's possession for much longer than a fleeting thought or conversation could, and was thus a useful record of life experience. They contained:

> quotations, fragments of works, examples, and actions to which one had been witness or of which one had read the account, reflections, or reasonings which one had heard or which had come to mind. They constituted a material memory of things read, heard, or thought, thus offering these as an accumulated treasure for rereading and later meditation (Foucault & Rabinow, 1984, p. 364).

Foucault posits that hypomnemata formed part of *epimeleia heautou*, or care of the self (Foucault & Rabinow, 1984, p. 359). In writing for and of the self, the author created a material artefact upon which to reflect. The element of caring for the self arises in giving oneself the ability to look back on life as it happens, using past experiences to grow as a person — a task made simpler when reading the self, rather than simply relying upon a fallible and fleeting inner monologue.

As discussed elsewhere in this chapter, reflexivity is an important part of forging narrative identities. According to Foucault:

> One of the main features of taking care involved taking notes on oneself to be reread, writing treatises and letters to friends who help them, and keeping notebooks in order to reactivate for oneself the truths one needed ... Taking care of oneself became linked to constant writing activity. The self is something to write about, a theme or object (subject) of writing activity (1988, p. 27).

In writing the self, the (subjective) individual can view the self as object, reading the self into being from the perspective of another. In doing so, a sense of self is

developed as the subjective reader achieves the necessary detachment from the subject writer (Ong, 1982, p. 78). 'The self-referentiality of writing, rather than a limitation to be somehow transcended', Faust writes, 'is our primary means of achieving critical distance enabling the work of self-formation to be carried out' (1998, p. 186).[28] When one writes the self into being, they are able to view the self from the outside: as a subject on paper rather than an internalized entity.

Foucault, writes Allen, felt that 'one can shape the conception/articulation of an actual subject-in-writing' (2010, p. 367) — that writing the self could be a real and powerful way to take control of one's life. Hypomnemata provided a way of gathering and archiving the disparate elements of an identity. Allen describes her experience with hypomnemata as part of the act of cultivating the self through writing:

> I keep a notebook of quotations I've gathered from readings, of ideas I've discovered through encounters with other texts, and so on. In some cases I've reread and written more at length (I've meditated on) the quotes/material gathered there, and that meditation has helped to 'hush the growling dogs'; in other cases the quotes sit alone on the page without much/any meditation applied to them. But the collection, itself, still constitutes hupomnemata (2010, p. 369).

This process is similar to research practice, gathering bits and pieces of information as the researcher progress towards a goal, be it the production of a report, a thesis, a paper, or a book. In contrast, though, the self-project that people engage in every day — collecting (and publishing) curios in the form of photographs, comments, links,

[28] McDonald, in a study of self-writing, argued that 'the insertion of language into the self through the technology of writing, in an effort to invest im-mediately given experience with interest...constitutes aesthetic self-creation'. The concept here is that without language – without self-writing – human beings are prone to feel as though life is meaningless (1996, p. 63). In doing so, however, the subject loses the immediacy of pure experience – that of being-in-the-world. 'It is only in naïve, spontaneous im-mediacy that consciousness is present to its object. When language or reflection intervene, there is a deferral and displacement of both the subject and the object. There is only the interplay of signs. The subject is no longer transparent and self-present, but lost in a labyrinth of "unlimited semiosis"', McDonald argues (1996, p. 63). If this is the case, the process of self-writing that we have come to practice so proficiently could be said to come at the detriment of authentic lived experience, challenging the possibility of a phenomenological existence.

and other ephemera[29] — has no distinct goal, as the project is never completed, at least not in one's lifetime. Nonetheless, both can be thought of as examples of hypomnemata. Writing the self into being has become a part of everyday life. We think nothing of repinning an image on Pinterest, posting a review to Goodreads, or sharing a photograph on Instagram, but each of these activities constitutes writing oneself into being. These deliberate, yet inconspicuous, acts of self-writing particularly echo hypomnemata when a user links their public social media profiles together, and in doing so gathers the distributed, multifaceted self into some semblance of a whole.[30]

Foucault read hypomnemata as evidence of careful self-management (Foucault & Rabinow, 1984, p. 363). The upkeep of the relationship with the self was seen as important above all else. Foucault writes:

> We have hardly any remnant of the idea in our society, that the principal work of art which one has to take care of, the main area to which one must apply aesthetic values, is oneself, one's life, one's existence (Foucault & Rabinow, 1984, p. 362).

The hypomnemata exemplified the importance of this relationship, for nothing could be left to chance. Important identity markers were chosen from experience and noted for future reference, facilitating the formation of a strong relationship with the self:

> the point at which the question of the hupomnemata and the culture of the self comes together in a remarkable fashion is the point at which the culture of the self takes as its goal the perfect government of the self—a sort of permanent political relationship between self and self (Foucault & Rabinow, 1984, p. 363).

Hypomnemata were just another way of constructing a self. Each individual lesson noted — a hypomnema — documented an element of the self: an experience, a

[29] What may have once been considered ephemera is, of course, anything but in the context of online communications. Not only is information stored forever in some capacity, but the propensity to interlink elements of identity in the form of a networked self means that it is becoming more difficult to escape one's digital past. Additionally, the online self is never just online. Where once one may have been able to draw a more distinct demarcation between online and offline lives, at present the trend is to reflect the "real" self online through the use of real names (rather than the adoption of a pseudonym), photographs (rather than avatars), and furthering existing relationships with people that one shares offline familiarity, instead of forging connections with new people.

[30] This echoes the "widgetized self" as proposed by Baym (2007; see also Helmond, 2010 and Weltevrede & Helmond, 2012), discussed in detail during chapters five and six of this thesis.

memory, something learned. Foucault interpreted hypomnemata as though the meaning of the self was located in the space of the everyday:

> The point is not to pursue the indescribable, not to reveal the hidden, not to say the non-said, but, on the contrary, to collect the already-said, to reassemble that which one could hear or read, and this to an end which is nothing less than the constitution of the self ... Such is the objective of the hupomnemata: to make of the recollection of fragmentary logos transmitted by teaching, listening, or reading a means to establish as adequate and as perfect a relationship of oneself to oneself as possible (Foucault & Rabinow, 1984, p. 365).

Like hypomnemata, blogs do not represent a person in their entirety, nor do they tell entire stories. Bloggers choose a topic to discuss in each post. Taking in one post on its own, the reader might not get a real sense of who the author is. Combined with months or weeks of posts, the author is revealed to be a complex individual who draws their identity from a variety of sources. This process of uncovering an identity is not for the benefit of the reader alone; just as hypomnemata were originally intended for their author as much as for others, so too do bloggers come to know the self via the posts they share online (Blood, 2000).[31]

The link between blogging and hypomnemata is salient but, in a way, the long-form, narrative style of many blog posts contradict the note-taking style of hypomnemata. Perhaps even more so than blogs, social bookmarking platforms such as Pinterest and microblogging platforms like Twitter exemplify hypomnemata. They are less explicitly narrative in form than blogs, thriving instead as spaces for curating collections of hyperlinks and brief commentary of experiences. In the case of Pinterest, users 'pin'

[31] One of the earliest articles on blogging, this piece by Rebecca Blood has become one of the most cited accounts of blogging practice (at the time of writing, Google Reader indexed 752 citations of the article). She argues in the article that blogging had two effects: 'First, I discovered my own interests... More importantly, I began to value more highly my own point of view. In composing my link text every day I carefully considered my own opinions and ideas, and I began to feel that my perspective was unique and important' (2000, para. 20). Writing the self into being in blog form can be a confronting experience, as most people are not used to seeing the self so exposed on the (public) screen – or at least this was the case in 2000. 'Lacking a focus on the outside world, the blogger is compelled to share his world with whomever is reading... These fragments, pieced together over months, can provide an unexpectedly intimate view of what it is to be a particular individual in a particular place at a particular time' (Blood, 2000, para. 21).

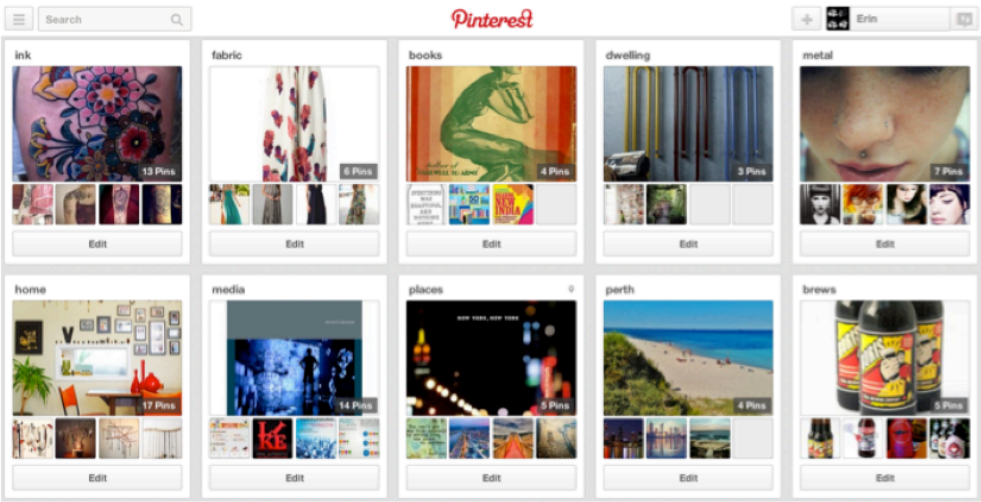

Figure 1: A series of Pinterest boards - curated, themed collections of hyperlinked images

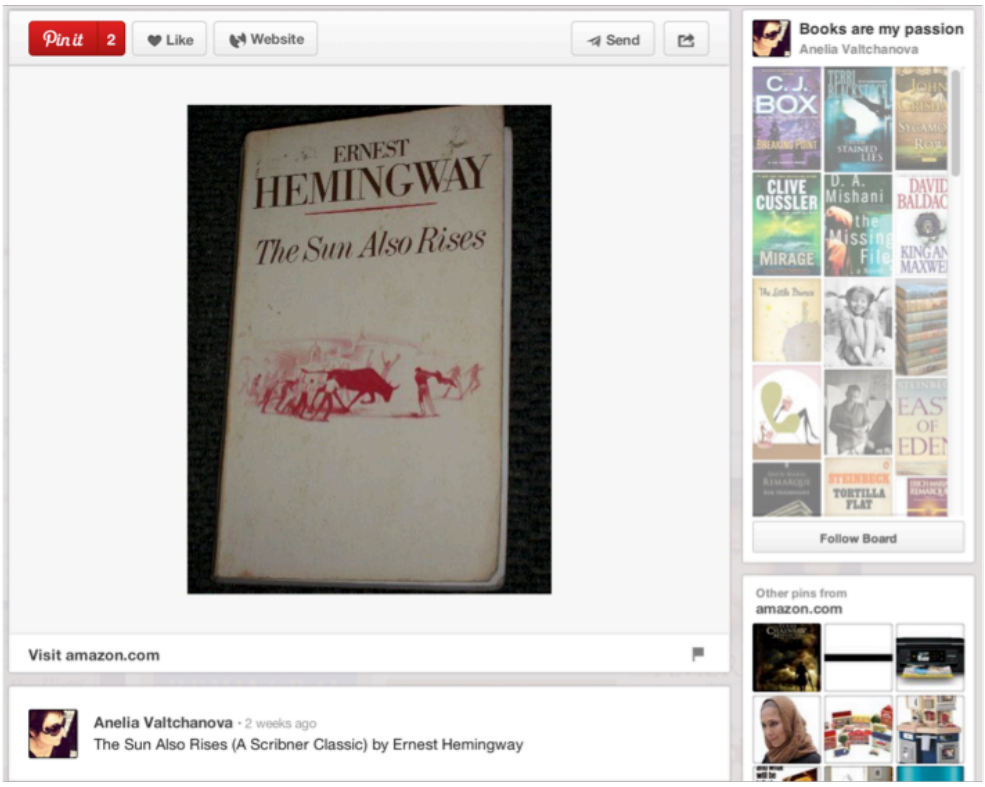

Figure 2: When an image is selected for pinning, the user can see what other boards that image belongs to as well as other pins by the source of the image.

images from the web to their personal profile, creating boards (galleries) of related images (see *Figure 1*). Each image has a URL; clicking on an image on Pinterest directs the user to the related website, if they wish, making Pinterest an effective tool for promoting business and blogs alike (see *Figure 2*). Users can upload their own

content, pin content from the web, re-pin others' content, follow a pin board ('follow board') or follow a user ('follow all'). When pinning an image, the user can see other boards that contain that same image. Users can name and re-name images for their personal use, contributing to a folksonomy in which content is indexed according to the titles, descriptions, and categories assigned to content by users.[32]

Pinterest and other social bookmarking platforms act as hypomnemata in a number of ways. Just as the ancient Greeks wrote reminders in their notebooks, Pinterest operates simultaneously as a source of inspiration (somewhat like a "mood board") and a space to remember matters of importance. Mood boards are often used by design professionals to 'visualize ideas or emotions that do not lend themselves to words' (McDonagh, Goggin, & Squier, 2005, p. 82), but they are also utilised in education and as tools for self improvement. Good suggests that curatory platforms such as Pinterest mimic 'youth-driven practices of textual exchange in school, literary and consumer practices of "curating" and saving media for reference or re-use' (2013, p. 569). The public nature of said curation may be interpreted as a form of identity performance.[33] This is significant: Pinterest is a social platform, and it is in this that the platform shows its true potential as a modern-day hypomnemata.

The traditional author of the hypomnemata did not think of the document as a secret diary; they would share their notes with others, treating them as a way to spread knowledge. As most Pinterest boards are public (there is also an option for secret boards), images curated by one user can be taken for use by another. The repinning function, like Tumblr's reblog and Twitter's retweet affordances, provides the viral locus of the platform. By re-pinning others' content, users instead engage in acts of community and communication. Community arises as users can see who else is pinning similar content; users can follow others' boards and converse via comments under each image. Communication can be implicit (that is, by pinning another's content, the user is saying 'I like your style') or explicit, via the comment form beneath each image. Without these affordances, Pinterest would be a collection of images belonging to other people. Instead, users are positioned as one part of a

[32] Folksonomy and metadata will be discussed more in chapter five.
[33] The socio-cultural significance of Pinterest and other social bookmarking sites as spaces of identity curation will be discussed in chapter five.

massive, evolving identity project. Pinterest is not alone in the social bookmarking world with numerous others tools offering various degrees of collaboration and community, each carrying their own cultural and social significance.

Epistolary: Writing the self for another

> *The rustle and thump of letters on the hall floor, or the burr of the postman's scooter are far less common in many people's lives today than the abrupt invasion of the mobile phone's personal melody, or the pop-up announcing another email in the inbox (Haggis & Holmes, 2011, p. 169).*

Many forms of online communication have roots in much older writing traditions. Just as blogs and social bookmarks have been thought of as technological iterations of hypomnemata, so too has epistolary writing influenced online communications. Email is the obvious comparison, having been the original scapegoat for the apparent decline of letter writing (Milne, 2010, p. 19). Milne argues that email has not, in fact, 'precipitated apocalyptic cultural change', instead '(borrowing) iconography, codes of composition and modes of social practice from its predecessor' (2010, p. 19). This appears to resonate with Ihde's postphenomenological assurance that new technologies don't simply render old ones immediately irrelevant, but instead build upon existing technologies which are themselves replete with existing social and cultural value (Ihde, 2012, p. 330; see Chapter 1 of this thesis). Nonetheless, it is a worthwhile comparison to make. Letters are inherently social artefacts. They are written with an intended audience in mind and (in the case of personal letters) carry the voice and persona of the author to a distant other. The self is written into being as the author concurrently imagines the reader into being, too.

Letters have a long and prominent history in social life, enabling a form of tangible communication across space since ancient times. Letters — once read to a gathering by an official messenger — were 'said to carry the very presence or projection ("*parousia*") of the sender' (Bazerman, 2000, pp. 17–18). The feeling of transcendental authorship imbued in a letter speaks to the sense of co-presence that interlocutors experience today when communicating via the Internet. Just as

conversation via email, Twitter, or Facebook can today be felt to transcend space and time, letters have long been a way of *being together with* geographic and temporally distant others. The written voice of the author speaks to an absent-yet-present other. Themes of absence and presence recur frequently in scholarship about epistolary, the words of a letter being the disembodied substitute for a person who cannot physically be present. Instead, they are brought to life in one-sided written dialogue:

> Epistolary discourse has long been a site for reflecting on the paradoxical entwinement — particularly, though not exclusively, inasmuch as letters bespeak affect, passion — of bodies and words, embodied words (Hayes, 2003, p. 3).

Said to 'narrow the gap between writers and readers' (Gerber, 2005, p. 320), letters are charged with taking the place of the otherwise absent writer upon receipt by the reader. There is a sense of responsibility on behalf of the writer in the act of sending a letter: they are expected to offer a self that is authentic and faithful, as 'writers take a formal and explicit responsibility for what they have written when they sign their name to the letters they have composed' (Gerber, 2005, p. 3).

Epistolary exchange is typically based upon an existing relationship, certainly in the case of personal letters (which is my focus here, rather than letters as professional or official communications). In analysing the genre, 'we need to see a subtle interchange between fantasy, writing and relationship' (Jolly & Stanley, 2005, p. 93). For Jolly and Stanley, authenticity and absolute truth are impossible, owing to the nature of epistolary writing as performance. The author must perform the self when writing to another, and the commitment of the self onto the page means that self is mediated by the pen and paper. The mediated epistolary self, contrary to familiar criticisms of the digital self, was not seen as inauthentic, however; letters were instead purported to express the *real* and *authentic* qualities that one would normally find in face-to-face conversation. Goldsmith concurs that 'good letter writers were said to be those who could make their letters "seem to speak" in a plain and unpedantic style' (1989, p. 47). Letters thus act as a corporeal substitute during distant communication between two parties and 'their "coherence" or truth is relative to the relationship that they in part embody. We are constantly re-measuring the border between "text" and "context"' (Jolly & Stanley, 2005, p. 97). Both the writer and the reader approach the letter with contextual awareness, based upon an existing

relationship and, presumably, information presented in earlier exchanges. The author and recipient, with no way for one party to communicate to the other a word-for-word stream of consciousness account of events, both accept a certain degree of artistic license in the letters as written.

The author, desiring clarity for the reader, carefully selects what they will include, providing as much detail is needed to make a point. Jolly and Stanley argue that this is part of 'the individual experience and historical determination' that comes with maintaining a long-term correspondence with another (2005, p. 93). The implications for narrative identity and the performance of self are unclear; on the one hand, Jolly and Stanley's insistence upon the inauthentic nature of the written self reminds me of the notion discussed earlier in this thesis that the desire for an authentic self is, in itself, inauthentic. On the other hand, approaching epistolary writing with the awareness of perpetual performance renders correspondence somewhat hollow, as if only ever getting half the story. (Although this, as I will attest in later chapters, can actually be a good thing to keep in mind when communicating via the Internet.) Epistolary writing may be best interpreted with Goffman's theory of performance in mind: as something not inauthentic or manicured, but simply another way in which we wear a mask in order to present ourselves to others.

Letters, according to Bazerman, are a way of 'maintaining and extending' personal bonds, as well as a means of doing business and even communicating with the spiritual world: 'Letters to the gods, letters to the dead, and letter prayers suggest the flexibility of the letter form to establish and elaborate communicative situations' (2000, p. 18). That is exactly the appeal of epistolary: although the author writes with a recipient in mind, the fact that they are imagined means they do not necessarily even need to be able to reply. Letters can be a cathartic apparatus. Jolly uses the example of an author writing to, of all things, a chronically painful shoulder — an example I found rather interesting because it deals with a recipient who *cannot* reply. Of the process, Jolly notes:

> Through writing, Dave must stand back from his suffering, encouraging perspective and ideally, analysis. This implies the conceptual division off the self: Dave's shoulder is a personality with its own needs and will...

> This, in turn, allows reintegration of the self's two parts... The letter facilitates both detachment and integration (2011, p. 48).

Although it is unlikely that many writers address their physical injuries in letter form, the benefit of writing the self into being in this manner is clear: it allows for the development of 'a self which needs to be conscious of its internal conflicts to bring them into relationship and eventual harmony' (Jolly, 2011, p. 48). This seems to echo the practice of blogging, where in it is the having of voice, rather than the being heard, that is often perceived most important. Just like with letters, blogging is cathartic in the act of writing; participation is an added bonus.

Documenting the daily: journals and diaries

Whilst letter writing has presented certain challenges to the construction of self by requiring the author to perform for another person (thus complicating the possibility of expressing an authentic self), the practice of diary writing — writing for oneself — is complex in a host of other ways. Diary writing or journaling is arguably the writing practice most reflected in the habits of today's Internet users. The similarities between keeping a diary as a personal confessional and blogging — particularly personal blogging, the practitioners of which often use the blog as a space for revealing intimate details of the self — are clear. Blogs, like diaries, can be used as a space for dealing with personal issues and concerns. However, I wish to stress that the two forms are distinctly different. Whilst blogs may take many a cue from diaries, they are not mere carbon copies of the older form; one of the most obvious examples can be found in the contrast between public and private writing.

Unlike diaries, blogs are (in most instances) public. The self-awareness that comes from writing in public may be less prominent in the case of a blog that appears to not have many readers; however, the benefit of public writing in this form may arise from awareness of a *potential* audience. Indeed, the awareness of audience may be problematic for bloggers struggling with the contrast between personal thought and public document. This issue was explored in an early article by Nardi, Schiano and Gumbrecht, who ask:

> Why would so many people post their diaries — perhaps the most intimate form of personal musing — on the most public communication medium in human history, the Internet? (2004, p. 222.)

Whilst elements of blogging are undoubtedly similar to diary writing — for example, the fact that both exist are, by their nature, works in progress (Reed, 2005, p. 227) — making it easy to think of blogs as replicating word-for-byte the diary form on the screen, it must be regarded as a distinct form of writing with its own conventions and styles (Nardi, Schiano, & Gumbrecht, 2004, p. 222).

The assumption cannot be made that bloggers disclose personal details with the same level of intimacy as they would in a private diary (although this possibility cannot be excluded; many a blogger has used their blog as a space for telling-all). This key point means that although blogs and other online writing may take cues from diaries, they are inherently different genres of writing. Bloggers, it has been determined:

> desired connection with their audience, wanted to insert themselves into known — and sometimes unknown — social spaces to update, inform, or advise, to greet or grumble, to pontificate, confess, create, and to think (Nardi, Schiano, & Gumbrecht, 2004, p. 231).

The social heart of blogging, indicated by the inclusion of comment forms on blogs and (more recently) networked presences on other social media platforms, directly contradicts the inherent privacy of the diary. Whilst the former thrives upon the presence of an audience and the feedback that this group may offer, the latter depends upon the maintenance of secrecy, as one writer muses:

> I think it was the lock that intrigued me the most — the lock whose presence signalled the expectation that one might write in the diary what no one else would read (Blos, 2002, p. 629).

This contrasts strikingly with the hyper-public nature of blogs. Whilst some blogs certainly have “locks”, in that they are password protected (with others “hidden” by the fact that they are not promoted by the author and thus become lost, unread, in the blogosphere), the norm is for blogs to be publicly accessible. Rak proposes that rather than taking over from where diaries left off, blogs are better understood as an

internet genre with a history as long as the history of the internet itself (2005, p. 170).[34]

Despite blogs and diaries being distinct entities with their own histories and meanings, it is nonetheless useful to explore the diary concept as it influences online self-writing. The diary is a classic example of writing the self into being. 'The written diary thus functions as a memorial, an avatar one could say, that literally stands in place of the individual who wrote it' (Kitzmann, 2003, p. 54). They exist as spaces wherein individuals document the minutiae of their life, an attempt to grasp at perpetuity in a life otherwise fleeting. Used for escapism and personal reflection, the process of writing 'of one's self and for one's self' allows diarists not only to write the self into being, but to read that self, too — a process that fosters understanding and a sense of self (Blos, 2002, p. 633). Reflexivity is paramount to writing the self into being, as discussed throughout this chapter. Whether diaries were written for the author or for an audience is debatable; not only have the contents of many diaries been published in full and found recognition in that regard, but many diaries have also inspired famous stories and films over the past hundred years. The apparent privacy of diaries is challenged by the fact that they are written at all. By writing the words on the page, the secretive contents of a diary enters the public realm, in a sense, as it is unlikely the author can (or will) protect it as all times. This is possibly part of the attraction of dairy writing; Kitzmann refers to the 'slightly voyeuristic thrill ... that comes from reading someone else's diary' (2003, p. 54), highlighting the tension between public and private that a diary must negotiate. Many a diarist has spoken to the as-yet-unknown audience that may one day discover this secret document. The very act of writing a diary, rather than just remembering experiences internally, poses the question of whether diaries are intended for an audience, no matter how personal they may be.

[34] Indeed, blogs take their cue from written forms *other than* diaries. Poletti, for instance, discusses the 'personal zine' or 'perzine' -- handmade, personalised form of zine that is part artwork and part publication, produced as a 'limited-edition multiple intended for public, albeit subcultural, circulation' (2008, p. 88; Zweig, 1998, p. 4). As a stand-alone object, personal zines occupy a different space to both diaries *and* blogs, but still share many characteristics with both. One writer has commented that perzines represent 'a mode of life narrative that most closely resembles the experience of being in the world' (Sinor, 2003, p. 247), whilst Poletti contends that perzines are 'a unique medium for lifewriting, as the materiality of the zine object often complicates the relationship between narrative and reader, and explicitly disrupts any assumption that the zine can offer a direct and uncomplicated representation of its subject' (2008, p. 93). Personal zines are, in a sense, the stepping stone between diaries and blogs.

For most diarists the sole audience is the author. A real diary is thought to adhere to a number of qualities. It is:

> a text written in the first person, with dated passages in chronological order, where the writing subject speaks not only of events in her surroundings, but also about her feelings and thoughts concerning these events (Sjodblad, 1998, p. 517).

A diary is more than a log of experiences; it is a dialogue with the self, wherein the author is able to write with the assumption that he or she knows what is being discussed, but also where the author is able to challenge him or herself to admit to thoughts otherwise unmentionable in the company of others. The private nature of diaries means that it would be fair to assume that the authentic self is written into being; however, the attainability of an authentic self is problematic. People have long used writing as a way to sort through personal issues and make sense of troubling experiences and thoughts, and the fact that they are (supposedly) read by none other than the author would suggest that there is no impetus to put on a face or play a particular role when writing them. However, the written self is instantly mediated by the presence of the page. In striving to uncover the authentic self in writing there can be too little feedback. The individual is able to express themselves without fear of retribution, and yet by keeping these innermost thoughts a secret, they also miss out on the opportunity for perspective that only others can provide. The challenges inherent to writing the self into being for other are pronounced, and becoming more so in the context of online writing, as discussed below.

Early online storytelling

> *Today, writing systems based entirely on electronic communication are rapidly encroaching on what has, until now, been the domain of speech-based writing. Computers can now "write" both messages and entire programs between themselves. At the same time, they are elaborating new systems of their own that transcend everything we have understood to be described by the word writing. Even the substances on which writing takes place are metamorphosing: e-ink (electronic ink) on plastic*

> *screens, thin as paper, might one day replace the ubiquitous substance which itself earlier replaced parchment (Fischer, 2001, p. 8).*

Writing the self into being online differs to most other forms of public self-writing (such as autobiographies and memoirs) in that rather than being the product of a life's work, the self written into being online is an active, present self. It is one that is often updated on a daily basis across a number of platforms. It is not just a collection of memories and experiences but also an ongoing, networked identity project, lacking a defined beginning and end. The narrated self persists in electronic form for as long as the narrator wishes it to, and even beyond: it persists for as long as archival records remain. This distinguishes online writing from traditional narratives. The main character in the story is the person writing it. This in itself is not unusual of course; however, the difference with online writing is in the fact that it is both public and indexed, in a state of 'perpetual beta' (Helmond, 2010b, pp. 15–17). The story is pieced together day by day, interaction by interaction, in a process of ongoing self-reflexivity. The narrative emerges as the life is lived.

Writing the self into being in the early twenty first century differs markedly to the ways in which the self was written into being in 1993, at the beginning of the World Wide Web. It is worth examining this contrast in order to understand how writing the self has changed over time. Today, we are familiar today with the practices of personal branding and the act of making one's mark on the digital landscape as it is common for individuals to maintain persistent identity markers, or profiles, on social platforms and blogs. The self today is more than the awareness of being and of having an identity. It is a task asking for constant attention,

> a self that is constantly working on itself, to better itself and its own relationships with others, all the while demonstrating that its behaviours are reflections of an authentically unique personality (Wee & Brooks, 2010, p. 60).

Many individuals carefully craft the self for performance on blogs and social platforms; these representations remain when the individual puts the phone down or the laptop away for the evening. The focus is on *authenticity*... but not too much. The "authentic" self is often carefully managed by bloggers and users of social platforms in order to mask the less desirable traits while projecting a genuine, open personality.

This is particularly true of blogs, as the blog author often *is* the brand; indeed, professional blogging (that is, earning a primary income from blogging) has become more and more prominent over the past ten years, and often professional bloggers aren't selling anything other than their own personal narratives. So-called 'personal branding strategies' (Wee & Brooks, 2010, p. 47) are one way in which the self is managed so as to negotiate a balance that satisfies the requirement of public and private and authentic and performed selves:

> Your "package" should be an accurate reflection of what's inside: make sure the impressions you're creating are the ones you want to be creating. Set an impeccable standard for everything that adds up to how others perceive you (McNally & Speak, 2003, p. 54).

Personal branding strategies allow 'an actor to make use of this self-knowledge to better influence how he/she is perceived' (Wee & Brooks, 2010, p. 47). The end goal of personal branding is less about understanding the self and more about presenting the self for consumptions by others.

Personal branding strategies deployed to managed identities that are distributed across several social platforms denotes a marked change from early practices of writing the self into being online. For instance, whilst impression management has always been a part of social life (Goffman, 1956; Leary & Kowalski, 1990; boyd & Ellison, 2008), it has become more prominent an element of online socialisation following the advent of social media. Users now go by their real name, often with a profile picture of themselves, projected in environments where they connect with their "real" friends. The online is, more than ever, an extension of the offline, and there can be real-world consequences for mismanaging your identity and behaving in the wrong way, especially when you are your own brand. Nonetheless, the co-requisites of "being yourself" and "impression management" appear incongruent; can one really engage the "true" self in identity performance? The "true self" — if there is such a thing — is complicated and, at times, ugly. It is not always a self that one wants to share with others, but in an era where the self transcends time with perpetual presence on blogs and social platforms, the less desirable aspects of one's personality are often left offline. Baumeister notes that all acts of self-presentation are done in the name of 'pleasing the immediate audience' (1982, p. 9) by

conforming to their expectations; this is certainly demonstrated in self-branding projects today.

However, as Baumeister indicates, total self-disclosure isn't something that occurs in face-to-face interaction, either. The likelihood is that much online self-disclosure (that is, those elements of the self deemed "acceptable" for the personal brand) reflects the self-disclosure practices that one engages in with the majority of people offline. Typically, we reserve total self-disclosure for a select few, the people with whom we feel comfortable sharing the darkest, least tolerable elements of one's life and personality. Attrill and Jalil point out that the information exchanged initially in relationships is 'superficial, gradually revealing more intimate and personal details over time' (2011, p. 1635; see also Rosen, Cheever, Felt, & Cummings, 2008). The constant push for authenticity online appears to reflect a deep-seated digital dualism; the same demand for authenticity is rarely required in the physical world, where it is almost assumed that people are who they say they are. I wonder whether the self may be more like a character than a subjective being: idealised, rather than authentic, a socially acceptable figurehead, of sorts, playing the role of the "authentic" self. On the other hand, the push for authenticity may indicate an awareness of vulnerability inherent to persistent presence in online environments, something that really isn't replicated in face-to-face relationships, as nobody is always present, all the time. Because we can't always be everywhere online to manage the pieces of ourselves that we have contributed to the network, we must instead put some thought into constructing an idealised self for presentation.

Today's branded, networked social landscape has diverged rather significantly from "anonymous", "disembodied" interactions in online communities. Earlier forms of online writing were often casual, real-time encounters in chat rooms and text-based MUDs. The first was built in 1979, and spawned numerous imitations and variations throughout the 1980s (Kendall, 2002, p. 40). Writing the self into being was more akin to participating in a conversation than it was an act of establishing a persistent online representation of the self, owing to the available technology at the time. Interaction was often structured around fantasy role-playing, but also took the form of spontaneous conversation. Users logged on and resumed playing as the persona they had previously created, or as a new persona, if they wished. One of the key

affordances of MUDs was the opportunity for identity play. As they tended to be text-based, users were able to easily role-play[35] in alternative identities:

> In other words, the disembodied and anonymous online environment makes it possible for people to reinvent themselves through the production of new identities. For example, in the online world, a man can pretend to be a woman, a nerd to be a star athlete, and an introvert to be an extrovert (Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008, p. 1818).

The custom of adopting a pseudonym together with the fact that users tended to gather on a more ad-hoc basis around shared interests rather than in line with existing social bonds (contrary to many online social encounters today) afforded users a significant degree of anonymity. This was further enhanced by the perceived disembodiment associated with the Internet prior to the early 2000s.

Writing the self into being in early online communities relied upon an 'architecture of belief'. Participation was dependent upon:

> the belief that your interlocutors possess the distinctive human identities which coalesce through and vivify the glowing letters scrolling down the computer screen, is itself built upon this form of fantastic autobiographical writing called the self-description (Nakamura, 2000, p. 713).

Users had to really think about who they were, who they wanted to be, and from this they wrote a self into being. Without physical referents, they were free to experiment outside the bounds of physicality if they so desired. For many users, creating an online persona wasn't just about the opportunity to play at being someone else, but also a chance for freedom from the natural body. Indeed, in some spaces, such as LambdaMOO, the description of physical characteristics that could be read as 'divisive issues' were actively discouraged. According to Nakamura:

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[35] Kendall is compelled to point out that not all MUDs were spaces for role-playing, giving the example of the BlueSky MUD, where it was expected that users would 'represent themselves much as they appear offline' (2002, p.44). Nor did all role-playing MUDs operate in the same way. She offers examples of role-playing MUDs based upon science fiction and fantasy, anthropomorphism, and popular media, but notes that just because these spaces existed, there was not necessarily a requirement for all users to constantly play as the character they adopted. 'Participants may understand the meanings of their online actions as "keyed" differently from everyday life (Goffman, 1974) and thus differentiate their role playing from their "true" selves' (Kendall, 2002, p. 43). This is similar to the attitude one must approach online sociality with today: not all spaces are homogenous and not everyone uses them in an identical manner. Social norms arise based upon practice, routine, and the expectations of participants, just as they do offline.

> Players who elect to describe themselves in racial terms, as Asian, African American, Latino, or other members of oppressed and marginalized minorities, are often seen as engaging in a form of hostile performance (2000, p. 172).

This could be seen as problematic, with online spaces being read as uniformly white, straight, and (probably) male. Alternatively, this assumption may be an error on the behalf of those who think in such normative terms. The push against writing the self as a minority was seen as an effort to limit the agency of those who saw the affordance of anonymity in cyberspace as a chance to 'co-opt the exotic and attach it to oneself' (Nakamura, 2000, p. 715) in the form of adopted, stereotyped racial personae. 'The appropriation of racial identity becomes a form of recreation', Nakamura writes (2000, p. 715). Role-playing racial minorities or members of marginalised cultures presents few of the challenges faced by those groups in everyday life, and certainly lacks the significant ongoing oppression that they face.

Painfully slow connection speeds, the absence of digital photography, and a lack of affordable data storage meant there were scant opportunities to prove one's identity by sharing photographs or videos, rendering the idea of virtual disembodiment not only plausible, but also perfectly reasonable. The tropes of corporeal disengagement that peppered early Internet theory made sense at the time, both because there appeared to be no alternative, and the alignment with 1980s post-modernist cyberpunk visions of the wired future. Nakamura argues:

> Since the "real" identities of the interlocutors at Lambda are unverifiable ... it can be said that everyone who participates is "passing", as it is impossible to tell if a character's description matches a player's physical characteristics ... descriptions of the self as a human-size pickle or pot-bellied pig are not uncommon (2000, p. 712).[36]

This wasn't just the case for LambdaMOO; it was the norm across the Internet. Being able to play as any body — human, animal, or an inanimate object — in any possible configuration, together with the custom of adopting pseudonyms, contributed in no small part to the perception that online interactions were divorced

[36] LambdaMOO is widely accepted as being 'the first, and most famous, social MUD' (Danet, 1998, p. 139) and has thus become the subject of many studies; see, for instance, Schiano (1999), Kendall (1998, 2002) and Turkle (1994).

from reality. There were few ways to verify identity, and the written self was fleeting in the synchronous, transient space of the MUD. The idea emerged that online interaction was, therefore, less meaningful than face-to-face interaction — a perception that to some extent still endures today.

This is a complicated issue. Users have been writing themselves into being for as long as computers have offered a communicative capacity (and much longer, as this chapter attests). The nature of this process has changed over time, but in essence, it has always been about projecting the idealised self. If this were not the aim, society would be chaotic and unkind, for people would act without any regard for neither their reputation nor the impact that their behaviour has on others. It makes sense that Internet users would wish to project the most accurate, most authentic version of the self. In reality, though, this "authentic self" needn't necessarily entirely reflect the physical self in appearance, personality, or demeanour. Yet, it often does; the online self is the offline self extended, idealised, and performed.

On the other hand, the Internet (particularly in the late twentieth century) provided unparalleled opportunities for identity play. According to Danet, 'in cyberspace, the typed text provides the mask' (1998, p. 129). Danet proposes that the 'textual masquerade' undertaken by participants in early online chat environments offered a chance for 'the performance of gender, textual cross-dressing, and gender-neutrality' (1998, p. 130); Kendall (1998) and Nakamura (2000, 2002) add race, disability and class to the list of physical traits that can be "left behind" when one goes online.[37] MUDs and chat programs (such as mIRC) offered what was really the first popular, large-scale opportunity to experiment with identity, largely free from consequence. The implications of being a man experimenting with female identities in a chat room are significantly less substantial than those he would face in real life, for instance, should he decide IRL to begin wearing a dress or using female pronouns.

[37] It is worth noting here that the process of "leaving behind" or ignoring physical identifiers in online interactions can have the effect of stereotyping or neutralising identities. For instance, Lisa Nakamura has discussed the propensity of online players in LambdaMOO, in choosing to play an Asian persona, tend to assume identities that are analogous to Orientalist renderings of Asianness in popular media. 'Asianness is co-opted as a "passing" fancy,' writes Nakamura, 'an identity-prosthesis which signifies sex, the exotic, passivity when female, and anachronistic dreams of combat in its male manifestation' (Nakamura, 2000). This sentiment is shared by Chesher, who has said that virtual reality (which could be said to include all kinds of online interaction, particularly at the time that he was writing) 'will tend to reinforce existing inequalities, and propagate already dominant ideologies' (1994, para. 29).

Reinvention (Turkle, 1995b, p. 23) was seen to be the ultimate affordance of the text-based communication platforms that emerged in the 1980s and dominated online social life until the turn of the century. Text chat 'combines written and oral features, as well as uniquely digital ones', Bechar-Israeli wrote. 'It legitimizes any form of expression ... This new, frontier-like medium fosters new forms of playfulness' (1995, pp. 132–133). The trope of the frontier was common: it conjured images of vast, unexplored landscapes of opportunity and freedom. By 'playing various identity games and experiencing different forms of behavior', users were able to push the boundaries of what it might mean to write the self into being, and indeed what it might mean to be human (Bechar-Israeli, 1995, pp. 132–133).

Personal home pages

Writing the self into being in text-based communities presented the chance for identity experimentation with few real-world consequences for the individual. The synchronous nature of chat meant that users could explore an identity or an assumed physicality for as long as desired without much in the way of persistent presence beyond the (virtual) walls of the MUD or IRC channel. The arrival of the web in the early 1990s changed this however, as users were able to do more than construct real-time personae for participation in chat environments. They could, for the first time, establish "homes" for themselves on the web in the form of personal home pages — a form of narrating the self that was at once exciting and complicated, changing users from consumers to producers of content: 'As both informative and expressive tools, personal home pages allow individuals to transcend from consumers of media content to media producers' (Dominick, 1999, p. 651). Personal home pages offered an entirely new way of writing the self into being. Most importantly, other than restructuring self-presentation, they challenged the notion of what it was to be a private being, as home pages were publicly viewable via the web. The relationship between privacy and self-presentation was symbiotic; the self was now not only written, but 'automatically published on a global scale' (Chandler, 1998, para. 1). This simple statement says much about the shifting nature of communication in the early 1990s: everyday people had, for the first time, an immense voice (Miller & Arnold, 2000, p. 74).

Perhaps the most tenacious effect of personal home pages was the way in which they redefined our understanding of public and private. The Internet expedited the encroachment of the public world into private life, but more importantly it projected private life into the public arena. Personal home pages were the next logical step in a long process of sociocultural ebb and flow as home life and communities changed, moving from communal, single-room living in rural settings, inwards to cities with increasing industrialisation, and back out to newly-formed suburbs as transportation and telecommunications progressed (Shapiro, 1998, pp. 277–282). The postal service and telephones, followed by radio and television, impacted upon the experience of everyday life as, little by little, people invited the public into their private homes (Shapiro, 1998, pp. 279–280). The Internet pushed the boundaries even further. 'On-line services,' writes Shapiro, 'pose the fascinating juxtaposition of vast public spaces intersecting with the private place of the home' (1998, p. 277).

The Internet's contribution to the disintegration of public and private became an essential element of many 1990s academic and media discussions. Seabrook's reflection on home pages is poignant:

> a home in the real world is, among other things, a way of keeping the world out... An on-line home, on the other hand, is a little hole you drill in the way of your real home to let the world in (Seabrook, 1995 in Chandler, 1998, para. 1).

Chandler expands upon Seabrook, reminding the reader that 'web pages which are "personal" are simultaneously public' (1998, para. 1). Referring to personal websites as "home pages" may have made it easy to forget that they were, indeed, public documents, so intertwined had the concept of home and privacy become over time (Shapiro, 1998, p. 275). The disruption of the public/private dichotomy that personal home pages engendered continues today, although it manifests in different ways, reflecting the fact that sharing and access have both undergone considerable change in the past fifteen years. Shapiro wrote in a time before the mass-use of social networking sites; these alone have had an immeasurable effect upon the way we present the self online, as I shall discuss in more detail in the next chapter.

Conclusion

This chapter aims not to serve as an exhaustive history of writing the self into being prior to the Internet, but rather to offer some insight into the practices of self-writing that could be said to have lead to the development of self-writing practices online. There seems to be a tendency to pit against each other traditional writing forms and computer mediated communications, but why? Fischer reminds us that computers, capable of 'writing regularly to one another independently of human mediation' (but, of course, just as commonly *with* human mediation; we impact upon them just as much as they do upon us), have marked the advent of 'significant future supplementations to writing's role, appearance, and technique' (2001, p. 298). The nature of writing is changing, both in terms of content and form and how it is used and interpreted, but it is not dying. Writing is always the product of technology, although we have a propensity to forget that when the "technology" at hand is not electronic.

The technologies we use to communicate today are rapidly becoming ubiquitous as connections and devices improve and barriers to access, such as cost and skill, decline, rendering them increasingly invisible and thus normalised. "Invisible" is, after all, 'how we like our technology to be'; without needing to focus on technology, 'we remain free to focus on the theory and practice of language' (Selfe, 1999, p. 413). The older technologies once used regularly to write the self into being (pens, paper, the postal service) have become visible because of the increasing invisibility of digital technologies. It is easy to be frustrated by the limitations — the materiality — of traditional writing in the context of instantaneous communication, as Hall attests:

> Indeed, materiality is at its most visible when the technology doesn't work or does not work well: the quill that blunts or breaks, the paper that tears or is pierced, the ink that has dried up, the fountain pen that splatters, the ball point pen that leaves blobs of waxy ink, the ruler whose edges have become chipped, the pencil lead that keeps breaking, the sharpener that will not sharpen cleanly, the propelling pencil that fails to propel, or the envelope that simply will not stick (2000, p. 85).

Adding to that list the Internet connection that is not fast enough, the mobile phone that is not charged, and the electricity that cuts out in the storm, and one realises that the opportunities and limitations offered by writing are a cross-generational and multi-technology phenomenon. Surely the continuation of the art of writing shouldn't be dependent upon the technologies that enable it, but in the word itself.

Investigating these traditional methods of self-writing reveals an obvious reason for the fascination (and indeed unease) with today's more public forms of writing the self into being — particularly that of blogs and posts to social networking sites. The hypomnemata were thought of as measured notes for later meditation, and therefore as something respectable; the author of a letter wrote with a specific recipient in mind; the diarist wrote for his or her eyes only (albeit with a voice that spoke to an imagined audience, most likely in another time). Online, though, writers often speak to no one — or everyone. Few can be exactly sure of who the audience is. There is no doubt that people like to write, for the reasons outlined in this chapter and more, but to write to an open audience still seems so unnatural that it is easy to interpret such blatantly open self-presentation as evidence of narcissism (for example, see Ong et al., 2011; Panek, Nardis, & Konrath, 2013).[38] Narcissism doubtless motivates some users, but a more realistic way to think about user behaviour is that it stems from a general desire for acceptance and the desire to be heard. It is no different, really, to an individual donning appropriate masks in face-to-face identity performance.

This chapter has argued that narrative identity and storytelling, as manifested through the act of writing the self into being, are common and essential elements of life. Tying together the three broad themes covered in this and the two chapters that preceded it (phenomenology, geography, and narrative identity), I turn to Farman's

[38] Interestingly, the second of these studies differentiated between the way that narcissistic tendencies manifest on Twitter and Facebook. 'Twitter appears to be used by college students who are high in narcissism as a kind of technologically augmented megaphone: a means of amplifying one's own perceived superiority to others', whilst 'adults seeking to convey this sense of superiority turn to Facebook instead of Twitter. Facebook's use by both college students and adults who are high in narcissism is more analogous to the use of a technologically enhanced mirror, reflecting a pre-occupation with one's own image, others' reactions to this image, and a desire to update the image as frequently as possible' (Panek, Nardis, & Konrath, 2013, p. 2010). Whilst the narcissism of SNS users is outside the scope of my research, it is interesting to note the depth and range of research taking place, primarily in psychology, that attempts to establish solid links between narcissism and online self-presentation.

assertion that storytelling is a device that binds together lived experience, communications, relationships, and the self:

> The act of storytelling is indeed an act of inscription. It is a writing of place, of identities, and of relationships. It is also true that the body's relationship to specific spaces is informed out of a relationship to the narratives about those spaces (Farman, 2012, p. 118).

Our narratives situate us in the physical and social worlds, and they give structure and meaning to both the banal and the chaotic experiences of everyday life. In later chapters, I will investigate location based social networks and in doing so will address the connection between space (and place), embodiment, and narrative identity, drawing upon the work already presented in the first three chapters of this thesis. Over the course of the next two chapters, however, I continue to explore concepts of identity, narrative, community, and place via an investigation of, firstly, audience-creator relationships and, followed by a discussion of how being "always online" is changing the way that we think about identity, locatedness, and what it means to be connected.

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Chapter Five

Performing identity, constructing place

Introduction

The previous chapter looked at the ways in which people have written themselves into being both historically in the form of hypomnemata, epistolary, diaries and, more recently, online. The way that we write the self into being has changed markedly since the days of chat rooms, MUDs, and personal home pages, and yet the process of writing the self into being online remains an important part of the communicative and identification processes. I proposed in Chapter 4 that we all write ourselves into being in some way, be it using written word or otherwise, and that storytelling is an intrinsic part of life and an innately human experience. It is through this storytelling process that we come to know ourselves: the written self offers the opportunity for reflexivity by facilitating distance — a 'long detour through objectification' (Ricoeur, 2008, p. 143 in de Vries, 2009, p. 18), as I mentioned previously, from the subjective self. By telling stories, we learn about our values and beliefs; we use stories as a way of making sense of the past as preparation for future encounters.

This chapter continues with the theme of writing the self into being by examining the process of writing the self and place into being online in the current context. Blogs provide the focal point of this chapter. Although there are many forms of online writing today, blogs continue to have salience. The rapid rise of social media has had few negative impacts upon blogging; indeed, it is common practice today for bloggers to distribute their identities (and their content) across numerous platforms; usually, a blog will be accompanied by a Twitter and Facebook account, as well as numerous other platforms. We are finding ever-new ways to come together and share our ideas, our identities, and our experiences. This chapter considers the role of interaction in the construction of self during computer-mediated communications, as well as how place and place identities are presented online. As discussed in chapters two and four, place is 'location made meaningful' (Cresswell, 2004, p. 7; Tuan, 1977). We construct place, and in turn are the product of our surroundings,

interactions, and experiences in the world. By looking at social networking sites and blogs, I will argue that the web can be a site of documentary place curation, and that this practice can tell the story of a place and the people who live there.

Beginning with an overview of Goffman's interactivity theory, which draws close parallels to symbolic interactionism, I then delve further into the role of audiences in the construction of identities, as introduced in Chapter 4. Communication is fundamentally interactive and phenomenological: by storytelling we create our audience and this interaction informs identity construction, again reflecting the co-constitutive nature of human experience. Internet audiences differ to traditional audiences, however, in their unprecedented access to authors. By investigating an American "healthy living" blog, *Eat Live Run,* I suggest that audiences can exert immense influence upon a blogger's writing and performance of self as the reciprocal relationship between bloggers and blog readers challenges to identity formation and expression of self for both parties. Following that, I discuss other forums for writing and performance of place identities online — social networking sites, particularly photosharing platforms — and the potential that these have as interactive, documentary, communicative space. Finally, I consider the role of the digital flâneur-as-curator, investigating the culture of collecting and the digital, being-in-the-world act of authoring of self and place as a part of identity formation.

'The self we would like to be':[39] Interaction and performance

Identity, as we now know, is informed by and emergent from lived experience, and at the core of this is interaction: we are the product of our surroundings, our encounters, and our undertakings, and we construct the world around us via these experiences. We know ourselves through our experiences in-the-world and our activities in space create meaningful place. From experiences come memories, which emerge as stories that we tell to ourselves and to others to make sense of the past and prepare for the future. Our interaction with the world is both symbolic and cyclical, something that reflects Goffman's theory of identity performance and impression

[39] Goffman, 1956, p. 30

management and the related sociological framework of symbolic interactionism[40]. Goffman proposed that we construct a self that is idealised: a version of the self that we would like to be, a self that is fluid and adapts as necessary in a given situation (1956, p. 44). He refers to this process of impression management and identity performance as wearing a "mask":

> It is rather a recognition of the fact that everyone is always and everywhere, more or less consciously, playing a role... It is in these roles that we know each other; it is in these roles that we know ourselves (Goffman, 1956, p. 30).

Goffman claims that we are all skilled performers, having practiced genuinely presenting the self in various situations (Goffman, 1956, p. 10). Identity performance facilitates awareness of self and the world.

Performance is an act of identity negotiation, as impression management (that is, deciding how to behave *and* how to appear around certain people and in particular settings) informs our sense of self which is, to return to another common trope of this thesis, a product of lived experience (Denzin, 1983, 2003; Ritzer, 1975; Waskul & Vannini, 2006). Our past experiences (and performances) inform those in our futures as:

> the self strives to convey an identity consistent with the expectations formed by the audience and within the situation, or stage, that frames the interaction. Self-ing occurs in the course of interaction via presentation of the self to selves projected by others. In order to navigate the social world, the self is called upon to collaborate with other selves (Robinson, 2007, p. 96).

The result of this collaboration is a set of behavioural expectations that each individual learns to adhere to in social situations. Identity performance — something intrinsic to being and, in this reading, not at all disingenuous, is the means by which people come to understand the world.

[40] Goffman is not considered to be a symbolic interactionist, despite the similarities between his work and that of symbolic interactionism. Stryker argues that, given the fact that 'Goffman's subject matter was face-to-face interaction occurring in natural settings; his data the conversation, the observed interplay that could take place in elevators, on the street, or anywhere else,' Goffman ought to be considered both a symbolic interactionist *and* a structural sociologist – the description he favoured for his work (1987, p. 88). Therefore, I don't find it incongruent to consult both Goffman and symbolic interactionism in this discussion.

Symbolic interactionism, first used by Blumer in 1937, developed the work of Mead (1934) and Cooley's earlier *Looking Glass Self* (1902). Symbolic interactionism regards human action as interpreting indicators in the physical world — places, objects, individuals, institutions, and categories of people, as well as the activities and experiences of these people, places, and objects in the daily life of the individual (Blumer, 1986, p. 2). Chapter two's discussion of phenomenology and that of place in Chapter 3 are both relevant here: one's perception and understanding of place is phenomenological, based upon individual and collective experience and memory within physical locations. Places are, by their very nature, interactive spaces. We perform versions of the self — wear *masks* — in the various places we inhabit, and our behavioural, interactive, and experiential memories influence the meaning that we ascribe to a particular place. This again reflects Cresswell and Tuan's place as 'location made meaningful' aphorism. Place identity arises from and is implicated in the location-based performance of self; we are, again, both product and author of the world and of our experiences within it. This theme will arise again later in this chapter and in those that follow.

Symbolic interactionism has similarities to Heidegger's being-in-the-world and Merleau-Ponty's treatment of the perceptual body and the physical world as co-constitutive. The specificity of each symbolic exchange informs the individual's understanding of a situation; lived experience is imperative in a symbolic interactionist approach to experience and identity construction. The framework stresses the importance of 'self, construction, interaction, and voluntarism' (Woods, 1992, p. 338) and 'is centrally concerned with how the self arises within the social process' (Woods, 1992, p. 341 citing Mead, 1934, pp. 7–8). Like phenomenology, symbolic interactionism treats the self as object and subject simultaneously: as the "I" — the active self, present only in the moment of action — and the "me" — the self as seen through the eyes of another (Woods, 1992, p. 346). The distinction here is significant: the symbolic interactionist "me" regulates self-control and indicates how an individual should operate within certain social situations (Woods, 1992, p. 347). This is the same as phenomenology's objective sense of self or narrative identity theory's distantiated past self, espousing the necessity of externalised, reflexive self-assessment.

The masks we wear are, are times, incongruous. For example, I have never had to wear my "daughter" mask at the same time as I have had to wear my "teacher" mask; if for some reason I had to do both — if my disparate worlds collided — there is a chance that my identity would be conflicted. However, that I would adapt my behaviour — referring back to past experiences — to accommodate both "masks" in the one situation, avoiding a conflict. Other performances of self are less easily adapted than this example, however. Giddens explains that individuals 'are sensitive to how they are seen by others, and use many forms of impression management to compel others to react to them in the ways they wish' (2001, p. 95), possessing a subconscious desire to adhere to social and cultural expectations. We understand that it is not appropriate to yell in a library or run naked in public because we have encountered these experiences before. Lived experience prepares us with the skills to manage our performance of self in social situations.[41]

The interaction-based performance of self is not without complications, particularly online. Online identities have been described as "fluid" (Pinch, 2010, p. 411), owing to:

> The fluidity and self-conscious platforms of performance (that) allow individuals and networks of users to play with aspects of their presentations of self, and the relationship of those online selves to others without inadvertently risking privacy (Pearson, 2009, para. 31).

While this was somewhat true in the past, it is less accurate today. Certainly, users can adapt their performance of self using impression management in order to present 'a self that is more socially desirable, better than their "real" offline identity' (Zhao *et al*, 2008, p. 1830) in online social spaces. In MUDs and other text-based, ephemeral online social spaces, users could easily present as someone (or something) other than their actual, material self. Today, however, opportunities for 'identity tourism' (Nakamura, 2002, pp. 31-60) are significantly fewer than they once were. The popularisation of social networking sites that emphasise the use of real names, such as Facebook and Google+, and the visual performance of "real" selves in the sharing and tagging of images challenges the notion that 'online performative space is deliberately playful' (Pearson, 2009, para. 31). Contemporary

[41] Social networking sites are one space wherein our distinct and separate selves are often subject to the colliding worlds problem. See DiMicco & Millen (2007).

online identity performance is less about experimentation than it is about the selective mediation, curation, and presentation of the self.

Interactionist theory has proven useful for interpreting mediated sociality as it is relatively easily applied to non face-to-face communication (see, for instance, Donath, 1998; Fernback, 2007; Graham, 1998; Pinch, 2010; Robinson, 2007; and Zhao, 2005). Impression management has taken on a new meaning in the context of today's Internet, however. Social networking sites, mobile media, and blogs lack the ephemerality of earlier online communication spaces. Identity is indexed by search engines and archived on blogs and profile pages: every interaction and experiment is accessible to the world long after the fact (boyd & Ellison, 2008, pp. 221-222; Helmond, 2010b, pp. 13-14, 19-21). Thinking back to Adams and Ihde, as discussed earlier in this thesis, technology extends the self far beyond the temporal and spatial bounds of one's physical being. The indexing and archiving of identity performance challenges our understanding of self and society. Goffman's sociology makes for an uncanny companion to modern-day web studies as it prompts us to reconcile our conscious, public performance of self online with the everyday, subconscious act that we engage in constantly as social creatures (Pinch, 2010, p. 411).

In the next section, I present a short review of an American healthy living blog named *Eat Live Run*. In this section, Goffman's interactivity theory was presented as a framework for understanding human interaction, both face-to-face and mediated by the Internet. The study of *Eat Live Run* will investigate what happens when a blogger no longer lives up to audience expectations — when a change in identity performance causes trust between blogger and audience to rupture. The performance of self relies heavily upon audience: the mask that each of us wears depends upon for whom we are performing, and in what context (Litt, 2012, p. 331). We perform identity to please an audience and to construct an ideal public self (Baumeister, 1982, p. 3); however, the needs of the audience and the performer may be at odds with one another, as is seen in the study that follows.

Performing the interactive self

Blogs are fertile grounds for identity construction. Bloggers have the freedom to express themselves however they like using the affordances of their chosen platform.[42] Despite this, the performance of self can be a complicated task for bloggers. The interaction between bloggers and audiences affects the way the self is realised, managed and performed. In Chapter 4, I posited that writing the self into being engenders reflexivity by distancing the writer from the subject on the page or screen. Examples abound of blogs as apparatuses for self-discovery. Blogs may offer a safe space wherein individuals (especially teens and young adults) can contemplate issues that they feel unable to explore in "real life", such as gender and sexuality (Huffaker & Calvert, 2006) as well as social and personal concerns (Bortree, 2005). Blogs often document new experiences, such as parenthood (Chen, 2013; Lopez, 2009; Morrison, 2011), a hobby or interest, such as food (Lynch, 2012; Watson, Morgan & Hemmington, 2008), fashion (Chittenden, 2010; Engholm & Hansen-Hansen, 2014; Rocamora, 2011), health (Buis & Carpenter, 2009; Miller, Pole & Bateman, 2011; Reisman, 2009), or learning, including education (Deng & Yuen, 2013; Killeavy & Moloney, 2010; Manfra & Lee, 2012; Sawmiller, 2010) and research (Bouwma-Gearhart & Bess, 2012; Chong, 2010; Luzon, 2013). Bloggers of all ages use the medium for self-expression, as a space for self-expression and to document personal growth, similar to the hypomnemata discussed earlier in this thesis (Blood, 2002; Herring *et al*, 2004).

Bloggers write themselves into being and engage in reflexive review of their narrated self. As is the case when writing letters and diaries, the audience is also written into being by the author. Cooley (1902) believed communication with an audience to be a fundamental human activity:

> It is doubtful whether it is possible to use language at all without thinking more or less distinctly of some one else, and certainly the things to which we give names and which have a large place in reflective

[42] Given the scope and limitations on space in this thesis, a thorough literature review of blogs will not be provided. The subject has been covered in a vast number of texts over the past decade; see, for instance Blood, 2002; Bruns, 2008; Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht, & Swartz, 2004a, 2004b; Nardi, Schiano, & Gumbrecht, 2004; Qian & Scott, 2007; Rettberg, 2008a, 2008b; Schiano, Nardi, Gumbrecht, & Swartz, 2004; Walker, 2000.

> thought are almost always those which are impressed upon us by our contact with other people.

Blogging is about relationships, with the blog itself, the stories one tells, and the audience. In imagining an audience, the writer envisions interaction and the communicative process as they tell their stories.[43] This audience may influence the content and longevity of the blog and the impression management behaviour of the blogger, especially in the case of measurable, rather than imagined, audiences. The blogger-audience relationship can be complicated, too, as writers hesitate to demonstrate a change in identity for fear of losing their audience and jeopardising the blog's success[44]. One such case is documented below.

Eat Live Run (http://eatliverun.com; hereafter *ELR*) was launched in 2007 as a "healthy living" blog (HLB). HLBs are most often authored by American women in their twenties and thirties who are 'self-appointed as exemplifying the promotion of healthy diets and nutrition'. They document a preoccupation with strenuous exercise and 'clean living' (Lynch, 2010, pp. 316–17), detailing the authors' marathons, triathlons, and gym workouts, promoting the consumption of local and/or organic food, often in the form of a vegetarian or vegan diet, with minimal alcohol consumption. Many healthy living bloggers have a history of eating disorders and ongoing struggles with food intolerances; a significant percentage of bloggers approach health holistically, discussing topics such as family and parenting, the use of sustainable and natural products in the home, interior design, and travel. HLB content is almost exclusively cheerful and positive in nature; pessimistic tone is incredibly infrequent and bloggers apologise to their readers if they publish a negative-sounding post. HLBs paint a picture of perfection, but the sanguine exterior hides a darker side. HLB authors and audiences (via comments) often admonish

[43] It is worth noting that not all blogs are strictly thematic; "personal" is a genre for a blog that encompasses a range of topics. It is also somewhat of a misnomer, as the vast majority of blogs are personal in some way, even if they are themed as something else (Lenhart & Fox, 2006, p. 9). However, Rettberg points out that the most popular blogs, as tracked by Technorati and listed in the Top 100 (http://technorati.com/blogs/top100/) tend to focus on a particular theme, such as technology, news, or celebrity (2008a, p. 134).

[44] There is no consistent marker of "success" in the blogosphere. Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht & Swartz note that the motivations for blogging vary, but range from self-expression to personal record keeping (Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht, et al., 2004a, 2004b). More recent work discusses with increasing frequency the reputation, professionalism, or "brand" of blogs and bloggers (for example, B. Park, Ahn, & Kim, 2010). The secret to a successful blog is also big business in the print world; searching Amazon for the words "successful blogging" reveals some five hundred titles dedicated to the subject.

themselves for not adhering to an exercise regime or eating plan. Healthy living bloggers have been accused of inadvertently promoting disordered behaviour due to their militant focus on "health" (Drummond, 2010; Lynch, 2010, 2012). Despite numerous healthy living bloggers "retiring" following health problems or as a result of excessive negative feedback from readers, the genre remains exceptionally popular.

Weber's success as a healthy living blogger afforded her a book deal (Weber, 2009c), free products and services (such as yoga classes and baby supplies), and all-expenses-paid vacations; in exchange, Weber posts reviews of said experiences. She is considered a professional blogger, earning an income from affiliate links and partnerships. In 2009, buoyed by the support of the sizeable *ELR* audience (exact figures are not available, but numerous analytics services suggest *ELR* receives in excess of ten thousand unique visits per day), Weber won a competition run by Californian winery Murphy-Goode. The competition saw Weber employed as a brand ambassador in California, and eventually lead to her moving from Florida to California (Weber, 2009b). Following this sea change, Weber gradually shed her healthy living blogger skin. Although she retained the *Eat Live Run* brand, the blog itself was restyled as a cooking blog with a strong focus on her Christian faith (Weber, 2013) and, recently, her experiences as a first time mother.

As *ELR* transformed from healthy living blog to cooking blog (complete with butter, cookies, and pasta) many long-term followers expressed sentiments of deception and abandonment. Weber was criticised for reneging upon her commitment to blogging about physical fitness and healthy eating. The audience's condemnation of *ELR*'s recasting signalled an apparent breakdown of trust. Weber was accused of being 'amazingly out of touch with her readers' (Shrug Bitch, 2012), an opinion often echoed amongst her frustrated audience on the "snark site" *Get Off My Internets!*[45] ("*GOMI*", http://getoffmyinternets.com). Despite having hinted at change over time

[45] *GOMI* is a "hate blog" commonly referred to as a "snark site". *GOMI*, according to the site's founder, 'focuses on commentary and giving people opportunities to discuss topics ranging from blogs, bloggers, the tech scene, and the online personalities of the day. With tens of thousands of interesting, intelligent participants from all over the world *GOMI* is a one of a kind place to gather and exchange opinions as well as interact via comments, forums and chat' (Wright, 2009). The tone of discussion amongst members ranges from encouraging to unsettling, with most demonstrating a degree of disdain for the bloggers they discuss.

by restating her food philosophy (Weber, 2010a)[46] and announcing that she had 'quit the gym and really, quit working out all together... Sometimes days go by and I'm too busy... and I'm totally cool with that' (Weber, 2010b), many readers felt they had not been given adequate warning of the impending change; one reader described the change as 'shockingly quick' (Krystina, 2012a), as though there ought to be more time for the audience to adjust to the impending change. Weber's change of focus ruptured the affective bond she had formed with much of her audience, who themselves subscribed to the tenets of HLB described previously. To them, Weber *was* her blog. Molm argues that online communities, like all networks, form on the basis of reciprocity, a 'highly important aspect of creating social capital through networks' that allows (in this case) bloggers and audiences to 'develop the trust and affective bonds that promote productive exchange relations' (Molm, 2010, pp. 126–127; see also Ammann, 2011, p. 27).

The balance of power in the blogger-audience relationship is complicated and constantly shifting. The author has control over the presentation of self, but audience reaction to that performance plays a significant part in determining the success of a blog. It has been argued that 'blogs create the audience, but the audience also creates the blog':

> Blogs... are a studied minuet between blogger and audience. Bloggers consider audience attention, feedback, and feelings as they write. While bloggers do not always judge their audiences correctly, and may inadvertently write inappropriate or injurious posts, consciousness of audience is central to the blogging experience (Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht, & Swartz, 2004a, pp. 224–225).

[46] This new 'food philosophy' — replete with claims that 'I think my blog is a healthy living blog BECAUSE I bake cookies with butter in them' and 'I choose to cook with simple ingredients that celebrate how food should *really* taste' (Weber, 2010a) — was a marked departure from the early days of her blog, where she meticulously photographed and recorded every low-calorie morsel of food that entered her mouth – including during the period immediately following the death of her brother, which she mourned publicly – if not somewhat robotically – on her blog (Weber, 2009a). The food philosophy of Jenna Weber in 2010 was significantly different to that of the girl who started the blog, and different to that of Jenna Weber in 2013. In a post from 2007, Weber justified her eating habits following a meal out with a friend. 'I'm pretty proud of myself because I def. could have eaten a lot more and feel stuffed right now, but instead I feel full, but not overstuffed,' she wrote. She ends the post with 'a note about dessert,' in which she reminds readers, 'dessert is fun to share and that way you eat less calories than ordering your own! Just don't hog the entire thing and keep the dessert small' (Weber, 2007). The change in tone, identified as lacking authenticity by some readers, was more likely the result of a blogger growing up in a very public forum, rather than anything sinister – a difficult experience, surely, for anyone who chooses to share their life online for an extended time.

However, because bloggers create their audience and invite feedback (in comments and on social media), these audiences are particularly powerful. Unlike many other media forms, blog audiences have real-time access to the person behind the screen. By leaving comments and contacting the blogger on Facebook, Twitter, and other networked platforms, they have a far greater change of building a rapport with their favourite blogger. The relationship goes beyond that of the writer and reader; blog audiences often come to have a vested interest in the life that is unfolding on the screen.

As previously claimed, storytelling life experiences in the form of internal, verbal, or written narratives is essential to identity construction. Audience members develop a sense of familiarity with the blogger and, often, other readers, as community emerges in the comments section and off-site on platforms like *GOMI* and Twitter, as observed by one *ELR* reader:

> People become connected to a blogger, even if they don't know them. They read about them and their lives and look forward to it because they feel like they're getting to know them. In a way, the blogger becomes a sort of friend. When that is suddenly missing, then the connection to that blogger is broken (Krystina, 2012b).

Audiences may also have a vested interest in a blog's direction if they have financially contributed to the blog in some way, such as by purchasing products from affiliate links, buying goods and services provided by the blogger, or — in the case of Weber and numerous others — purchasing her book. Additionally, she often appealed to her readers for donations to causes promoted via her blog. Readers may have a vested interest in a blog on a more personal level, too, as recognised by one reader, whose comment that she needed 'closure from the past Jenna' (S, 2012) read more like the pleas of a broken-hearted lover than a dejected blog reader.

In terms of identity performance, blogs are effective because the audiences really get the chance to *know* the author — or, at least, to know the version of the self that the author performs. The blogger-identity is always a construct, owing to the mediating effect of the screen; the fact that a blog has a potentially limitless audience means that the self as performed online is likely to be more curated and less 'natural' than the self that performs wearing a variety of masks in everyday life. Marwick and

boyd, studying identity construction and performance on Twitter, suggest that bloggers and social media users:

> must maintain equilibrium between a contextual social norm of personal authenticity that encourages information-sharing and phatic communication... with the need to keep information private, or at least concealed from certain audiences (2011, p. 124).

Thus the situation is complicated: the blogger may perform the self as they wish, but a dissatisfied audience won't return to read a blog they no longer enjoy. For bloggers who earn a living from their site, this is particularly undesirable. The (impossible) desire to maintain *authenticity* (Marwick & boyd, 2011, p. 124) can alienate — and, if the case of *ELR* is evidence, hurt — existing readers, limiting the blog author's agency.

Thus the audience often influences a blogger's presentation of self. The relationship between blogger and audience must be taken at face value, as when the audience reads too far in to the nature of a blog, cracks begin to appear, and the intent and trustworthiness of the blogger is questioned. This is comparable to Rabinowitz's theory as to the believability of fictional narratives:

> the narrative audience of Cinderella accepts the existence of fairy godmothers... A reader who refuses to pretend to so believe will see Cinderella as a neurotic, perhaps psychotic, young woman subject to hallucinations (1977, p. 129).

Similarly, audiences have to accept the totality of the blogger-subject as a whole representation of an individual. Both the individual and the audience must believe in the performance; if not, the audience begins to question the legitimacy of the identity presented on the blog. Problematically, in most cases the audience will only know one version of the blogger — the one on the screen.

Anyone who publishes personal narratives in public online spaces opens risks criticism from an (often silent) audience. As posts are archived and indexed, identity development and performance is complicated: individuals are restricted as to how much they can "move on" from previous incarnations of the self. Baumeister argues that the reluctance of individuals to present a version of self that temporarily or permanently deviates from the norm 'derives from self-presentation concerns'

fearing 'negative labels —such as "hypocrite," "liar," and "two-faced"' (Baumeister, 1982, p. 11). Although she had outgrown her healthy living blogger persona, Weber's decision to modify her performance within the space of the blog attracted criticism as Baumeister predicts, as evidenced in both comments on her blog and discussions taking place elsewhere on the web (such as *GOMI*). Azariah has approached this problem specifically with bloggers in mind, noting that:

> individuals use multiple discourses to reflect who they are, always keeping audience expectations in mind. The resulting narrative is heteroglossic and characterised by discursive tensions (2012, p. 65).

These 'discursive tensions' occur when the stability between the self that is presented, and the self that the audience perceives, become unbalanced, as in the case of Weber, whose audience still felt connected to a version of the self that had been superseded.

The interactive relationship between bloggers and audiences is thus complicated and challenging as much as it is advantageous. Telling stories to others can be cathartic, but a blogger who changes a story once it has already commenced may face criticism, despite the fact that blogs are evolving narratives of self (Carrington, 2009) and grow along with the author. Clearly, audiences are significant in terms of bloggers' (and, presumably, users of social media) construction and performance of self online. A further focus of this thesis is the ways in which place identity manifests online. Despite thorough searches, I was unable to uncover any evidence of an Australian blog having been the recipient of such vitriolic opposition as that of *Eat Live Run*. There has, no doubt, been dissent within particular sectors of the Australian blogosphere. For instance, following the 2013 Australian food bloggers conference, *Eat Drink Blog*,[47] there was an immense amount of discussion on blogs and Twitter about the ethics of accepting free meals in exchange for reviews.

Beyond blogs

There is an inherent risk in Internet research — perhaps more so than in other fields — that by the time a project of this scale nears completion, it may be irrelevant. The speed at which the Internet and its various technologies evolve means that staying on

[47] Not to be confused with the Perth food festival, *Eat Drink Perth*. *Eat Drink Blog* is hosted in different cities each year.

top of developments can fast render older work out-dated. Such was the case when writing this chapter. One of the first pieces of work written for this thesis, it was revealed just how far the Internet has progressed in the four years since. This chapter originated as one that investigated the relationship between audiences and bloggers; there was no mention of any other kind of social media, and it still assumed that readers (or audiences) of blogs were primarily content consumers, rather than content producers. The degree to which the two overlapped — a category of user originally labelled 'prosumers' more than forty years ago (Toffler, 1970), but revised in recent years to 'produsers' (Bruns, 2008) — was something I almost entirely overlooked.

Returning to this early piece after four years, it quickly became clear that a chapter on blog audiences was not going to suffice. The infiltration of social media into almost every aspect of daily life has, for one, completely changed the way that 'audiences' interact with bloggers. Additionally, most of the people who blog do so as one of many ways of communicating online — a fairly recent trend, given the abundance of options for social networking that have become available in the past decade. A blog is, these days, usually complemented by a linked Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Flickr, or Pinterest profile — or, as is becoming more and more common, all of these, and others too. Online identities rarely operate in isolation; Baym, for one, proposes that the self is becoming increasingly widgetized as we adopt and integrate more social media platforms, and what we ought to do is look for a way to manage these dispersed selves (Baym, 2007). Myriad opportunities exist for networked self-construction across a number of platforms — each consisting of differing networks, performances of self, and audiences.

Today, the act of writing oneself into being goes beyond written communication in its traditional sense – something that has never been quite so evident as it is currently. The simultaneous eruption of popularity of social network sites and smartphones can claim much of the responsibility for this phenomenon. The tools we have at our disposal add to the early practices of writing oneself into being online; boyd explains that this involves 'creating a profile and fleshing out the fields as an act of self-presentation' (2008, p. 121). This is echoed by Turkle, who notes that 'identity construction (is) recast in terms of profile production' (2011, p. 182). Users,

presented with a series of categories and a template for profile construction, must "fill in the gaps" and create a public profile, but the process of identity construction and performance is much more involved than just creating a profile. Indeed, opportunities for expressing the self within the framework of social network sites can be *limiting*, rather than liberating. The culture of contribution and sharing that has flourished over the past few years means that we have all appropriated the tools of creativity as apparatuses for creating, understanding, and performing the self.

Even more pertinent to this study than the question of *whom* you play when online is the question of *where* you play. Social platforms, particularly since the introduction of smartphones, have changed online communication by introducing a geographical dimension to computer-mediated being-in-the-world. Susan Sontag once wrote, 'To collect photographs is to collect the world' (1977, p. 174). Photographs are powerful: they document place, recording an individual as being in a particular space and time. Van House and Davis note that 'a major use of photos of all kinds is for sharing' (2005, p. 3). We have greater access to both cameras (as a feature of smartphones) and photographic images (via social network services) than ever before, and together they quite literally change the way that we see the world, and ourselves. It has been claimed that an ongoing mission of Internet research is the question of 'how to locate and interpret online space and real world places... and also how those dynamics relate to the real world and our communities' (Tsou & Leitner, 2013, p. 55). Although I find the use of 'real world' here problematic (it seems to operate as a binary opposite to 'online'), the message is nonetheless poignant: there are very real and very significant intersections between "online" and "offline" life, and social sharing is a way in which they are experienced and documented.

'Social media — represented by online games, social networking sites, and virtual communities — are critical contexts for socialization and identification experiences,' writes Code (2013, p. 41). Indeed, in one of the earliest pieces on online social networks, Donath and boyd identify social networking sites as:

> on-line environments in which people create a self-descriptive profile and then make links to other people they know on the site, creating a network of personal connections, Participants in social networking sites are usually identified by their real names and often include photographs;

> their network of connections is displayed as an integral piece of their self-presentation (2004, p. 73).

The past decade of Internet use has focused heavily upon the undertaking of establishing an online identity and using it to connect with others. The web has truly become social, and as we move away from out computers and onto handheld, Internet-enabled devices, everyday life has become more networked and more connected, too. Wessels has discussed the transition to 'nonymous' identity performance — that is, 'that users are no longer anonymous and are identified and accountable in online communication' (2012, p. 1254), echoing the work of Zhao, Grasmuck and Martin, mentioned previously. Social networking sites prompted the move towards presenting the "real self" in online communication, as usernames and avatars progressively abandoned in favour of real names and smartphone photos, tagged and uploaded to a myriad of platforms in acts of what Burgess has called 'vernacular creativity' (Burgess, 2010). The identity play that characterised early Internet use feels almost sociopathic today, amidst seemingly constant warnings of identity theft and the requirement of persona validation. If you are not willing to play yourself, it seems, you are not allowed to play at all.[48]

'Previously few people would have carried a camera with them,' writes Goggin. 'Now, they find themselves with a camera at their disposal more often and in a wide variety of circumstances' (2006, p. 146). Goggin here points to a significant shift in the experience of daily life, one mediated by the presence of mobile devices. An Internet-enabled smartphone, characterised as social tool, camera, media centre, and (lastly) telephone, is 'a "prosthetic" object' — 'part of its owner' (Riviere, 2005, p. 172).[49] These tools are everywhere that we are, and accordingly, they document every thing that we do. The self is written not only in words, but in images and metadata, too. The true reason why users are so compelled to share the minutiae of everyday life is still unclear, but I for one am inclined to think that the answer is really very simple: because they can. Indeed, that we have such devices and technologies as smartphones and photosharing platforms affords an awareness of 'the more fleeting and unexpected moments of surprise, beauty and adoration in the

[48] There are still some exceptions to the rule of self-disclosure, however. Reddit and 4chan come to mind (see, for example, Bernstein et al. (2011) and Knuttila (2011)).
[49] The discussion of smartphones as prosthesis will be carried on in greater detail in chapter six.

everyday' (Okabe & Ito, 2006, p. 99). Things that would have gone unnoticed are now seen as potential photographic subjects — artefacts that can be used to present identity and to connect with others. Goggin refers to the practice of photographing the everyday as 'a demotic turn in photography' (2006, p. 147). In a similar vein, Burgess offers the term 'vernacular creativity' to explain the '"ordinary" or everyday creative practice that accounts for both continuity and change and avoids creating a nostalgic desire for the recuperation of an authentic folk culture' (Burgess, 2010, p. 116). For Burgess, sites like Flickr (and, presumably, Instagram — the smartphone-native photosharing application that was launched after Burgess's publication) are indicative of a trend of 'broader cultural communication and creative practice' (Burgess, 2010, pp. 122–123). Contributions to social platforms – whether in the form of textual narratives, images, metadata, or something else entirely – all play a part in writing the self into being, *and* writing place into being.

Finally, the "snack"-style offerings that we make to social platforms offer the opportunity to turn the lens back on ourselves. Echoing phenomenology, Walker notes that, according to traditional photographic theory, 'the conventional gaze of the camera' results in 'the person photographed [being] objectified' — a situation that is evidently more complicated when the photographer is the photographed (2005, p. 187). Walker contemplates this process:

> Obviously, when I gaze enraptured at the image of my own legs walking on the tiny screen on my digital camera I am not discovering my own self for the first time. Perhaps, though, I am discovering a version of my digital self that I had not before been acquainted with (Walker, 2005, p. 188).

Indeed, smartphone photography (and smartphones in general, owing to their location-independent nature) endows reflexivity of self, place, and being-in-the-world. Goggin writes:

> Cell phone cameras not only inhabit a changed place (the here of the everyday), but also rearticulate photography in terms of the temporal — something familiar from the reception of digital photography... Camera phones are perceived to offer a sense of immediacy, lessening the time elapsed between the time when the photo was taken and the time it is reviewed (2006, p. 149).

This can be extended to talk about the relationship between smartphones, memories, and the experience of everyday life more generally. The always-on nature of smartphones (always on the user, always on the Internet) changes our perspective of the everyday: we experience being-in-the-world through the mediating lens of a portable, augmenting, value-adding screen.

The located flâneur-as-author

In a 2012 *New York Times* article, Internet critic Evgeny Morozov claimed that the 'real-time Web' had killed the *cyberflâneur*. One can almost hear Virilio reverberating in Morozov's claim that the speed and compartmentalisation of today's Internet is such that 'hardly anyone "surfs" the Web anymore' (2012, para. 11). 'Transcending its original playful identity', writes Morozov, 'it's no longer a place for strolling — it's a place for getting things done' (2012, para. 11). For Morozov, everything about the present-day web — Google's takeover of search and knowledge, the 'frictionless sharing' behind Facebook's commitment to social *everything*, and mobile apps that compartmentalise the digital experience — contradicts the ethos of the *flâneur*, whose image was so readily co-opted by early Internet researchers as the poster child of the new communications medium. However, I propose that today's Internet user — whether called a *cyberflâneur* or not — embodies many of the traits of the flâneur, as they travel not just through digital space but also through *physical* space interacting, curating, and writing the informational and material worlds around them.

The flâneur emerged on the streets of Paris in the wake of the nineteenth century French Revolution. Wandering the streets, the flâneur was 'seen largely as a social type... an urban stroller, observer, even idler' (Frisby, 1994, pp. 85–86). The flâneur was an 'historical figure' commonly seen in Parisian arcades and grand boulevards from the 1830s (Frisby, 1994, p. 85). A more recent study of Benjamin's flâneur in the digital context notes a number of poignant connections between the technological advancements of the nineteenth century and the practice of digital flânerie today. Lindgren notes that Benjamin:

> wanted to put forth that the forms of mediated reproduction that were emerging in the era of modern industrialism had an impact on the ways

> in which people (organised) their perception of the world around them (2007, para. 1).

Traditionally, the flâneur possessed 'a reflective state of mind in observing the city' (Apostol *et al*, 2012, p. 22). They were urban explorers; phenomenologically, the flâneur only existed because he had the space of the city in which to exist. Lindgren also proposes that the flâneur might be a useful device through which to understand the 'self-reflexive subjectivities of the internet in the twenty-first century' (2007, para. 2).[50] The flâneur can be reimagined in current context as one who uses and consumes the lives of others online, in much the same matter that the traditional flâneur had done two centuries ago.

The flâneur 'moved through the crowds with a high sense of invisibility — he was in effect masked and enjoyed the masquerade of being incognito' (Featherstone, 1998, p. 913). Featherstone has suggested that the digital flâneur needn't always be a male figure, unlike the traditional character: 'flânerie (once offered predominantly to men) was now offered as a pleasure to anyone — of any race, ethnicity or gender — who had the capacity to consume' (Featherstone, 1998, p. 915). In the case of digital media, it is other users and the online lives they create for themselves that individuals are consuming, rather than products or services. Wolff (1985) introduced the term flâneuse to describe the female equivalent (see also Wilson, 1991). More recently, Berry (2010) explored the idea of the fashion blogger as digital flâneuse. The flâneur endeavoured to be inconspicuous. They blended into the background of the streets, ever watchful but wishing not to be seen. It's an apt metaphor for the social media consumer today — although this is changing as participation rises. Yet, there is still some protection from being seen:

> The anonymity of the crowd provides an asylum for the person on the margins of society... the flâneur is the modern hero; his experience... is that of a freedom to move about the city, observing and being observed, but never interacting with others (Wolff, 1985, p. 40).

The metaphor of the flâneur/flâneuse also applies fittingly those who create content for social media. Berry notes that the flâneur 'continues to be a useful analytical tool with which to consider the practices of observation, discriminatory taste,

[50] I explore this idea further in Stark, 2006.

consumption and production' (Berry, 2010, para. 3). Indeed, social media users over many platforms often become the arbiters of taste and trend; one need only read a handful of food blogs around the time of a new restaurant opening to determine this.

Despite being inconspicuous, 'the construct of flânerie presumes a social relationship between the reflective stroller and other users of urban space' (Apostol *et al*, 2012, p. 23). This notion of interaction as essential to being has recurred throughout this thesis, firstly in the discussion of phenomenology in Chapter 2, then in terms of the co-constitutive relationship between people and places in Chapter 3, and in the relationship between writers and audiences in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5, interaction was explored in terms of presence and proximity as enabled by locative media. Most recently, the previous section in this chapter dealt with symbolic interactionism and Goffman's identity performance. Evidently, interaction — with others, objects, and places — can be seen as crucial to the lived experience of human beings.

Berry draws on Frisby (1994) in her reading of the flâneur and flânerie and interprets Frisby's construction of flânerie as:

> not just a form of observation but a method for reading and constructing the city where the flâneur is also a producer of illustrative texts, narratives and social reports (Berry, 2010, para. 4).

Berry goes on to discuss the way in which the Internet has restructured the physical city into a virtual, global one. Instead of doing so from across the tree-lined boulevard, flânerie occurs via the Internet. Everyone is within reach. Featherstone writes:

> the electronic flâneur is capable of great mobility...with the electronic media of a networked world, instantaneous connections are possible which render physical spatial differences irrelevant (1998, p. 921).

Certainly, distance is irrelevant in the digital context — although as will be discussed in later chapters, place and location are still intrinsic to identity and network affiliation. What has changed, perhaps, is the way that we see ourselves within the world, as access and information do away with distance. An even more modern reading of Frisby, Berry, and Featherstone could see the flâneur as the author (and subject) of today's hybrid spaces. The cyberflâneur is not merely one who enjoys the world through the computer screen, taking virtual journeys (using

Google Earth and the like) down far away streets. Instead, they are authoring the city through their experiences. As we move through urban spaces, we build the city. Locative media documents our paths and practices whilst digitally augmenting the physical city. Information is layered upon material reality, and the flâneur is implicated in the construction of such.

Indeed, there is an important connection between the flâneur and place, the significance of which becomes evident in the next few chapters. The flâneur was very much about being in the world. He was a product of his city, as were the people and sites he visited, and his identification with the city was what made him. The city looks different now, but it is still important. The flâneur observes in different ways, but he is still there. Berry sees this shift as evidence that the boundaries of space have simply 'expanded beyond the actual boundaries of a particular city, to include the limitlessness of a networked society linked globally and virtually through the internet' (2010, para. 4). Similarly, McGarrigle writes:

> Whereas the flâneur was always embedded in the city, the flâneries of the cyberflâneur were, by definition, immaterial. Mobile networks have made it possible for the cyberflâneur to operate in the real spaces of the city; however, a flânerie which eschews the development of new approaches which evade the ubiquitous surveillance and data mining of companies such as Google and Facebook can never be anonymous... (2013, p. 3).

One area in which the flâneur could be said to flourish in the twenty-first century is that of photo sharing websites. Berry cites Sontag, who called photography as 'an extension of the eye of the middle-class flâneur' (Berry, 2010, para. 23 citing Sontag, 1977, p. 55). More so than ever, users are sharing images of their own lives via sites such as Instagram and Flickr (and, by extension, any number of sites that these images are synced to, automatically or manually, including Facebook, Twitter, and blogs). Berry writes:

> The camera is a tool of flânerie, especially in relation to street photography where the dynamics of the city are captured in a snapshot immediacy providing the viewer with the photographer's mediated view of the metropolis.

For Berry, the photographer is capturing fleeting moments that result from the 'gaze of desire' (Berry, 2010, para. 24; see also Ebner, 2008). Interestingly, while there is a degree of performance about the nature of many of the photographs captured and displayed on social media. For whilst the flâneur was attracted to the casual, yet purposeful, observation of the everyday, users (particularly bloggers and Instagrammers) will often pose a photograph in order to have it appear candid.

In the digital age, belonging, citizenship, and identity are all re-imagined inside a world that has markedly different notions of boundaries – between places, between public and private, and between the roles that are played out in different environments. The Parisian arcades may be re-imagined in the form of virtual cities: the interfaces are the new arcades, and the various spaces that users inhabit online — blogs, Facebook profiles, Instagram accounts — make up the social spaces of the metropolis. In the context of the Internet, the flâneur is a cyber citizen, roaming the "streets" of cyberspace. Turning again to Featherstone:

> To talk of the flâneur, therefore, raises a number of questions about the nature of contemporary public life. It raises questions about the aesthetic of public spaces and the possibilities that these same spaces hold for citizenship (1998, p. 220).

Featherstone's observation is pertinent to the experience of citizenship, identity, belonging, and public versus private life in the early twenty first century. The way that we live our lives has changed and continues to change; the notion of "public life" has taken on an entirely different meaning as people begin to live their private lives in public spaces. The metaphor of the flâneur has never been so fitting as it is when used to describe today's citizenry and participation.

Opportunities abound for acts of flânerie in the present time. Any individual who has spent hours wandering down the digital rabbit hole that is Wikipedia, YouTube, or Pinterest can attest to the fact that we do still explore without a purpose, challenging Mozorov's claim that we no longer surf the Net. Apostol *et al* (2012, p. 22) add that tools such as Google Street view 'have made it possible to enjoy from afar a vicarious walk through such eminent urban spaces as Piazza della Signoria in Florence or Champs-Elysees in Paris'. We are constantly consuming — the lives of others, as detailed in the discussion of *Eat, Live, Run* earlier in this chapter;

creativity, in the form of music, videos, and photographs shared to social networking sites; and products, sold to us via persistent and targeted advertising, as well as on the profiles of other users — but at the same time we are observing and chronicling modern life.

McGarrigle, in a similar vein to Morozov, wishes to do away with the flâneur model. Again, the impossibility of full anonymity is seen to problematise the flâneur metaphor in the current context:

> Rather than pass unnoticed, the cyberflâneur amasses a considerable data shadow from the ceaseless checking-in, from merely being connected... To be digital involves leaving these traces; thus, the flâneur's treasured anonymity and ability to watch unnoticed are replaced, for the cyberflâneur, with not only a lack of privacy, but also the commercialization of his data trace as user-generated content' (2013, p. 3).

Morozov believes that our seemingly endless access to information is 'the very stance that is killing cyberflânerie: the whole point of the flâneur's wanderings is that he does not know what he cares about' (2012, para. 25). He may have a point: shared content, search algorithms, and "killer apps" may indeed make it easier than ever to go with the flow and not have to make choices. However, Morozov assumes that all users are the same, subscribing contently to the status quo. The Internet, however, remains a rich and generous fount of knowledge, experience, and wonder for many. It may be harder than ever to remain anonymous online, but if there is one thing the Internet users of today have learned, it is that it is often worth sacrificing anonymity for something in return. The next section in this chapter will extend this discussion by detailing some of the flâneur-like practices undertaken by today's web users, who act as curators and documentarians of their space and time.

Conclusion

'The ubiquity of image making spawned by the camera-phone has enabled social media to function to some extent as "socialized media": inviting alternative, image-driven forms of social interaction (Fallon, 2014, p. 59). Internet users are now seen as engaged in the act of networking, rather than subdividing, elements of the self. As

Helmond suggests, identities aren't merely transferred verbatim from offline to online spaces (2010b, p. 15). The user is 'dispersed across the network and there is a reconfiguration of the user' over the various platforms each individual uses (Helmond, 2010b, p. 17). Relating back to my earlier discussion of the role that audiences play in the construction of user identity, Helmond points out that 'identity is not only constructed or performed by the users themselves; some aspects are determined by others' (Helmond, 2010b, p. 18).

> As people communicate through social media, they become more aware of themselves relative to visible and imagined audiences and more aware of the larger publics to which they belong and which they seek to create (Baym & boyd, 2012, p. 325).

We are increasingly the product of our digital surroundings. Participation in social networks contributes to a sense that the self is both curated (via the collection of digital artefacts) and an amalgam of the distributed self and others.

This chapter has demonstrated the complexity of the relationships between authors and audiences in an era when the audience has an immense amount of access to — and investment in — the lives of those who create the content they consume. Indeed, audiences more and more commonly *are* content creators themselves, shifting the balance of power between the two parties. More so than with other kinds of content, consumers of digital content have a vested interest not only in their position *as* consumers, but also as participants in diverse, shared networks. These networks manifest as networks of the self, and as part of distributed networks involving other people and numerous platforms. As it becomes more common for Internet users to distribute their identity across a number of spaces, they are starting to take on the role of 'curator'. Curators, like the nineteenth century flâneur, are social historians of sorts, documenting the everyday in order to tell stories (consciously or not) about personal and collective identities in the current online context. The cyberflâneur, 'supplement(ing) the online experience with their imagination and memory of the real place', documents urban life as they 'stroll in time in the archival world of images and narratives sustained by cyberspace's unlimited storage capabilities' (Apostol *et al*, 2012, p. 26). In the following chapter, I discuss in more detail location based information, and the implications of a shift towards an "always online" culture. Smartphones, as they become ever more pervasive an element of

Western life, offer individuals unparalleled opportunities for social curation, by tracking, informing, and connecting users to both near and distant others, wherever they may be.

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Chapter Six

Being, Online

Introduction

By the beginning of 2010, the Internet had become part of everyday life. Between blogs, social networking sites, and location-aware, Internet-enabled smartphones we are now always online. The mobile screen is part of everyday life, with users embedded in a perpetual loop of sharing and receiving data. Indeed, location is all: Google Maps ensures that it is almost impossible to become lost while geotagged photographs, tweets, status updates, check-ins, and reviews implicate users in the writing of places. Accordingly, the use of location-based services and locative data transforms narration of the self. With such a focus upon location, the notion of a digital frontier devoid of spatial referents now lacks all salience. Importantly, location now informs the development of "online" relationships and networks as users increasingly look to nearby others for community.

Given the rapid and extensive rise of smartphones and tablets, it is necessary to critically (re-)evaluate the role of place, space, embodiment, and identity in the context of a permanently connected world. We are in the midst of an info-spatial revolution, one wherein the network is re-routed via mobile devices into our everyday lives. Being online — indeed, being *always* online — has become part of our lived experience. "Cyberspace", if we were to use this out-dated term today, could be characterised by the fusion of networked information and corporeal experience. Networked information adds value to the physical environment, augmenting and enhancing the world we live in; 'the spaces we move through and the digital information we interact with have merged' (Frith, 2012, p. 132), taking the form of smartphone-facilitated hybrid space.

Of particular interest is the changing role of the body. Almost two decades ago, Dery spoke of an idea endemic to 1990s digital culture theory—'body loathing, a combination of mistrust and contempt for the cumbersome flesh that accounts for the drag coefficient in technological environments' (Dery, 1996, p. 234). Over the

course of the past few decades, the way the body is imagined has shifted: from being a complicated and somewhat unwelcome encumbrance without a home on the Internet, to being imagined in terms of posthuman and cyborg possibilities, to being an ever-present and hyper-visible element of online interaction. With the advent of social media and smartphones, the body found a place online in the profile pictures and photo sharing habits that, along with smartphones, gave rise to the phenomenon of selfies; through check-ins, geotags, and GPS data that locate people in places; and in the sense that being online is today a much more embodied experience now than it ever was before.

This thesis seeks to investigate how place influences Internet users' construction of self, and how this manifests in the content they produce and the relationships they form online with proximate others. This chapter builds on the analyses of place, narrative, and identity construction that were the focus of earlier chapters, linking the theoretical and practical exploration of networked, located identity in this thesis. It begins by returning to phenomenology in a discussion of located communication followed by a study of digital dualism that, with reference to embodiment and lived experience, is used to contrast pre-mobile Internet communications with today's mobile, located Internet use. This discussion will set up the rest of the chapter as a comparative study between the pre-2000 conceptualisation of cyberspace and the hybrid space we experience today. This discussion of bodies and disembodiment will act as a gateway for discussing Internet users as mobile and located, reflecting the work in chapters two and three about the co-constitutive roles of the body and space. With the development of 'always online' culture, the mobile phone is becoming the ultimate digital prosthesis. This chapter paves the way for discussing location-based social networks (specifically those that emerge around Perth-based blogs and online social networks) in chapters six and seven. (Almost) ubiquitous access, coupled with Internet-enabled mobile devices, has impacted upon the way that embodiment and location are implicated in Internet use, with consequences for presence, identity, community, and belonging. Modern communication technologies provide unprecedented corporeal freedom, but it's not in the way it was once imagined: today, it is freedom from being fixed in place and the freedom of mobility.

Locating phenomenology

Place plays an incontrovertible role in the way that many Internet users construct a sense of self, as seen in the content published on blogs and social platforms and in the relationships they form with other users who share their physical location. Approaching this problem phenomenologically, mobile communication devices both embed us in the world as we become part of space via the discussion of local places, geotagging and other forms of locative identification, and invite us to construct that world through the content we create. Communication technologies facilitate what Adams (2005) calls *extensibility* and Ihde (2011, p. 110) refers to as the ability to go beyond the physical limits of the self. They give us greater access to the world — to *being-in-the-world* — and thus foster participation in the ongoing construction of self and place. At the crux of this phenomenological exploration of communication spaces is the notion of presence.

'For a quarter of a century', writes Virilio, '"trajectography" — tracking — has effectively replaced "geography". From now on there is a path independent of *any locality* and especially of any *localization*' (1997, p. 129). As discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis, cyberspace — akin to 'extraplanetary emancipation' for Virilio — challenged the experience of being situated, located, and spatial, resulting in a 'loss of reality' (1997, p. 130). Digital communication, according to Virilio,

> globally undermines all "presence" and promotes a "telepresence" without consistency and, more particularly, without a true spatial position, since the remote interaction of a being at once absent and acting (teleacting) defines the very notion of being there. At the heart of this virtual space... cyberspace looms up like a transfer accident in substantial reality. Suddenly, what gets accidentally damaged is not the substance, the materiality of the tangible world, it is the whole of its constitution (1997, p. 131).

For Virilio, "cyberspace" — a condition providing only a sort of insubstantial, grotesque *co-presence* — is mutually exclusive with the located and embodied presence at the centre of phenomenology. Cyberspace, 'more easily controlled than concrete reality', represents the triumph of time over space; all that is left, according

to Virilio, is ‘a *phantom limb*, a virtual presence perceived as an integral part of the mutilated body’ (1997, p. 66).

Virilio’s rhetoric was not out of place in the context for its time. Late 1990s Internet communication *was* marred by the fact that users, in a way, could only privilege one ‘reality’ at a time — virtual or actual — indicating ‘a split between activity and interactivity, presence and telepresence, existence and tele-existence’ (Virilio, 1997, p. 44). Access was granted primarily via desktop computers, themselves ‘chained’ (if only metaphorically) to the desks upon which they sat and the rooms in which they were located. It was not feasible (nor realistic) to carry a personal computer through the streets or to take it out with you to dinner or when travelling. Such devices certainly couldn’t work without a power source and WiFi had not yet been popularised. Additionally, the Internet was decidedly text-based in 1997. It was exceptionally easy to create an existence for oneself online that did not mirror the “reality” of one’s offline life, much more so than it is today. Numerous factors contributed to this, including fewer persistent spaces in which users operated (chats and forums dominated long before websites, blogs, and social networking platforms took hold) and the fact that the Internet was not yet a pervasive communications medium used simultaneously for work, socialising, and education. Going online really did feel like divorcing oneself from “reality” as it was commonly perceived.

Whilst Virilio’s anxiety over the state of a human existence increasingly marked by a ‘split’ between the virtual and the real was, one must concede, somewhat plausible in the 1990s, it is no longer so. As discussed in Chapter 2, phenomenology was long seen to be at odds with Internet communications because there was no significant opportunity for phenomenological awareness to incubate online; that is, when one considers the nature of Internet communications in the 1990s and well into the 2000s, it is easy to see why the possibility of online lived experience could be challenged. Given the nature of technological developments over the past decade, however, there is no reason that phenomenology ought not be discussed in the context of Internet communications, particularly in terms of the influence that locative media has upon reframing presence.

A re-evaluation of absence and presence to fit the context of ubiquitous, mobile Internet-enabled communications challenges what it means to be together. We are now familiar with the experience of being present in multiple spaces at once, as well as with the notion that 'presence' demands differing levels of commitment and attentiveness. Mayfield used the term 'continuous partial presence' (2007, para. 2) to describe Twitter, referring to the ephemerality and informality of interaction via the platform, as well as the fact that most messages are glanced at, more so than read, by the user. Whilst Mayfield's less than positive perception of Twitter echoes that which often reverberates in popular discussions of social media, the notion of *continuous partial presence* is nonetheless a helpful one. Individuals contribute snippets of the self throughout the day across a variety of platforms and we — the users — lap them up. For Helmond (2007), *continuous partial presence* is part of a 'perceived freshness fetish': the apparent obsession with creating and consuming new content, particularly on platforms such as Twitter and blogs, that has come to characterise digital content over the past decade.

Continuous partial presence is about creating and consuming the content found in the ever-streaming river of social media, but it is also (more importantly) about the cumulative effect of these activities, an idea that I will also consider in Chapter 6. Today's Internet users — their practices and the places they occupy while connected — contrast strikingly with those of a decade or more ago. Most significant is the widespread practice of leaving a trace of oneself online. Whilst in the 1990s, much communication occurred in chat rooms and on forums, with personal home pages being less favoured, today a piece of the self always remains online. 'Even if someone does not post on a particular day', writes Murthy, 'they feel an aura of other users through the feed of microblog posts on their PCs' (2013, p. 39). The self that performs on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Foursquare, blogs, and numerous other online spaces is always online, always at least partially co-present, and always contactable, such is the nature of asynchronous online communication (Ebner & Schiefner, 2008; Helmond, 2007, pp. 13–15; Murthy, 2011). Later in this chapter, I will investigate the influence that mobile Internet technologies have had upon the way that we divide our time and attention in the current time.

In chapters three and four, I raised Adams' idea that 'our physical movements through communities... have brought us "here" to this virtual encounter by many routes, and these routes have left tracks on all of us' (2005, p. 3). This quote, invoking the corporeal essence of identity, is essential to understanding the notion that experience is always embodied and located. We bear the marks of our history: they inform our physical and social senses of self. This is an idea that has been explored by Connor in a somewhat different context; he argued that our skin bears the 'tracks' of our inner-world, declaring 'the skin is always written; it is legendary' (2004, pp. 50–51). Both claims resonate an idea at the core of my research, in line with phenomenology and symbolic interactionism: human beings are the sum of their physical surroundings and draw their own sense of self from interactions with other subjects and objects within this world (Meltzer, 1972). We are the product of *being-in-the-world* and, thanks to today's Internet, we share the artefacts gathered via lived experience in the form of photographs, blog posts, likes, recommendations, and tweets, effectively writing the physical world as we do so.

We see evidence of this today more conspicuously than ever before. Mobile media allows location-independent access to information and (through locative media) constantly situates each of us in the physical and digital worlds concurrently. We occupy multiple spaces and times at once:

> Mobile technologies have transformed the categories of synchronous "presence" and asynchronous "absence" into simply a social proprioception of "continual co-presence"... Thus, simply by being tethered to the device, we are engaging in a sensory-inscription of continual co-presence that does not require the modes of immediacy typically attached to the practices of synchronous communication (Farman, 2012, p. 108).

This notion will be discussed throughout this chapter, acknowledging that being online now means giving consideration to the geographies and phenomenologies of communication and co-presence. As participants (and, indeed, authors) in this perpetually evolving, increasingly intelligent, and multimodal network, the relationships that we have with each other and with the technologies that allow access to the network confront us with new rules. We must rethink presence, relationships, identity, participation, and privacy. The co-dependency that we have

with the network and those who use it is changing the way that we think about ourselves, each other, and what it means to be human in the twenty first century.

Online/offline: The former dualities of being connected

When I began this project in early 2008, I didn't own a smartphone or a tablet. I accessed the Internet using the laptop I kept at home (its age and tendency to shut down without warning rendering it useless as a portable device) or the desktop computer I had on campus. That computer was, obviously, in a fixed position; to use it I would have to drive to Curtin University, go to the office I shared with eleven other students, and sit at my desk, itself located in the back corner of a room accessed under a set of stairs. Being online meant *physically* being in one place — I couldn't access the Internet from just anywhere. "Going online" was then very much a *process*, in that it was something that I had to actively do. From communicating with friends and family, to doing research in cafes, to looking for directions, my extensibility — my presence — was limited by technology. I had to commit to being in one place at a time at the mercy of either my home or university Internet connection. Although a long way from the static-filled, bleeping notes of a dial-up modem connecting — the sound that had defined my teenage years — the Internet, for all its global connectivity, still lacked ubiquity 2008 due to the fact that access was not yet truly mobile.

That rigidity and limited connectivity seems archaic today. As I look around the room in which I work, I can see a smartphone and a tablet, a laptop, a desktop computer, and three external hard drives with a total of six terabytes of cloud-synced storage space, all connected to each other — and to the devices of the people I live with — via a high-speed wireless local area network. If I find myself out of WiFi range, a mobile data pack allows me to access the Internet on my smartphone or tablet or, by tethering from one of these devices, my laptop. I am always online, and like many of my generation — one of the last to grow up offline — I'm forgetting how to live disconnected. A world without GPS, social recommendations and reviews, access to social networks, real-time physical world information, a web browser, and the instantaneous ability to speak to people across the globe seems likes a distant memory.

The Internet has become such an intrinsic part of everyday life that to be without access for any significant amount of time is, at best, incredibly inconvenient and, at worst, anxiety inducing.[51] Usage has become so widespread that a number of nations, including Estonia and Finland, have codified Internet access as a universal human right; the government of New Zealand has informally done similar (Penney, 2011, pp. 14 & 42). Regarded as an essential, cross-generational, multifaceted and multi-use medium, the Internet is used for communication, entertainment, business, and information retrieval; we have grown accustomed to always being online. Bodies and places, depicted as visual and locative media, are conspicuous elements of today's Internet, and the spaces and traits of the "virtual" and the "real" are considered as symbiotic. In a post-digital dualism world, the Internet is widely regarded an extension of the "real" world, not a distinct (or inferior) other. However, this was not always the case: the cyberpunk and cyborg future-fantasies depicted in film, literature, and academic scholarship during the late twentieth century largely occurred in a placeless, bodiless abyss. Cyberspace — the digital realm within the networked computers that we came to spend progressively more time on — promised a life unencumbered by physicality (as discussed in Chapter 1).

The well-worn description of cyberspace as a 'consensual hallucination' Gibson, 1984, p. 12) was so tantalising because it seemed to epitomise the ultimate freedom that digital technology promised: if not the opportunity to live digitally, then at least the chance to play out fantasies of digital disembodiment. In the introduction to this thesis, I outlined some of the complexities of early digital culture theory, much of which framed corporeality as redundant in the context of globalised communication technologies. Of course, not every theorist interpreted disembodied cyberspace as reality, or even desirable. "Disembodied" by the presence of the screen (effectively shielding users from one another's gaze), users could experiment with identity and

[51] Although it lies outside of the scope of my research, numerous studies have been conducted by researchers from a range of backgrounds, including psychology, medicine, and the social sciences, to determine whether Internet dependency does exist, and the degree to which such a dependency impacts upon the physical and mental health of the addict. Yellowlees & Marks' 2007 paper 'Problematic Internet Use or Internet Addiction?' reviews a significant amount of literature on the subject, and is such a useful resource for contemplating this issue. One must question whether Internet addiction would be interpreted in quite the same way today as it was in 2007. It may only be that six years have passed, but the general increase in use, the mode of use, and the normalisation of online communication has been significant in that time.

alternative text-bodies due to the lack of visual cues to provide evidence of the users physical body. It was often cast as a utopian ideal, 'the great cultural mediator' that could potentially eradicate 'the differences that have divided and segregated human beings' (Gunkel, 1998, p. 111).

Without the ability to see others' physical presence, interaction could supposedly be stripped back to its communicative, temporal core, free from the prejudices humans exercise upon one another based upon physical markers of identity. This is complicated, however, by an 'obvious and prominent fact' (Turner, 1984, p. 1): we are *always*, phenomenologically, physically, and psychically, in-and-of our bodies. Turner's work reflects Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology: the body is the site of experience, knowledge, and reflexivity, and it is a part of us all. No one can escape the reality of the body, for it informs every action; indeed, 'our "bodily-being-in-the-world" provides the basis for understanding culture and experience' (Csordas, 1990, p. 43). By 'constructing the Internet as a virtual — and therefore less real — realm', we are 'neglecting the material context in which technology operates' (Gies, 2008, p. 313).

Phenomenology privileges the embodied self as enabling lived experience, but during the 1980s and 1990s the mediating gaze of technology that early phenomenology sought to defray became an everyday reality as 'the role of information machines in everyday life' began to influence every aspect of being (Poster, 2007, p. 173). While phenomenology privileged the body above all, postmodernism saw humanity 'bit by digital bit... becoming alienated from our increasingly irrelevant bodies' (Dery, 1996, p. 234) as the rapid development of communication technologies challenged the primacy of the human body and devalued lived experience. At the same time, the meaning of 'space' was being challenged in everything from the work of Baudrillard to *The Matrix*; a 'weakening sense of the "real world"' was becoming 'necessary for the containment of the emerging virtual space' (Gordon, 2007, p. 891). Cyberspace — placeless, deterritorialized, disembodied — combined with global flows of information was cause for unease as new technologies challenged individuals personally, socially, and culturally. Baudrillard's claim that 'the map...precedes the territory'

(Baudrillard, 1998, p. 166) was, Gordon suggests, indicative of 'the anxieties associated with the new technology' (Gordon, 2007, p. 891). He writes:

> The map, or the simulation of the territory, is more important than the territory itself. When subjects engage with spaces, they engage only with its simulation; and the real eventually loses all distinction (Gordon, 2007, p. 891).

Postmodernism marked a 'shift from real to hyperreal', where 'representation gives way to simulation' (Nunes, 1995). 'Mapping that disembodied space' (Gordon, 2007, p. 891) contributed to the dualisms that for decades would characterise writing about the Internet: one could be offline (in the real world) or online (in an un-real, virtual representation of the real world), but never both at the same time, and one could *especially* not be online in the real world.

Cyberspace was seen as incongruous with embodied, spatial, lived experience in many ways, yet it was precisely *because* of the body that cyberspace could never harbour disembodied beings. The physical body would continually pull the user back to reality by reminding them to attend to their bodily needs: to eat, sleep, stretch sore muscles, and so on (Stone, 2000, p. 525). Cyberspace was depicted as "virtual" partly because the banality of everyday physicality did not exist in that environment; there's no need to feed a text-body, after all.[52] While online, users could conceivably operate outside the bounds of the body. They were free to be any-body or no-body, and to go any-where or no-where: there was no requirement to write a human body into being in order to interact with others, and cyberspace wasn't concerned with adhering to national borders. However, for all its promises of being "global", the Internet was, up until the mid-2000s, very much restricted by geography. The reality was that users were engaging in these global interactions from a fixed location: at a desk, in front of a computer, tethered to a modem that was plugged into an outlet in the wall. The possibility of being 'always online' was limited by the available technology. These digital dualisms characteristic of early Internet-related discourse

[52] To clarify, here I am referring to the examples provided in Chapter 1: although users were often depicted as disembodied from their physical self when they were online, many chose to "reconstruct" a body in the form of textual descriptions, particularly in MUDs and other chat-based realms. Users could choose to reconstruct themselves online in the form of a human body, an animal, or whatever they desired.

have, in recent years, been greatly alleviated as mobile technology has changed the definition of what it means to be "located".

There was once a distinct difference between being online and being offline. Going online used to mean sitting at a computer in a room; it was very much location-dependent and limiting. There was little opportunity for human-computer interaction that involved the body, beyond using the fingers to type and eyes to read. At the screen, you were online; when you logged off and walked away, that experience ended. In the past decade, that has changed. The dualist rhetoric of online/offline, disembodied/corporeal, and virtual/real has (mostly) disappeared from the pages of mainstream media and academic publications. Almost twenty years ago, Balsamo claimed that technology prompted the need to think about 'the human body as a boundary figure belonging simultaneously to at least two *incompatible* systems of meaning: the 'organic/natural' and the 'technological/cultural' (1995, p. 215; emphasis added). Now, there is nothing at all 'incompatible' about these categories: the organic (human) melds with the technological (Internet and Internet-enabled devices) and the cultural, social, and spatial every day.

The earlier conceptualisation of the Internet as virtual (and "virtual" as not-real) was, to some extent, the result of the fact that nobody had come up with a good way to project the body online. Impeded by slow connections and limited storage space, text-based self-expression had to suffice; with it came the freedom to describe the body however one wished. As I discussed in Chapter 2, the phenomenological body is the key figure in lived experience; it is our site of perception and action, and the lens through which we know the world. We are constructed as part of space, just as our bodies construct space through their presence. To not have that referent online challenged the perception of that experience. Digital disembodiment was a plausible reaction to the frustration inherent to the restrictiveness of access. Before broadband and WiFi, the fact that you had to sit at a computer and listen to the tone of your computer dialling in to the network suggested that you were actively connecting to *something else*, an other-worldly data system. Further, as dial-up connections occupied the telephone line, you could not make or receive calls whilst online; every time you connected to the Internet, you were *disconnecting* from the "real world". Most likely physically alone, you stared into a computer monitor that became your

window to the "virtual" world, but also the door to the material world that closed behind you.

The process that was once involved in going online made it easier to think of cyberspace as virtual and distinct from the real world of the everyday. As de Souza e Silva and Sutko attest, it was this process of connection/disconnection that facilitated an understanding of data as virtual and everything else as real. However, such comparisons were not new, having been experienced with earlier communication technologies, including the telephone, once thought to disembody users and virtualise communications (Killmeier, 2009, p. 42; Rieger, 2004, p. 2). This dichotomy came to characterise a decade of online social research:

> (Early) discussions about cyberspace and the Internet distinguished between the virtual and the 'real' world, resulting in a "conceptualization of the Internet and digital information as essentially disconnected from physical spaces (Richardson & Wilken, 2012, p. 184 quoting de Souza e Silva & Sutko, 2011, p. 25).

The physical isolation that one experienced prior to going online was met on the other side of the screen by continuous textual chatter from people scattered across the globe. On their side, they were doing exactly the same thing: sitting alone, staring into screens that became their windows into the virtual world.

Perhaps most significant change to the way we use the Internet today resides in the way physicality is experienced as part of Internet-enabled communications. No longer do we have to sit at a computer, in a room, only to be returned from disembodied, placeless, virtual cyberspace to everyday reality by the needs of the body. Instead, smartphones and other mobile Internet devices mean that we can access the Internet from almost anywhere. Young and Whitty write:

> In pursuing Descartes' abstracted mind into cyberspace, we have learned not only that the intimate relation between mind and body is maintained and not transcended but, moreover, that it is fundamental to meaningful communication, even in a world where embodiment appears, on the surface at least, to be less apparent. The more we try to disengage with the body, the more its importance is revealed to us (2010, p. 224).

Dualisms that posit the Internet as something apart from reality are no longer useful. The portability and pervasiveness of smartphones and other devices offer a way of being online and mobile. Internet access and face-to-face interaction can be simultaneous. As such,

> Users do not perceive physical and digital spaces as separate entities and do not have the feeling of "entering" the Internet or being immersed in digital spaces, as was generally the case when one needed to sit down in front of a computer screen and dial a connection (de Souza e Silva, 2006, p. 263).

The following section will explore mobile and locative media in more detail, investigating the transition towards a world where access is ubiquitous and immersive.

Going mobile

Digital, hand-held, internet-enabled mobile devices have irrevocably changed the way we communicate and interact, and have done so in an extremely short time. Mobile phones have developed rapidly from being a device for making location-independent phone calls to tools so powerful that they supplement almost every aspect of daily life. This hints at the significant impact that mobile phones have had on culture and society. The advent of smartphones that were not only intuitive but (relatively) affordable has made a marked impact upon social life. Users have constant access to the Internet from anywhere they like; mobile Internet is as location-independent as making a phone call. The distinction between online and offline has been eradicated by the mobility of access afforded by mobile phones. While this thesis does not specifically deal with mobile media in any significant detail it is crucial, given the focus upon place and the relationship between bodies, spaces, communication, and interaction, to discuss the influence of Internet- and GPS-enabled mobile phones have had in recent years.

Our conceptualisation of interaction, embodiment, place, and identity is constantly evolving as smartphones become more and more ubiquitous and complementary to everyday life. In just a couple of years, smartphones undid years of theory about the incompatibility of the body and the Internet by enabling the visibility of the body in

computer-mediated communications. The primacy of the body is such that when we communicate using smartphones and make use of location-based services, we always practice that which we have learned offline — how to be embodied, how to interact (Farman, 2012, p. 23). They allow us to interact in news ways with our surroundings and each other; in doing so, we continue develop a sense of self and understanding of the world (Farman, 2012, pp. 23-24; Crawford, 2008, p. 81).

Mobile devices and locative media are forcing us to redefine concepts such as presence, proximity, access, and togetherness (Richardson & Wilken, 2012, p. 184), as we – the users, a label from which few can escape – input and extract data in an exchange of information from the network that overlays the physical infrastructure of the spaces we inhabit. Importantly, they reify the status of the body: as we use mobile Internet devices, we receive information about our physical surroundings. As we move through space, we add to the information that we (and others) receive. This reflects Mauss' claim that the body 'is simultaneously both the original object upon which the work of culture is carried out, and the original tool with which that work is carried out' (Csordas, 1990, p. 11, citing Mauss, 1934). Mobile technologies *need* mobility, bodies, and space in order to be useful. Increasingly, we must also 'conceive of our devices as absolutely integral to the very foundation of embodied space in the digital age' (Farman, 2012, p. 46).

The concurrent rise of smartphones and social networking sites (SNS) ushered in a new appreciation for what it means to be embodied and located as the former divide between 'virtual' and 'real' and 'material' and 'cyber' space is reconceptualised as hybrid space. The notion of the (dis)embodied user debated in early Internet research discussed elsewhere in this thesis contrasts strikingly with the embodied, experiential user in age of smartphones. Frith writes:

> By bringing the searchability of the internet into the information contained in physical places, hybrid spaces afford new ways of organising the filtering experience, transforming the physical city into a database city of sorts, ready to be reordered and personalised (2012, p. 145).

The digitally disembodied has no need for place, maintaining the incompatibility of technology and embodied, lived experience. However, as I have argued, the body is

always present. Phenomenologically, the body is the site of perception, the point from which all lived experience and understanding emanates. Just as 'each living body *is* space and *has* its space', it also 'produces itself in space and it also produces that space' (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 170).

We are in and of space, and our lived experiences in space produce place. Internet communication has always been embodied and spatial; now, it is even more so, and more visibly than ever before. As Richardson & Wilken write, smartphones:

> clearly antagonize any notion of a disembodied telepresence that is seemingly endemic to digital screen media, as we are frequently on-the-move, on-the-street and purposefully situated in local spaces and places when engaged in mobile phone use (2012, p. 184).

Over the past few years, Internet-enabled mobile phones have an immeasurable influence upon Internet use. Networked information about location — in the form of social network access, mapping tools such as Google Maps, and augmented reality, location based social networks (Foursquare, for example) — has become increasingly embedded in the practices of everyday life.

Location-based social networks

'Communications,' writes Adams, 'are integral to place; place without communication is not place' (2009, p. 168). The consequences of this idea for the construction of place and place identity are profound. Human activity is essential to the formation of place: it implicates the idea of 'location made meaningful', repeated throughout this thesis, and the phenomenological, symbolic interactionist interpretation of embodied humans beings as the site of experience. Bodies, as discussed in chapters two and three, create space and are created by space, and to be human is to tell the stories of experience to the self (as memories) and other (as narratives). Place, communication, and the self are thus intertwined and co-dependent. Mobile and locative media have infiltrated everyday life to the extent that 'users do not perceive physical and digital spaces as separate entities' (de Souza e Silva, 2006, p. 263); the use of mobile media 'demonstrates an intimate relationship between the production of space and the bodies inhabiting those spaces' (Farman, 2012, p. 4).

As discussed in the previous section, Internet-enabled, GPS-aware mobile devices have changed the way that we think about Internet communications. They have also impacted upon the way that we conduct ourselves as embodied beings, located in and of space, and the role that we play in writing and being written by the physical and informational environments in which lived experience occurs. Goggin claims that:

> a confluence of two important shifts — from desktop to mobile computing, and from individual to social software — encouraged development of applications that made possible informal contact mong people in the same proximity... capitalizing on serendipity (2010, p. 144).

We now see a range of communication tools that place people in the physical world whilst forging networks of information and people via digital technologies; this is hybrid space. Our movement through space is digitally located in the form of geotags and check-ins, and these movements tell stories about individuals, communities, and societies. Communication technologies have always '(provided) people with opportunities to envision and re-envision the contours of the self as an occupant of a place' (Adams, 2009, p. 168); now it is easier than ever to share that with others, and to use locative media created by others to shape our future paths.

Locative media takes many forms: geotagged photographs shared to services such as Instagram and Flickr; location-based social networks that require users to 'check in' to the places they visit (such as Foursquare); to location-based mobile games, such as Ingress; and location-based services, including the ubiquitous Google Maps, and many more beyond the scope of this project. Because of the rapid uptake and pervasiveness of locative media and location-based services, 'the ways in which place and location are mapped and overlaid with the electronic, emotional and social are changing' (Hjorth, 2012, p. 239). More specifically, location-based social networks are 'mobile applications that enable people to form social networks and share their locations with friends' (Frith, 2013, p. 248). Accessed using Internet-enabled mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets, LBSN users "add value" to the places they go by checking in, sharing photographs, reviewing services (such as restaurants, salons, and shops). In doing so, users publicly share information with

either a “closed”, articulated “friends” list or with a public user base. This information contributes, along with the information shared on other sites, to the writing of an ongoing narrative of self. As I have discussed elsewhere in this chapter, the line between online and offline has, all in measurable sense, ceased to exist; location-based services are further evidence that increasingly we see ‘the digital and the physical as interconnected rather than separate’ (de Souza e Silva, 2008, p. 250). Some locative media, such as the location-based social network platform Foursquare, rely upon users ‘checking in’ to the places they visit. ‘By informing their social network of their location as they move about their everyday lives’, writes Farman (2012, p. 57), ‘users of locative social media are relying on the fact that location says something about their identity’.

Location-based services are used for many purposes. Richardson and Wilken identify ‘the possibility of proximity with familiar others’ (2012, p. 192) as a reason to use locative media. Colombo *et al* (2012, p. 217) see the use of location-based services — especially those that allow a user to check-in, but also relating to location-relevant content (a blog post about an experience in a particular place) and geotagged photographs shared on platforms such as Instagram and Flickr — as creating a ‘spatio-temporal record’ of their activity ‘to keep track of the places they have been to and when’ (Colombo *et al*, 2012, p. 217). In the latter case, locative media has at the potential to act as hypomnemata — a record of past activities and experiences that may be used to jog the memory in future, (usually) shared with innumerable others via online social platforms. This reflects Lazzarato’s claim that ‘every “memory” is... an anticipation of the future, an action’, where ‘the accumulation of the past takes place in function not of “what is” but of “what will be”’ (2007, p. 96). Further to this, while locative media has made it easier than ever to keep track of where we have been, the documentation of having been somewhere — particularly when that documentation is accompanied by input such as a review or rating (on a service like Urbanspoon, for instance) — implicates the user in writing place and affecting others’ future mobilities, too.

Locative media has ‘blurred the barrier between the physical and the virtual world’, as mobile applications ‘augment people’s experiences in real places through relevant geo-tagged information from the Internet’ (Bilandzic & Foth, 2009, p. 66), as:

> locative media creates a digital layer on top of the physical world affording new practices for social interaction that would not be possible otherwise; these affordances have caused a social translucence of physical space, hence transformed it into a translucent hybrid space (Bilandzic & Foth, 2012, p. 67).

Locative media makes the world better. It does so by adding value to the everyday, and by allowing us to engage not simply with ideas and with each other, but with the cities and landscapes we live in. Bilandzic and Foth continue:

> While the mobile phone tends to shift its user's attention from the immediate spatial environment to the mobile display...embodied artefacts are part of the physical infrastructure of space; they are visible and accessible to everyone, thus have the potential to enrich the collective situated experience of people in a place (2012, p. 68).

This description corroborates that which has already been discussed in this thesis: the intertwined relationship between embodiment, technology, and place speaks to phenomenology and the significance of experience, and of the ongoing renegotiation of the boundaries between self and world.

The themes of each chapter in this thesis — phenomenology, place, narrative identity, and interaction theory — converge as critical elements of LBS. However, as I shall attest as I investigate services such as Instagram and Urbanspoon, this does not always mean using a dedicated LBSN to "check in". As Chapter 7 will detail, the term "location-based social networks" can be extended to include social networks that emerge based upon shared proximity/location — in this case, a local food blogging network — rather. This reflects de Souza e Silva and Frith's claim that users of LBS 'write' the spaces they use:

> By writing a location-based blog post, publishing reviews about locations, or participating in an LBMG, people are able to collectively construct locations in ways that were not possible before (2013, p. 40).

Importantly, this act of writing places also both reflects and facilitates a writing of the self, an act of *being-in-the-world*. Foursquare and applications of its ilk deal with a very specific kind of location-based social networking practice: active checking in. However, location manifests in other ways, including through the use of locative media (such as geotagged images on Instagram), on social recommendation services

such as Urbanspoon, in games (such as Ingress), and in the content of blogs, which are unlikely to be geotagged or contain geotagged content, but which nonetheless serve as a space around which location-based social networks emerge, as readers recognise familiar locations and artefacts (such as restaurant names, the names of local personalities, or colloquial language distinct to or referring to local places).

Conclusion

> *The interference of the mobile device serves these locative stories in positioning the user at the nexus of the individual and the community while simultaneously involving both audiences in the process of signifying place. This process of capturing history and involving readers in the process of enacting that history in a site-specific way is a common theme that has run through locative narrative projects since their inception (Farman, 2012, p. 123).*

Nunes, in a critique of Baudrillard's hyperreality concept, asked whether the:

> Internet, rather than presenting a simulation of totality, might provide a space of play. Rather than pursuing ends through this technology, one might instead turn oneself over to the drift and derive of "cyberspace" (1995, para. 36).

I argue that the Internet certainly does 'provide a space of play', but it is so much more than that. Locative media has facilitated the gamification of everyday life via platforms like Foursquare, but it has also re-placed and re-embodied human experience, rendering it both material and informational at once. Dreams of cyberspace promising disembodiment and immortality weaved their way through fiction and theory throughout the final decades of the twentieth century. Milne notes that 'along with the desire to escape the human body, disembodiment involved a desire to eclipse the material technology of communication' (2010, p. 29). The location-independence of smartphones has addressed many of the challenges (imagined or otherwise) that corporeality dealt to communications. The ability to access the Internet from anywhere potentially offers a degree of freedom that the early Internet, tied as it was to desktop computers and telephone ports, could not. In

terms of access, we are now experiencing unprecedented freedom of mobility. The body no longer holds the user back: it is the conduit for experience.

In the past decade, technology has developed in such a way that we don't have to give ourselves over to the disembodied, dis-placed cybernetic existence depicted in popular conceptualisations of the Internet. Instead, technology increasingly works with and for our bodies; this is especially true of mobile phones, as they enable location-independent access and facilitate an 'always online' existence. By removing the fixedness and routine of connecting and disconnecting, mobile phones (as well as other portable devices, including tablets and laptops, that allow for a similar experience due to more widespread access in general) have contributed to the eradication of dualisms, including real/virtual, natural/technological, and offline/offline. It is possible that, to some degree, the online/offline dualism was symptomatic of semantics. As pioneers in the field of Internet studies, many researchers seemed to struggle with defining and explaining computer mediated communication. A good example of this is the claim from Rheingold, who asserted 'people in virtual communities do just about everything we do in real life, but we leave our bodies behind' (2000, p. xvii). Rheingold, intending to legitimise online community, in fact informed the virtual/real dualism that persists in some form today. who later changed his mind about the place of the body online, was intending to legitimise online community in his seminal text *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*. Instead, the above quote epitomised popular notions of the relationship between bodies and technology: one of incompatibility, which in turn informed the virtual/real dualism.

If "cyberspace" exists today, it is a space that it very much real, combining data and spatiality to provide rich amounts of information about the world in which we live. Discussing new media art that incorporates technology and the body, White suggests that:

> Theories of folded, connected, and expanded corporeality, in which the body and embodiment connect with and through networks, provide a different model of new media engagement than ideas about leaving the body behind (2009, p. 613).

It is my suggestion that White's claim applies not only to art, but also to the experience of the everyday. New technologies of access and communication are providing us with new ways to navigate social life. The pervasive internet, in the early twenty first century, complements day-to-day life as data is mapped onto physical space and data is retrieved from and sent to the network, augmenting reality by feeding information to us about our physical surrounds. The embodied, lived experiences of human subjects have the potential to be more meaningful in the context of this information-materiality symbiosis. The self is located at the intersection of embodied experience, society, place, and technology. Smartphones and other Internet-enabled mobile devices are ushering in a new appreciation for what it means to be embodied, located, and connected, all at once. 'As mobile technologies have developed, their links with, focus on, and reliance on place have only deepened', write Wilken and Goggin. They continue:

> The pervasiveness of place and its plurality of forms means that it allows no hold; its ubiquity and diffuseness is what makes place most important as it informs and shapes lived existence. Thus, place can be understood as all-pervasive in the way that it informs and shapes everyday lived experience — including how it is filtered and experienced via the use of mobile media technologies' (2012b, p. 6).

The "cyberspace" of the twenty first century is, so far, one of social connections, locatedness, and semantic data feedback. It depends upon a symbiotic relationship between the user and their machines, in which the network thrives due to the information that users contribute and that which they glean from (proximate) others.

One of the most interesting areas in which location-based social networks form is on blogs. Unlike other location-based services that geotag content (for instance, Instagram and Twitter) or require users to check in (Foursquare), the location of a blog isn't always obvious and determining it may require some work on the part of the reader. Here, readers have to rely on their ability to analyse content, searching for signs such as recognisable place names (such as cities), location names (such as restaurants), people (such as other bloggers or individuals the reader knows personally), and local colloquia (for example, "Cott" or "Vic Park", well-known pseudonyms for the Perth suburbs of Cottesloe and Victoria Park) that give away the location of a blogger. This information can be found in the blog content, the name of

the site, in tags and descriptions (such as captions), in the 'about' page, and/or in a blog roll posted to the site. The next chapter, in bringing together the overarching concepts of phenomenology, place, narrative identities, and interaction theory discussed in this thesis, investigates the manifestation of place identities and location-based social networks within Perth's food blogging scene. I contend therein that locative media and location-based services are today so pervasive, with evidence to suggest that users of social platforms are, more than ever, reaching out to others who share their physical location. The Internet gives us unfathomable reach and yet we are spending more time than ever before turning the lens in on our own world.

Chapter Seven

Locating place networks

Introduction

This thesis has worked to establish place and embodied experience as critical sites of identity formation and performance. It has looked at geography, place identity, and the notion that our lived experiences inform the construction of self. It has also considered how different forms of communication and technologies mediate, augment, and shape the emergent sense of self as a product of located interaction and communication. In this chapter, I draw upon the themes outlined in earlier chapters in discussing two topics very close to my heart — food and my city — as I explore the relationship between place, embodiment, community, and identity. Importantly, this chapter seeks to look at how Internet users write physical space and how their interactive, located experiences inform their sense of self and sense of place. In examining the way that place factors into and influences the process of writing the self into being, I propose that shared-proximity online networks, articulated via blog rolls, comments, conversations, and followerships, as well as through common discussion points about places and lived experiences, are engaged in at the phenomenological, interactive process of *being-in-the-world*. By writing about located, embodied, lived experiences — such as dining and attending events — bloggers write both themselves and place into being, and in turn are written into being as products of the places, cultures, and ideals they create.

The practice of consuming, documenting, narrating, and sharing embodied, located, and lived experiences is integral to this thesis and as such food blogs are the focus of this chapter owing to a number of factors. Firstly, eating and drinking are *incredibly* embodied and located experiences; we must eat to live, and the access to food depends upon the condition of our physicality (in terms of natural geographies, economics, politics, and much more). Secondly, food blogs often comprise a rich tapestry of written, photography, maps, hyperlinks and metadata, and other forms of narrative, each of which contributes not only to a story about food but also about place, self, community, and being. Finally, because food is located and embodied,

food blogs present a great opportunity to explore the relationship between self and place as it is encountered and enacted online, and to examine the degree to which we tend to seek out others who share our proximity online, as we identify with their experiences and use them as inspiration for constructing our own experiences and sense of self (and, as a result, using these experiences to write the world in which we live into being — something particularly true of food blogs, geotagged content on platforms like Twitter and Instagram, and location-based services like Urbanspoon). Thus, food blogs are a vehicle for discussing embodied, located experience, and thus for discussing place, identity, and narrative storytelling.

This chapter begins by establishing the relationship between food and eating, as the subject of the network studied within, and identities, place, geographies, and interactions. This section, relating back to the studies of phenomenology (Chapter 2), place and human geography (Chapter 3), storytelling (Chapter 4), the interactive self (Chapter 5) and locatedness and location based social networks (Chapter 6) effectively ties this chapter into the work that has come before. Following that the chapter delves into research methods and methodology, including a justification and explanation of the sample group, the stages of data collection, and the processes used to collect, code, and display data. Particularly important here is the explanation of my use of data visualisation, and the intended outcome of such an approach. Next, I explain more about why I've chosen to examine not only Perth food blogs, but also the annual local food festival, *Eat Drink Perth*. There is a relationship between Perth's rapidly developing cultural scenes and the place identities of many of the people who live in the city, resulting in no small part from the substantial success of *Eat Drink Perth*, along with festivals such as the long-running *Perth International Arts Festival* and *Perth Fringe Festival*. I will also present the results of my data collection as part of a discussion of food blogs as evidence of phenomenological, located, lived experience — and the role of individuals in the authoring of both self and place through our interactive pursuits — as well supporting my observation that we seek out shared-proximity others with whom to form networks online.

Background: Food as a nexus for communication, identity, and place

My earliest memory is food related.

I was quite young — probably not much more than two and a half years old, as my sister was still an infant. My family was on holiday in Singapore. We were having dinner in a hawkers' market on Sentosa Island when, for the first time in my life, I ate something spicy. It didn't end well. I spat the offensive substance into a large pot plant nearby and cried my little heart out. Another time, perhaps two or three years later, I was helping my mother with the grocery shopping. As she ordered meat from the deli, I touched a chilli-covered salami that was hanging from the counter, and then stuck my fingers in my mouth, as pre-school aged children tend to do. Again: not a good outcome. Needless to say, I detested chilli for a long time after that, not really getting over my aversion to spicy food until well into my teens.

Thankfully, many childhood food memories were much more pleasant. As kids, my sister and I would steal the tins of sweetened condensed milk that had been hidden at the back of the pantry, supposedly out of the way of thieving little fingers. We would sit on the floor in her bedroom, greedily shovelling teaspoons of the cloying, forbidden milk into our mouths until we felt sick. We would then hide the not-quite-empty tin under the bed, leaving it to succumb to ants. Other times, when dining out with our parents, we would carefully plan our meals so that we both chose something the other liked, so as to maximise our opportunity to taste new things. It's something we still do today, half a lifetime later.

Food features heavily in my adult memories, too. From 2001-2004, I spent many late nights at The Moon Cafe in Northbridge, eating veggie moon burgers and drinking terrible cask wine whilst discussing music, politics, and gossiping with friends. Then there was the time, during the direst period of student poverty I experienced as an undergrad, I found myself with only $7 to do my weekly grocery shopping. I managed to buy enough food, but there were many meals of Vegemite toast and beans and rice that week. A couple of years later, in 2007, my sister and I ate a seemingly infinite number of ham and cheese rolls for lunch whilst sitting in parks

and piazzas in an effort to stretch our shoestring budget as we backpacked around Europe together. On another holiday, this time to India, I ate simple curries and rice off a metal tray as I sat on the floor of an Ashram in Rishikesh. Despite their simplicity, every single night these basic meals, clumsily scooped into my mouth with my fingers, somehow managed to be the most delicious thing I'd ever tasted.

As you can see from these stories, food memories situate me in space and time. They re-locate me to the places I've been: a delicious (and, in some cases, not-so delicious) past, long consigned to memory. Similarly, Duruz recognises 'dynamic connections between food, nostalgia and identity' (1999, p. 232). Nostalgia is a peculiar thing. Something will trigger a memory: a smell, a travel feature on TV, a conversation with a family member, or a fleeting glimpse of a tweet as I scroll through my news feed in the morning. This trigger will remind me of somewhere I've been and the food I ate there, and I'll find myself transported back in time, to somewhere else, with other people. When this happens, I'm not remembering the food so much as I'm reliving the entire experience of having *been there*. Memories tie me to my environmental past, which provides the setting for the construction of my current and future sense of self. Through these memories, I am bound to the people I've known, the time we spent together, and the places we were. Food is more than fuel: it is memory, identity, and life.

Accordingly, food is also tremendously complicated. We need to eat to survive, but what of its appeal beyond that? There can be such pleasure in eating and so much pain in not. It becomes the basis for lifelong memory making. Eating is often more an occasion, replete with social and cultural significance, than an everyday necessity. Holtzman argues that eating is different to the other bodily acts, because it is often shared with many others. When we eat, we consume not only food but also individual and collective histories:

> As for food, we may readily define it in a strictly realist sense — that stuff that we as organisms consume by virtue of requiring energy. Yet it is an intrinsically multilayered and multidimensional subject — with social, psychological, physiological, symbolic dimensions, to name a few — and with culturally constructed meanings (Holtzman, 2006, 362).

In the act of eating — especially that shared with others — we 'construct and construe the object of food in often very different ways, ranging from the strictly

materialist to the ethereal gourmand' (Holtzman, 2006, p. 362). This chapter deals with the intersection of food, identity, culture, and storytelling. The social and cultural significance of food and eating are manifested in food blogs and other social media contributions that render this corporeal necessity as an event that is experienced, narrated, memorialised, and shared with others. Through food stories, identity and community are enacted.

I have chosen to limit the scope of this study by investigating stories about Perth's primary food festival, *Eat Drink Perth*. This is a topic of particular interest to me not only because Perth is my hometown, but also due to the fact that it is a city with a conflicted, self-conscious past. Perth has long been accused of lacking the culture of its eastern states siblings in Sydney and Melbourne; as one journalist put it, 'the nearest place for a shot of culture is Fremantle', claiming that the lack of notable architecture and history were made up for by the people, who 'breathe life into this otherwise mundane city' (Majawat, 2009, p. 22) – a more pleasant review of Perth's residents than many have provided. This negativity festers within Perth, having infiltrated the minds of its residents; we've become a city of people who love to hate the place. There is (apparently) nothing to do: no history, nowhere good to eat, and a complete lack of international-quality facilities, entertainment options, and landmarks. A pervasive cultural cringe sees many young people in Perth flocking to Melbourne, Sydney, or London as soon as they can (Conradson & Latham, 2005).

Over the past few years, however, there has been a distinct, noticeable change in Perth. It's beginning to feel alive — certainly for the first time in my life, and unquestionably for the first time in a very long while. It's a city that has slowly begun to breathe again, as the residents, businesses, and official bodies realise that culture and social life can't be *forced* upon a city, but can be *encouraged*. One of the ways that this is happening is via ongoing urban renewal in the inner-city suburbs, including large-scale building and landscaping projects, as well as the transformation of public spaces into public *places*. Increasingly, public spaces are used to host events ranging from outdoor cinema and concerts to farmers markets, art and craft fairs, and food festivals. One must acknowledge, of course, that a hugely successful, long-running food or arts festival or large-scale building products intended to bring residents back into the centre of the city does not guarantee a regeneration of the

public sphere, nor is it a sure sign of urban renewal and increased citizen engagement, but it is a positive step in the right direction.

Two such spaces being targeted to bring life into the inner city of Perth are Forrest place in the CBD and the Piazza in Northbridge. Both spaces occupy prime real estate in heavily trafficked areas of the city and, until recently, both were severely under-utilised. Although it once hosted bars, Northbridge Piazza lay unused for many years in the mid-2000s (see *Figure 3*). Recent urban renewal schemes have transformed the site into a community-focused entertainment space (see *Figure 4*), playing host to outdoor cinemas, markets, concerts, yoga classes, and a host of other events aimed at making people feel welcome in this inner-city space previously synonymous with violence and drunkenness (City of Perth, 2008, 2013).

Figure 3: Northbridge Piazza area before redevelopment (courtesy of City of Perth).

Similarly, Forrest Place has been developed over recent years, transforming from an ugly, under-utilised space that was only visited as people walked through it on their way from the CBD to Perth Train Station, to one where culture and diversity are celebrated. The weekly Twilight Hawkers Market takes place in the square (*Figure 5*), with other community events hosted at the site on a regular basis. Such

redevelopments, and the carefully-chosen events that they host, work to encourage Perth's residents back into the city, ideally prompting a change in perspective about the city and what it has to offer. The planning scheme for the redevelopment of Forrest Place was subtitled, 'A plan for a delightful sense of place' — fitting, for a space that previously lacked life of any kind (City of Perth, 2008).

Figure 4: Northbridge Piazza after redevelopment (Rapley, 2013).

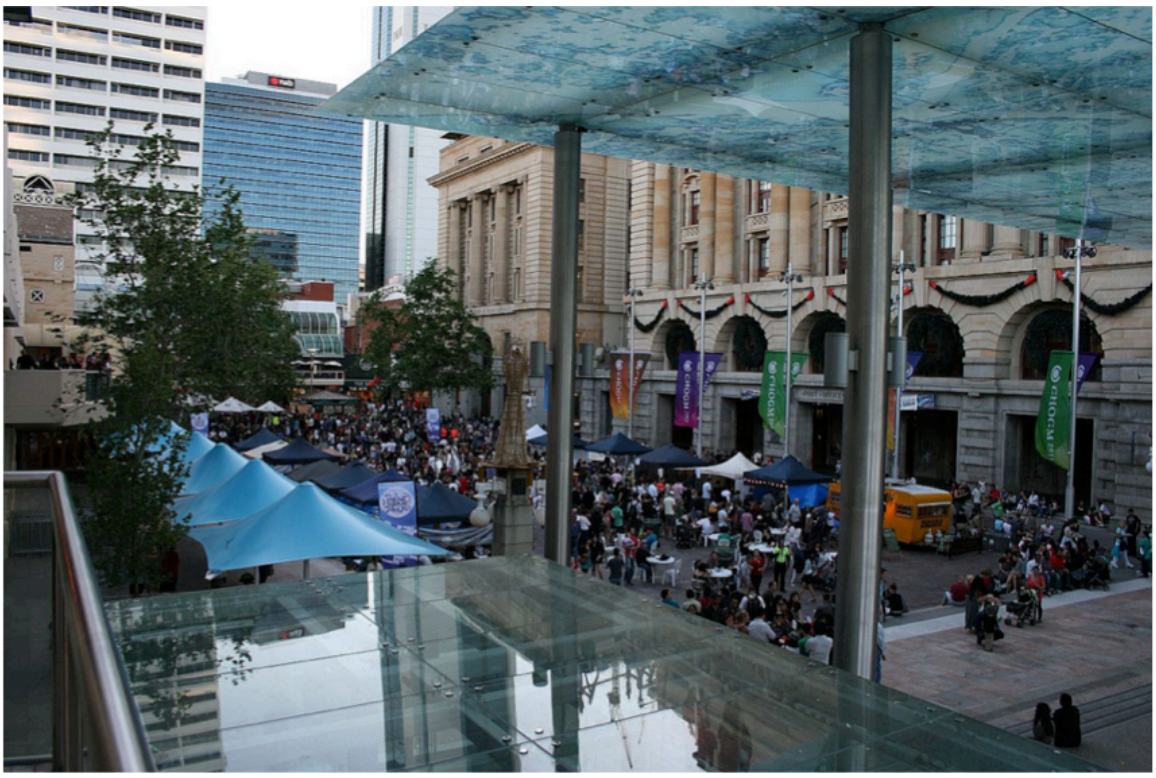

Figure 5: Forrest Place during a Friday evening Twilight Hawkers Market (Rapley, 2011)

Food, society, and the self: Eating embodied geographies

It has been said that, 'like myth or ritual systems', food and eating are 'codes wherein the patterns by which a culture "sees" are embedded' (Meigs, 1987, p. 349). The old adage *you are what you eat* has become clichéd in our diet-obsessed society, but in a cultural sense it is accurate. You are indeed what you eat, because food — eating it, preparing it for others, remembering it, and telling stories about it — contributes to identity, both individual and collective. Food links us to the world, infusing the everyday with elements of distant geographies, biographies, and histories. This is particularly important in a society such as Australia that takes its food culture from other places. For instance, food is closely tied to geographies, both global and local. The cuisines of other nations are prepared — often adapted to fit local preferences — in restaurants and homes around Australia. International products are imported to be sold on Australian shelves, whilst fruit, vegetables, and meat are from interstate and overseas so as to ensure year-round variety.

Perth, and indeed Australia more generally, doesn't really have its own distinct food culture. There is food — an abundance of it, even — and plenty of places to consume it, but there's nothing *distinctly* Western Australian about the food we eat. As a young country, Australian is yet to establish significant, ubiquitous food traditions. There is "modern Australian" cuisine: a pastiche of internationally -dishes accented with "Australian" flavours, particularly foods native to Australia that easily grown in the often-difficult Australian climate. Kangaroo has become more popular in recent years, but we aren't eating too many other iconic Australian foods. Many Australians have not even tasted Indigenous cuisine although "bush food" (adapted from the older "bush tucker") is beginning to make its way onto the culinary landscape, often in unexpected ways.[53] At the same time, we tend to look elsewhere for food inspiration. Duruz argues that the post-World War Two era saw Australians expanding their culinary horizons, which in turn contributed to 'narratives of increasing diversity and multiculturalism' (1999, p. 232). Australians on a large

[53] During January 2013, burger chain Grill'd sold what they called the 'Coat of Arms Burger'. Featuring a meat patty that was 80% kangaroo and 3% emu, the burger also included Indigenous foods such as quandong (a form of wild peach) and bush tomato, a small, dried fruit found in the desert, which is similar more to a raisin than a common tomato (The Food Pornographer, 2013).

scale began eating the dishes that migrants brought with them, engaging with 'memories and myths' as they did so (Duruz, 1999, p. 232). By and large, Australia has adopted its food culture from the migrants who make up most of population. We have taken meat pies from the British, pasta from Italians, souvlaki from the Greeks and Lebanese, and a variety of dishes from the Chinese and Vietnamese populations.

That is not to say that Australians lack food identity, however. I think of my own food identity as an example. I grew up in a household overseen by my mother, British by birth, who came to Australia when she was twelve via Gibraltar and Singapore, and my father, a fifth-generation Australian. Mum is a fantastic cook whose international upbringing endowed her with a keen interest in trying different foods. As a result, I grew up without any serious dislike for food of any kind, other than the chilli aversion mentioned previously, and the twelve years I spent as a vegetarian. For dinner at home, we ate tapas, stir fries, barbecues, curries, and pasta, the latter often courtesy of my father, whose speciality has always been mince-related dishes: spaghetti or gnocchi Bolognese, hamburgers, meatloaf. For lunch, chicken and salad rolls on crusty bread; breakfast was always Vegemite toast. Food was also present in the context of celebration: we would gather with family to celebrate birthdays and Christmas, favouring cold spreads of shellfish and salad to the traditional roast turkey of northern Christmases. My food history is probably typical of many people of my generation who grew up in Australia, although the multicultural composition of the population means that there is a lot of variety, also.

Whilst food identity is present in this country, it is not distinct. There is nothing that is "quintessentially Perth" when it comes to food — no one dish or tradition that is shared as an essential part of the collective identity of the people who live here. This is not always the case in other parts of the world:

> People identify themselves in terms of locality, also... In France, every village or rural region has (or used to have) its own distinct cheese, wine, baked goods, and — often — sausage and other preserved meat specialties...These mark identity; people from the place in question often make a point of eating their speciality. Even if they do not, their "sense of place" is very much involved with the sense of taste. We are

> "consuming geographies"... (Anderson, 2005, p. 130 quoting Bell & Valentine, 1997 and Feld & Basso, 1996).

Given a lack of distinct food history of our own, Australians consume *other* geographies. As a nation largely comprised of migrants and the descendants of migrants, tastes are diverse and divergent, and in eating we appropriate elements of others' histories and using them to construct our own (Cook & Crang, 1996). 'The foods eaten have histories associated with the pasts of those who eat them', writes Mintz (1996, p. 7), noting also that 'foods are all culturally variable, with histories of their own'. That is because food is more than simply fuel: it is also culturally, socially, and historically situated in both the past and the present. Lupton writes, 'at the simplest, biological level, by the act of eating and absorption of food, we become what we eat. By taking food into the body, we take in the world' (1996, p. 16).

Some have even claimed that the move towards slow food cultures is a reaction to the perceived virtuality of live in the digital age, particularly those that manifested towards the end of the twentieth century. Duruz writes:

> Kelly argues that increasing globalisation of markets, fears of unemployment and increasing violence, the challenges of social movements to rework personal identities and family structures—all of these contribute to a retreat from change in the popular imaginary. So, we could argue, with their mood of *fin de siecle* and fearful gaze upon the future, the nineties welcome nostalgic narratives of material life and its certainties—tales of the earth, the seasons, "real" food—as bulwarks against the virtual unknown (Duruz, 1999, p. 241 quoting Kelly, 1994, pp. viii–ix).

Here, Kelly interprets food as returning a dislocated and perhaps disembodied postmodern subject to the land; it is a direct link to nature and stability, one that may be lacking in times of immense and swift change, such as that seen at the new millennium.

We inhabit the spaces of the food we consume, and we also take them into ourselves, as eating is an intensely embodied event. Our health depends upon what and how much food we eat. Additionally, the senses are engaged in every stage of the eating process. Writing about his grandmother's kitchen, Downing remembers:

> a place of sensuous delights, a place of fragrances: mouth-watering roasts, mashed potatoes, homemade breads, and pies that were to-die-for. The aroma of food wove through the intimate dramas of our gatherings and makes this "place" one my nose and mouth can recreate before my mind's eye can conjure it visually (2003, p. 215).

He notes also that the kitchen 'was a place where I *became* a part of who I am and realised myself in the scheme of the family fabric' (2003, p. 214). Food is memory, identity, and embodied experience. Indeed, it is perhaps the most embodied act that there is, at least in terms of those that we are comfortable sharing with groups of people.

History tells us that 'humans are social feeders' (Anderson 2005, p. 125). There are likely reasons for this: in hunter-gatherer societies, for example, it would make sense to surround oneself with a group of people to increase the likelihood of killing and protecting food. Today, though, we don't need to hunt and kill (or even gather) our food; as Anderson suggests, 'the immediate reason for most social feeding is that people simply like to eat with others' (2005, p. 125). By gathering in groups to eat, whether in private homes or in public, we contribute to the construction of place, identity, and memory, and that in turn changes the way that we interpret places. Desjardins writes:

> Examining meanings of place through the lens of food leads to different distinctions than those which focus on place meaning derived from landscape, home, regional history, cultural tradition or personal experience in general (2010, p. 68).

For this reason, place and food must be thought of in holistic terms, for the relationship encompasses much more than just location and availability of produce. In terms of this project, it also involves thinking about the ways that ad-hoc, shared-proximity networks form around the celebration of food, and how writing about food helps to shape places, and in turn how identities are shaped by the lived experience of eating with others, both physically and digitally.

Storytelling located and embodied experience

> *Gourmands and foodies do not form true subcultures but are still defined by their tastes. Some cannot rest til they have sought out every pit barbecue in any city they visit. Others become absorbed with finding the perfect pate or taco or French fries. Individual taste has something to do with all this, but much of it is driven by the need of individuals to communicate something special, distinctive, and personal about themselves.*[54]

I have long been fascinated by the success of food blogs. Via the screen, you can look at food, and you can anticipate future meals and remember meals past, but that is the extent of the experience. You can't engage the senses in the same way that food and eating ought to; the experience is stunted by the (current) lack of sensory engagement. Somehow, it *does* have a place online. We may only engage one of the senses — vision — but in consuming food via the screen, we participate in other socially and culturally significant activities. Just as offline, food online can become the basis for community formation. As I attest in this chapter, the shared experience of food — eating it, socialising around it, and narrating personal identity by storytelling food — brings together people with shared proximity. Significant to this study is the fact that many members of Perth's food blogging community discuss a major event on Perth's cultural calendar, which happens to take place in the City of Perth. Smart argues that urban locations — often the cultural "melting pot" of a city — lend themselves to interpretation in multiple ways. He writes:

> And these urban spaces not only allow the digestion of foods but also practices of flânerie in which, even if not eaten, constructions of the global and its parts can be fazed at the provide imaginary gratification (1994, in Cook & Crang 1996, 136).

Here, Smart highlights a number of concepts that have been focal points in previous chapters. Just as the digital flâneur, discussed in Chapter 5, engages in the social curation of digital artefacts (as markers of identity), so too do those people who go out to eat in densely populated urban settings engage themselves in flânerie. In these spaces, geographies are consumed as the flâneur takes in the everyday life around

[54] Anderson, 2005, p. 130

them. In the case of the hungry flâneur who is also a food blogger, these experiences are photographed, uploaded, narrated and shared once the meal is over.

Having the means to write about food suggests much about the individual on the authorial end. They have the financial ability to eat at restaurants (or spend time cooking in the kitchen at home), take photographs, and spend time researching, editing, and publishing a blog post, before engaging with commenters and (increasingly) cross promoting the post on other platforms. They have access to the tools of online publishing — not just a computer with Internet access but, most often, a camera (and, in the majority of cases, well-developed photographic skills, in turn implying time spent developing said skills) and a suitable level of digital literacy (Rettberg, 2008b, pp. 2–3; 7–8). Anderson notes that 'status, class, and prestige comprise probably them most important area signalled by food' (2005, p. 133). Desjardins, citing Crewe's (2001) study of farmers markets and organic food supply, notes that there is a perceived 'ubiquity of... apparent elitism'; I wondered whether this might apply in the context of food blogging, too, given the aforementioned privileges. However, food blogs don't always cover the topic of eating out: many blogs exist that are dedicated to the exact opposite, run by students and others on limited incomes, those with food allergies or specific diets, and others who simply wish to document their experiences in the kitchen in a form somewhat akin to the *hypomnemata*, discussed earlier in this thesis.[55]

Food blogs are a well-established genre already, having emerged as one of the most popular forms of blogging over the past decade. Food blogs are also tightly bound to place: as my research demonstrates, food bloggers tend to pay attention to what is happening on other food blogs based in the place they live, and there is a high level of engagement between food bloggers, both online and off.[56] They are also

[55] It is worth noting that, by chance rather than design, many of these types of food blogs are excluded from my study. Many of those who are included do also document such topics; a good example is a March 2011 post on the blog Hold the Beef, where the author outlines a guide to Eat Drink Perth for those who, like herself, suffer from food intolerances.

[56] This I know from both research and personal experience. Although I am not, and never have been, a food blogger, I have become a part of the community through commenting on blogs over the course of the past decade, and then by following local bloggers on Twitter — many of whom have gone on to become "RL" friends. Although there is no doubt that there are smaller friendship groups within the food blogging community, it is evident that the relationships formed are very much real, as members gather together for meals and events such as EDP.

incredibly easy to locate — perhaps more so than any other genre of blog. There are numerous reasons that I have identified for this. Firstly, Google search results for cuisines, restaurants, and places to eat out in a local area will often return food blogs towards the top of the search list, given food bloggers' propensity to review these businesses. Additionally, platforms such as Urbanspoon allow users to link their blog to their personal profile. Using the "spoonback" function, bloggers can link to Urbanspoon when they post restaurant reviews on their blog. Indicated by a small Urbanspoon icon in the blog post, such a system guarantees cross-promotion for both Urbanspoon and the blogger. Not all food bloggers utilise this function; however, it served useful in locating numerous local blogs across all genres. Finally, food and eating are topics that appeal to most people. This contrasts with other popular blog topics such as fashion (which is a highly niched subject) and mummy or parenting blogs, which are presumably of less interest to those without children. Food, on the other hand — both the desire and the need to eat it, often in the company of others — is something that most can identify with. As I will explain further, I did not set out in my research to focus only on food blogs, so in the earlier stages of data collection I was exposed on a regular basis to around 450 blogs authored by Perth locals. I collated them all in a folder on Google Reader, making an effort to read as regularly as possible — usually around once a fortnight. Over the course of a number of years, however, food was a recurring theme in the majority of blogs. The data collection process and inclusion parameters are outlined below.

Data collection

It has been said that 'social networks are navigable small worlds' (Liben-Nowell, Novak, Kumar, Raghavan, & Tomkins, 2005, p. 11623). Bruns contends that 'online social networks appear to exert a special fascination for researchers because they are, for the most part, already rich in readily accessible and apparently objective data' (2012, 1328). However, the study of social networks does not come without challenges. 'Formal SNA is based largely on the quantitative mapping of networks, and aims to measure their formal properties, notably the strength, intensity, frequency and direction of network relations' (Heath et al., 2009, p. 645); saying that, social network analysis (SNA) requires more than simply the visualisation of network links in order to be meaningful. Larsson and Moe have asked how

researchers can 'grasp and make sense of the sudden outbursts of seemingly abundant messages in a seemingly ever-more fragmented debate' (2011, p. 730). Their study focuses on political (micro)blogging, but is an appropriate example here nonetheless, as the focus of my study, just like an election, is an event held at a specific time, with the vast majority of content about the event generated over a six week long period each year (leading up to and during Eat Drink Perth). The term 'topical network analysis' has been used to refer to this style of approach, focusing on 'the collection of sites commenting on a particular event or issue, and the links between them' (Highfield, Kirchhoff, & Nicolai, 2011, p. 341). Such studies '(allow) for a more nuanced examination of online activity' (Highfield, 2012, p. 214).

Internet research often presents challenges. Networks are at once complex and ephemeral (Larsson & Moe, 2011, p. 730), and being a participant-observer of online social networks presents challenges to the researcher. 'It's very easy,' writes Tocci, 'for the virtual ethnographer to feel like a "lurker," even if she has announced her presence to a particular online community' (2010, p. 2). How true this is. The sample group for my research emerged from my own online social networks, many of which I have been a member of for a long time as a blogger, Twitter user, Flickr contributor, and more. The initial sample group was made up of people whose blogs I have followed for years, many of whom I have gone on to meet "IRL" and form close bonds with. I discussed my project openly with many Internet-turned-IRL friends and made my work public on Twitter and my blog. Nevertheless, I felt like I was lurking, silently observing from a safe-but-not-too-safe distance, and like they would soon begin to feel like I'd betrayed their trust — a complicated concept in a space where public and private are increasingly blurred (Shapiro, 1998, p. 283).

Additionally, the question of how to approach online social networks — networks made up of *real people* doing *real things* that have *real consequences* — is met with a complicated answer. Kennedy argues that Internet researchers must 'think about the ways in which online selves are socially meaningful to their offline counterparts'; the 'offline context of (content) production and consumption' is as important as the lives played out on the screen (Kennedy, 2006, p. 871 citing Hine, 2001, p. 183). Indeed, as I have discussed throughout recent chapters, the lack of distinction between online and offline makes this acknowledgment even more

crucial. Thus, the mediating qualities of the screen cause a complicated situation to arise:

> new communication technologies privilege and highlight certain features of interaction while obscuring others, confounding traditional methods of capturing and examining the formative elements of relationships, organizations, communities and cultures (A. Markham, 2008, p. 250).

Brennan argues that 'qualitative research is interdisciplinary, interpretive, political and theoretical in nature', aiming to 'create a sense of the larger realm of human relationships' (2013, p. 4). For this study, I am employed a mixed methods approach, 'combining ethnographic methods with technical modelling, conceptualizing SNSs as both a field site... and a tool for collecting data' (Kramm, 2011, p. 127).

Research methodology

This chapter aims to paint a picture of Perth's food blogging community, with a specific focus on the *Eat Drink Perth* festival, knowing that the event organisers had strategically made use of local bloggers to promote the event. As well as this, I expected that the event would have been well documented by other, unaffiliated bloggers and users of social platforms, such as Twitter and Facebook. Therefore, I have utilised a number of approaches to gather information. The first step in gathering a sample group involved blog content and networks (as articulated via blogroll links). Duggan (2013, p. 27) writes:

> Written communication holds as a "snapshot" of a moment not in terms of an event and the "facts" of the event, but rather, in the subjectivities of the narrator, and the ways in which reader's gaze is directed towards particular aspects of the event.

This quote is appropriate to this particular study; blogs were chosen as the "starting point" for numerous reasons, but most significant was the fact that, in an age where 140 characters and smartphone snapshots are beginning to dominate online personal narratives, blogs continue to have salience as a legitimate, popular form of self-expression. The potential for sharing long-form narratives means that bloggers are able to construct more detailed stories; alternatively, they can choose to narrate using nothing but images or sound if they wish. Blogs are reflexive spaces, less rigid in form than social network(ing) sites, although there are norms adhered to by many

bloggers: time-stamped posts displayed in reverse chronological order and accompanied by an archive, the use of tags, and the inclusion of a blogroll (Herring et al., 2005, p. 3). Duggan notes that the continually updated nature of blogs 'allows for both researcher and participant to engage with a narrative "in the activity of production"' (Barthes, 1977 in Duggan, 2013, p. 31). Blogs contribute to the production of many things, including identity, community, and a sense of place. Over the course of four years, I have, through my analysis of blogs and blog (and SNS) networks, been able to watch a city and its people grow and change as bloggers and SNS users write themselves, and their city, into being.

Blogs are also an origin point for networks — both of the self, and networks with others. The term 'network' is used in many ways, but is generally made up of three elements: nodes, links, and mesh. van Loon writes:

> The nodes are the easiest to identify. They are the points where links are being concentrated; the crossings that bind different tangents together. The links are the most basic unit of the network; they are what constitutes the difference between what is and what is not 'bound'. Finally, the mesh is the overall structure, pattern and shape of the network; it is that which gives each network its particular dimensions and shape, and from which the deployment of the network derives its functionality (2006, p. 307).

Online networks are such because users (nodes) are connected to each other via links (also known as edges); they have 'articulated' relationships that take the form of blogrolls, comments, and Friendships on social platforms (boyd & Ellison, 2007, pp. 211-214). The 'mesh' is the overall picture of these nodes and edges: how the network appears and is interpreted (the context of the network). In the case of my research, the mesh takes the form of Eat Drink Perth as a festival with a network that spans both online and offline locations. The mesh of social network analysis 'can provide are detailed, site-specific, insights into the processes of communication between the users of these networking sites' (Bruns 2012, 1329). However, it is also expressed as the overall picture of the Perth food blogging community. The network of my sample (a small group, involving just 135 regular food bloggers) was seen to be highly interlinked across a number of platforms, as outlined later in this chapter. This study is ethnographic in nature, in that researching a bounded (yet multifaceted

and ever-changing) community allowed me to 'make sense of cultural practices in the context of everyday life' (boyd, 2008, p. 46). As I have mentioned, I consider myself a member of many of the communities discussed in this chapter; therefore, formal participant-observation was a natural extension of my day-to-day activities. Although no formal interviews were conducted, the fact that many of the participants are RL friends meant that I had a constant stream of feedback about the project, enlightening me when new local food blogs were launched or providing informal gossip-style information about the community and the festival.[57]

The field was located in two places: online, across numerous platforms (including blogs, Twitter, Facebook, and Urbanspoon), and offline, in the City of Perth. Keeping in mind that there was historically the tendency to '(overplay) the separatedness of online and offline' — a process in which the 'focus on community formation and identity play has exacerbated the tendency to see internet spaces as self-contained cultures' (Hine, 2000, p. 27 in Milner, 2011, p. 19), my research advocates the position that Internet and material-world cultures are contingent upon and influence one another. This is clearly evidenced through the choice of subject matter in this chapter — that is, a geographically proximate alternative location based network. The appeal of an ethnographic approach lay in the fact that I could employ numerous methods to gather, analyse, and present data, as discussed in more detail below.

Locating Perth's blogosphere

Initially, my intention wasn't to focus on Eat Drink Perth, nor was it to exclusively investigate the role of food blogs in re-placing identity. As I outlined in the introduction to this thesis, the original plans were much more ambitious. I was going to locate the URL every Perth-based blog that I could, including the links between them, before expanding the study to pulling tag- and search-specific data from other platforms (such as Twitter, Flickr, Instagram, and Foursquare). After mapping the broader network, I had intended to work with a group of around fifty of the most connected (linked to and from) blogs. Although I could see that bloggers expressed a

[57] I have been careful to avoid including any gossip-style information, such as that collected in casual social situations, in my discussion or analysis. This decision was made so as not to implicate parties (innocent or otherwise) in the course of my work, nor risk relying upon (potential) hearsay as evidence.

sense of place identity via their content, I was going to wait for the story to emerge, using textual analysis to prove undeniably that which I, along with many other residents of Perth, had been witnessing for years: that Perth is changing for the better, and people are beginning to notice.

I located Perth bloggers using two methods: search and request. In terms of searching, I consulted Google, entering terms such as "Perth bloggers", as well as derivatives of this ("Perth food bloggers", "Perth lifestyle bloggers", "Perth fitness bloggers", "Perth education bloggers", and so on). The results were of mixed value, but I proceeded to compile a list of as many bloggers as I could find. I also searched platforms themselves, locating users who indicated that they were located in Perth. At last check (November 2012), 19000 bloggers stated their location in their Blogger profile as being WA, Australia. 6900 of these more specifically indicated that Perth, WA, Australia was their location. Numerous bloggers do not list a location at all, and many of those who have said that they live in Western Australia may live in Perth, but have not indicated such. WordPress does not appear to have a similar affordance, as author profiles are not publicly displayed by default in the same way as those on Blogger. A search for the term "Perth" on WordPress resulted in more than 150,000 results; a further search indicated that 3,800 posts had been tagged with the term "Perth" since March 2012. However, due to the fact that Perth, Western Australia is not the only location named Perth, there was no guarantee that all of these posts — or the blogs connected to them — were based in Perth, WA and not, for example, Perth, Scotland or Perth Amboy, New Jersey. It became clear at this point that it would be challenging to complete a study of such scale; I would never be certain that I had successfully tracked the *entire* Perth blogosphere, particularly if platforms such as Tumblr and LiveJournal were to be included (as they were, at a point).

Instead, I decided to focus upon just one sector of Perth's online communities: food bloggers. The reasons for choosing this were, primarily, the fact that it was a group with which I already had strong familiarity, having been blogging and following other local bloggers for almost a decade. Additionally, the ties between food and identity, geography, and the narrative self are pertinent, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Finally, I knew from experience that the group was relatively small in size, and that many Perth food bloggers made use of other platforms — a significant

factor, given that I intended to discuss how blogs compared to other platforms in terms of use, content, and community. Following the initial process of searching Google, I began a more time-consuming and methodical process of visiting each blog. I did this in order to achieve the following:

- The initial goal was ensuring that all blogs in my sample were actually from Perth. This required, at times, an intimate knowledge of the city, as many bloggers did not explicitly express their location. Instead, their Perth-ness was verified through an analysis of content — a process that involved reading a number of posts from the archives, looking for any mention of locality (such as a restaurant or a suburb). Such content indicated that the blogger had at least *been* to Perth, and that it was worth continuing the analysis to determine whether they *lived* in Perth.
- Upon visiting each blog and locating the archives (usually visible on the blog sidebar), I made a note of the date of the first post and the most recent post, as well as how many posts (on average) they published each month. This process allowed me to determine whether a blogger was "active" (regularly updating their blog by publishing new content), or not.
- Upon determining that a blog was "located in" Perth, I followed any links located in a blogroll — 'inter-blog citations and endorsements' (Adams, Phung, & Venkatesh, 2014, p. 952) that may indicate relationships between bloggers. This method produced mixed results. It certainly led me to discover new blogs. However, not all blogs displayed blogrolls — around 64%. Although this number is considerably higher than that encountered in other

research,[58] it still meant that a significant proportion of the Perth food blogosphere was not linked in any way to other local food blogs.[59]

Having exhausted the processes of manually searching and following links between blogs, I decided, as my data collection neared completion, to utilise one of my own social networks in order to locate any Perth food bloggers that I had previously overlooked.

Twitter as a research tool

I have been using Twitter since 2008; by 14 September 2012, I had a little over four hundred followers. I knew that it was likely that my followers — many of them from Perth — read blogs that I had not yet come across. In the interests of painting a more truly representative picture of Perth's online communities, I posted a message to Twitter, crowdsourcing recommendations asking for Perth-based bloggers to get in contact with me (see *Figure 6*). I was confident that using Twitter to appeal for participants would be successful, as I knew a reasonable proportion of my follower list to be bloggers and blog readers. Had my tweet only reached one third of the (roughly) 400 followers I had at the time,[60] 133 people would have seen my tweet. This likely would have resulted in a small number of results being returned, especially considering that not all followers are based in Perth (and thus less likely to have read a Perth food blog). I decided to employ two techniques to extend the reach

[58] Herring *et al* report the figure of blogs with blogrolls at just 28.5% (2005, p. 4). Efimova and de Moor reported in the same year that the low number of blogroll links was related to the increased popularity of RSS feed readers (2005, p. 2). Additionally, both WordPress and Blogger allow members to follow other blogs in-platform, potentially negating the desire for bloggers to publicly display a list of the blogs that they follow. Finally, my research indicates that the vast majority of bloggers -- 118 of the 135 surveyed -- link to another social platform (such as Twitter, Facebook, or Instagram) from their blog, using these spaces to promote recent posts blog posts. This, coupled with a high level of interconnectedness between bloggers across a number of platforms, is likely to have negatively impacted upon the number of blogs displaying links to other blogs in the form of a blogroll.

[59] Efimova and de Moor indicate that, along with a 'lack of tracking technologies' and the 'distributed and fragmented nature' of online identity, blog network analysis can be complicated by the 'lack of bi-directional links' between bloggers (2005, pp. 1–2). As is the case with Twitter, Flickr, Instagram, and numerous other social platforms, there is no requirement for a blogger to follow another blogger back. As such, it is possible that some bloggers have been misrepresented as not being connected to other local bloggers, or indeed overlooked entirely. The distributed nature of online identity, along with my decision to focus on Perth food *bloggers* (rather than food tweeters or food 'grammers' (used to described Instagram users) means that there are, potentially, highly-engaged pockets of Perth's online foodie community that I have not come across.

[60] Recent reports suggest that as many as two-thirds of Twitter accounts are fake, spam, or inactive, being accessed less than once a month (Taylor, 2012).

of my tweet: including hashtags, and requesting that my followers retweet the original tweet.

Figure 6: Twitter request for participants

boyd, Golder and Lotan describe retweeting as 'the Twitter-equivalent of email forwarding where users post messages originally posted by others' (2010, p. 1). Users retweet information for a variety of reasons, including 'to propagate information, to illustrate that they are "present" in the conversation or in the space, and to attempt to return favors to other individuals to prop up their Twitter followers' (A. Black, Mascaro, Gallagher, & Goggins, 2012, p. 2). Requesting a retweet is 'not unusual,' boyd et al point out as on Twitter, 'visibility and status matter' (boyd *et al*., 2010, p. 9). Altruism — common all over the Internet (for instance, altruistic tagging: Ames & Naaman, 2007; regarding technology acceptance: Li, 2011; and as motivation for contributing to Wikipedia: Lovink, 2007) — motivates some users to retweet (boyd, Golder, & Lotan, 2010, p. 9). Here, Baumeister's observation that 'altruistic behavior... may relate to concerns with self-presentation as self-construction' (1982, p. 6) is significant; as Twitter operates as a space of reflexivity wherein users narrate the self, altruistic retweeting may be regarded by some as a practice whereby identity can be explored and performed.

Twitter can be an effective site for promoting social action (boyd *et al*., 2010, p. 7). This was reflected in my experiment. Although it is not possible to track the paths of retweets, the statistics on my initial tweet suggest that it was retweeted at least eighty times, potentially reaching audiences numbering in the tens of thousands. boyd, Golder and Lotan also mention that 'celebrities and other highly followed users are in a particularly good position to broadcast content for social action' (2010, p. 7).

This assertion held true here; my original tweet was retweeted by Leigh Sales, the presenter of the ABC network's current affairs program, *7.30 Report*. At the time, Sales had 45,000 Twitter followers (Sales, 2012). The potential audience of my tweet thus grew approximately one hundred times greater than the original audience. This extended the reach of my request far beyond my existing network of Twitter followers.

Another strategy used to direct my tweet towards users who may be of use to my research (that is, Twitter users who are also — or who know of — Perth bloggers) was to use the hashtag #Perth. Of course, the system is not perfect; other than Perth, WA, there are nine other town, cities, and districts around the world containing the world 'Perth' in the name,[61] and therefore there is a chance that anyone searching the #Perth tag would not be seeking tweets from Perth, WA. One way in which the hashtag did prove useful was in that it allowed for my original tweet and all subsequent retweets to by synced to the TweetPerth network, which operates as a website and via the @tweetperth Twitter account. TweetPerth offers a real-time syndication of tweets relating to Perth, WA. With 24,000 followers (TweetPerth, 2012), TweetPerth regularly retweets Perth-related content, reaching an extensive audience. Retweeting is one of those peculiar altruistic practices that regularly arise in online networks. From contributing to open source software development and the collective intelligence of wikis, to peer-to-peer file sharing, to fulfilling simple requests for a Twitter post to be retweeted, participation online often manifests in a form of altruistic social action that stems from an individual's concern for others, regardless of whether the individual concerned has a significant vested interest in the outcome (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004, p. 5; see also boyd, Golder & Lotan, 2010).

As it happened, the story emerged much sooner than I had predicted, allowing me to narrow the scope of my investigation without limiting the efficacy of my project. Whilst I continued to observe communities based on photosharing and location based social network sites, by narrowing the focus of my blog network research to

[61] These include, in Australia: Perth, Tasmania; in Canada: Perth-Andover, New Brunswick, Perth, Ontario, and Perth County, Ontario; in Scotland: County of Perth; and the United States of America: Perth, Delaware, Perth, Indiana, Perth, New York, and Perth, North Dakota .

include only Eat Drink Perth I was able to contain what was otherwise proving to be a project without ends.[62] Armed already with a list of around one hundred regular food bloggers from Perth, I set out to find common threads of conversation, emerging between February and April for the years 2010 — 2013. The most effective way to do this was using Google. Searching for the terms *eat drink perth* (without quotation marks) returned too many inaccurate results, but "eat drink perth" was more helpful. I used the advanced search tool to better identify relevant posts by year, starting with 2010.

Network analysis has been useful in this study in determining the extent of influence and interrelatedness between blogs and other SNS profiles. Tan, Na and Theng note that community identity and influence studies are, at times, inadequate, as it is not possible to accurately ascertain the presence of bounded community and influence simply by studying blog links. They argue that 'blogs in different communities also share similar opinions on certain topics, and blogs within the same community may not always influence each other on all topics' (2011, p. 428). This is actually a useful caveat for my own research, as it allows me to introduce the limitations I imposed upon my data collection. I did not exclude non-food blogs from the sample, nor did I exclude non-Perth blogs; indeed, in the following section, you will see that I have included them in the visualisations I've produced. Given the amount of data that I collected, I determined that data visualisation would be the most effective way of analysing and presenting results (discussed later in this chapter).

Tools for mining and scraping

The process of manually locating Perth food bloggers was frustrating and time-consuming, and it also highlighted the fact that there is a lack of resources suitably capable of analysing connections between blogs and other SNS profiles. The dearth in functional tools that are able to 'visualize and browse the complex, multi-faceted

[62] As I mentioned in the Introduction (Chapter 1), one of the most significant problems with too broad a study of blogs -- even those whose authors share common physical proximity to each other -- is that it is essentially never-ending. Even between January and October of 2013, a number of new food blogs were established, many of which discussed Eat Drink Perth 2013, meaning that they had to be included in the sample.

entities of people and their relationships' (Adams *et al.,* 2014, p. 952)[63] represents a significant problem in the context of pervasive, multi-modal online social life. Additionally, relationships between bloggers and SNS users are not always clearly indicated; a blog without a blogroll may have a well-populated comments section following each post, allowing (arguably more meaningful) community to arise and thrive in that space. Further, online relationships are not always articulated in such a way that demonstrates complexity or different levels of friendship. boyd and Heer, discussing the SNS Friendster, note that 'all Friends are treated equally' (2006, p. 7); in a later piece, boyd and Ellison claim:

> The term "Friends" can be misleading, because the connection does not necessarily mean friendship in the everyday vernacular sense, and the reasons people connect are varied (2008, p. 213).

Thus, my research required a significant amount of manual data collection in order to obtain the most accurate and thorough representation of the Perth food blogger network possible.

Having said that, I did use a number of tools to gather data about the network sample group. I used IssueCrawler (http://www.issuecrawler.net) — a free, online service that crawls the web based upon parameters supplied by the researcher — to extract hyperlink information from the sample group. A list of around two hundred blogs with potential for inclusion in the sample group were uploaded to IssueCrawler as the 'seed' — 'a list of URLs which is selected by the researcher and defines the "issue" which is going to be examined by the crawler' (Bruns, 2007, para. 6). For the scope of my research, IssueCrawler proved unhelpful; something I attribute in part to the fact that the URLs I supplied in the 'seed' were too general (that is, they pointed to the landing page of each blog, rather than a specific issue such as a common tag). In the earliest stages of the project, I was aiming to determine the interconnectedness of Perth blogs. Of course, IssueCrawler, whilst useful for pulling out links *between* blogs when supplied with a list of URLs (something I had already done manually),

[63] Adams, Phung and Venkatesh (2012) have been developing a 'feed reader and...social network aggregator' that offers 'novel ways of building, visualizing and browsing commentator-based social networks'. Social Reader, as the platform is known, is being developed to locate the content and networks often overlooked in search engine results. It is not indicated in this article whether such a platform would be capable of identifying location-based shared proximity networks (that is, networks that arise based upon a shared location but *without* the assistance of location data) such as those represented in my research, however.

was of no use for determining whether those links accurately represented a connection between two Perth blogs. This is due to the aforementioned limitations of non-semantic search; if a blogger doesn't set their location to Perth, WA, IssueCrawler has no way of distinguishing between a blogger who lives in this city and one who has just mentioned it in a post.

Further, IssueCrawler returned vast amounts of irrelevant information. To a blog visitor, the blogroll provides the most explicit evidence of a network connection between two blogs, but (as mentioned previously) more compelling evidence of a relationship between two bloggers exists in the form of comments and in-text hyperlinks (that is, one blogger linking directly to another blog in the body of her post). However, even this is inconsistent: just because a blog receives a comment from another blogger does not mean that there is a relationship between the author and reader beyond that one post. Highfield argues that 'hyperlink analysis is...initially a quantitative process' (2012, p. 12). Further analysis of content is needed to gather meaning, as 'citing a news article or another blogger is not necessarily endorsement of the view presented' (Highfield, 2012, p. 12), and thus interpreting the presence of a hyperlink as indicative of a relationship is inaccurate.

Having gathered a list of Perth food blogger URLs, I set up IssueCrawler to locate instances of those URLs occurring on any other blog on the list. IssueCrawler pulled information about all links on each blog; it could not distinguish between blogroll links, comments, in-post hyperlinks, or other content. Instead, the 6,509 results returned by IssueCrawler contained, for the most part, the URL of sections within the blog itself. This was more frustrating than genuinely problematic; I could sift through the thousands of results provided to look for useful, unique links, but there was little benefit in doing so. (For example, some bloggers display a "Recent Comments" widget on the landing page of their blog; thus, when crawling every page of a blog, those blogs featured in the "Recent Comments" section would be overrepresented in the results). Bruns refers to this occurrence as 'contamination', noting that such widgets (as well as blogrolls) '(makes) it likely that the crawler will find a fairly close connection between a very large number of blogs even if the blogroll links are the *only* form of interlinkage between these sites' (2007, para. 7). Thus, it proved to be more effective (if not significantly more time-consuming) to

manually search for, follow, and document the links between Perth food blogs. IssueCrawler has presented limitations for analysing relationships between other social platforms such as Twitter or Facebook; Helmond has criticised this limitation, questioning whether there is a way that 'we can map the current web by not looking at these platforms in isolation but as part of the so-called "ecosystem" that they are part of' (2010a, para. 6). Helmond's point about the necessity to isolate each platform reflected my experience, as I employed different tools to analyse Twitter (ScraperWiki), as well as Flickr (a self-developed app in the Flickr API garden) and Facebook (netVizz), the results of which I elected not to include in this research.

ScraperWiki is a browser-based web scraping tool — 'software code that makes it possible to automatically download data from the Web, and to capture some of the large quantities of data about social life' (Marres & Weltevrede, 2013, p. 313) — that can be used to source extract a variety of data. ScraperWiki was most effective in my experience as a tool for accessing the follower lists of Twitter users in my sample group. With some users' follower lists numbering in the thousands, such a tool was an effective replacement for time-consuming manual data collection, and a suitable substitute in lieu of adequate programming skills. By downloading follower lists and coding results, I was able to determine with relative ease the follower relationships within the sample group.

Parameters and scope of sample group

It became clear over the course of documenting Perth blogs that there had to be a cut off point. Therefore, the sample group of bloggers (and all the secondary accounts on other platforms they are using) is merely a representative, rather than exhaustive, example of local online communities. Others have employed similar tactics in order to conduct close studies of small groups. For example:

> To qualify for inclusion in our research, our entry point individuals had to be willing to introduce us to their network, and they then chose whom to nominate for further involvement in the research. We were then reliant on the willingness of network members to participate. Consequently, we are very aware of some of the gaps and silences in the achieved

> networks, which may or may not be significant, but which we suspect probably are (Heath et al., 2009, p. 649).

The 'gaps and silences' in the network presented in this chapter are, in some senses, a limitation, but in others serve to demonstrate a prevailing truth of social web: if a user is not connected to anyone via links, comments, or other activity, they are silenced by the noise of the active, visible network.

Additionally, not every Perth-based blogger will actively use the word 'Perth' in their posts. Identification in this case relies upon my experience as someone who lives in the city. They may refer to suburbs or other locations that I know to be in Perth. Lawrence et al have explored this problem with regards to product and concept reviews on blogs, but their experience is useful here:

> If the interest is only in a specific product, it is straightforward to identify blogs (e.g. by using a blog search engine) containing references to the product. Such an approach is less effective for broad topics because discussions that touch on such a topic (e.g. "collaborative software") may not specifically contain these keywords (R. Lawrence et al., 2010).

Those searches only reveal users taking advantage of the services provided by the two biggest blogging platforms, Blogger and WordPress. It is difficult to say how many more are using sites such as Moveable Type, TypePad, WordPress.org, or any number of other platforms. It also does not take into account platforms that could be considered either blogging platforms or social networks, such as LiveJournal and Tumblr, which are not being included as blogs in this particular research.

There is, as far as I could tell, no convenient way of tracking the activity of such a group of blogs (meaning conversational activity amongst themselves as a group, such as commenting and linking to one another's content), beyond manually checking each one, and when they number into the tens of thousands, such a project is unfeasible – particularly given that this research intends to present the most accurate and up-to-date information possible, meaning a review of the sample blogs had to be undertaken close to the time of thesis submission in order to ascertain that information was still correct.

The networks are also fluid and inexact: fluid in the sense that users may remove another user from their network without warning, or may no longer engage with that user in any way other than via a link, and inexact in that networks may extend beyond what is visualised on the screen. van Loon argues:

> a distinctive aspect about the network is an ambiguity about its finitude. That is to say, whereas a mesh does indicate that there are limits and boundaries separating what is within from what is beyond the network, the ontological status of the network-boundary ('the rim') is unclear. It is only when we come across problems of accessing networks that we discover that there are boundaries that mark inclusions and exclusions (2006, p. 308).

In conducting this research, I acknowledge the fact that the network studied within represents a mere subset of the entire Perth blogger network. The limitations resulting from the sheer number of Perth-based bloggers has been discussed above.

One way of dealing with this potentially massive group was to enforce strict criteria that each candidate had to meet in order to be included in the network data. Knoke and Yang have referred to this process as nominalist, in that the researcher imposes the network boundaries. They note that nominalist boundaries exist where,

> a researcher reaches network closure by imposing an a priori conceptual framework that serves an analytic or theoretical purpose for a particular project (2008, p. 16).

A criterion for involvement in this research was that the individual had to have a blog (they could not just be using, say, Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr – which, for the purpose of this study, I have deemed to be separate from blogs), which must have been updated in the previous 6 months, and updated semi-frequently (at least once every two months) before that. They also had to regularly use at least one platform other than a traditional blog.

The samples studied in this research can be broken down into a number of groups. Each one of the three hundred users reviewed shares the following characteristics:

- They keep, or have kept at some point, a blog as a means of communication.
- The blog is kept up-to-date, having been updated in the past six months, and regularly (at least once per month for over a year) updated prior to that.

- Another platform – Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, Pinterest, Instagram, and so on – is used, and this platform is linked to via the blog.[64]
- They are based in Perth, and refer at some point to events and places in Perth.

For example, a blogger may write about fashion, but never refer to Perth in any way (such as via event reviews, by discussing local retailers or designers, or by linking to other Perth-based bloggers in a blogroll). This person would not qualify for this research, as the idea is to track the way that Perth-based bloggers connect with each other based upon their physical location.

Eat Drink Perth

Each year during the month of March, more than 90,000 of Perth's residents converge on the City of Perth for the *Eat Drink Perth* food festival. 90,000 may not seem like a huge number; the *Perth International Arts Festival*, also held annually, attracts 190,000 paying visitors (Committee for Perth, 2013, p. 11). Yet, it is significant. Whilst the Perth International Arts Festival showcases the talents of internationally renowned performers, artists, and writers, *Eat Drink Perth* focuses on promoting the best local talent and products. It is a festival that truly showcases a growing, diversifying city. *Eat Drink Perth* is one of a number of festivals that run in the City of Perth and surrounding areas each year. The decision to prioritise *Eat Drink Perth* over the other events that have marked the recent insurgence of inner-city engagement over the past few years has not to do with the fact that it is a better event than others organised by the City of Perth or independent bodies. Instead, it relates to the fact that the event has been so well covered in social media; indeed, social media engagement was part of the City of Perth's strategic plan for promoting the event, according to official City of Perth reports from 2011 and 2013. It is also one of the biggest events on Perth's calendar, running for the entire month of March, drawing 90,000 people into the city and generating an income of $4.5 million (L. Scott & City of Perth, 2013, p. 2). 2013 was the fourth year of the festival, although it ran for five years prior to 2010 under the name City Food and Wine Month.

[64] Although the vast majority of bloggers linked to social platforms, two of the most prolific bloggers in the same did not. I unofficially monitored them for some time, and both have begun linking to other platforms over the past year.

Any number of events could have been chosen as the focal point of this study. Three major celebrations of the arts — the Perth International Arts Festival (running annually since 1953, making it one of the oldest continuous arts festivals in the world (Perth International Arts Festival, 2013)), the Winter Arts Season, and the Perth Fringe Festival — are held every year. In addition, the geographic isolation of Perth deters few international touring acts, and the city plays host to a swathe of music festivals over the summer. Perth also hosts an annual fashion festival, numerous festivals dedicated to beer and wine, a writers' festival, and other niche interest and community-focused festivals (such as the William Street, Angove Street, and Beaufort Street Festivals) instituted by local government bodies and interest groups. To put it simply, Perth loves a festival. However, food brings people together like nothing else. People *get* food; not everyone gets art in the same way. As a physical necessity for life food, even in its most stylised, outrageous, and least functional forms, masquerades easily as something we all need. Art, music, fashion, and even drinking do not share such intrinsic value; after all, we all eat.

Festivals like Eat Drink Perth offer the opportunity for locals to turn the lens in on themselves. This is an example of what Cook and Crang describe as the local articulation of 'cultural artefacts' (1996, p. 132). Food is interpreted:

> not only as placed cultural artefacts, but also as dis-placed, inhabiting many times and spaces which, far from being neatly bounded, feed into and indeed manually constitute each other (1996, p. 132-133).

The events held over the course of *Eat Drink Perth* are all located at venues within the City of Perth — a relatively small but densely populated group of suburbs at the heart of the city (see the following section). Eat Drink Perth invites locals into their own city, offering them the opportunity to create their own food identities as they explore their local urban environment. This has been an explicit goal of the City of Perth who, as part of a greater urban renewal effort, have recognised the potential for *Eat Drink Perth* to increase public awareness of the City's offerings and, in turn, attract visitors to the inner suburbs. The purpose of such an effort 'to create vibrancy and activity in the city' (Scott & City of Perth, 2013) is to help to raise the profile of the City, plagued for a long time as being both "dead" (in the case of the CBD) and "violent" (in the case of Northbridge).

Given that food is culturally and socially significant and geographically located, an investigative study of Perth's largest food festival allowed me to engage many of the themes already explored in this project. Indeed, the tension between Perth's perceived lack of culture and the narratives presented in food (and other) blogs was striking: there appeared to be a clear contrast between those who *do things* in the city (and blog about it), and those who believe there is nothing *to* do. Even the most ostensibly pessimistic of Perth's blogs, *The Worst of Perth* (http://theworstofperth.com) — which also happens to be one of the city's most popular, in terms of visits (almost five million since 2007) and inward links from other blogs — is written with the sort of parodic tone that could only come from an author who accepts that Perth is what it is: somewhat awkward and, at times, embarrassing.[65] Food can be used as the backdrop for engaging with every topic outlined in the theories chapters that led to this: Through an investigation of this four-year running, month-long food festival, I have been able to tell a story that is so much more than just a story about food, or a story about a social network. Instead, it's a story about a city, its history, and the identities of those who live here, both individual and collective. This is the story of how a city with no hope — a city dubbed Dullsville — ate its feelings and found its feet.

Network visualisation

Network visualisation, as a method of analysing data and social networks, draws on 'contributions from mathematics, computer science, social science, media, communication and cultural studies, and design' (Bruns, 2012, p. 1328). Thus, it is useful as a tool for researching, analysing, and presenting data a wide range of sources and backgrounds. Heer and boyd note that visualisations have been used as an analytical tool in the social science since the 1930s (2005, p. 2); however, it has recently enjoyed a surge in popularity as a means of telling stories about complex networks and data sets. The rise of social media platforms over the past decade has resulted in a wealth of information about people and the way they behave, from the

[65] Interestingly, a post on McDonald's The Worst of Perth, where he uses the pseudonym The Lazy Aussie, led to the removal of a particularly ugly piece of art in 2007. Perth Lord Mayor Lisa Scaffidi, having read McDonald's original post (The Lazy Aussie, 2007, November 14), described the coverage of the questionable sculpture as "embarrassing" (The Lazy Aussie, 2007, December 3). The sculpture, which can be viewed on The Worst of Perth, was removed in December 2007 (The Lazy Aussie, 2008, March 18).

formation of networks to cultural trends and physical movements through space. Network visualisations offer a means of articulating links between users at the same time as telling a story about connectedness and community. As communication continues to shift — become more located and persistent as the popularity of mobile Internet devices increases — researchers are employing increasingly sophisticated methods for analysing and presenting information about communication and technology. Bruns notes that '(data) visualization is in itself a flourishing field of interdisciplinary research,' adding that visualizations began with 'mapping hyperlink networks between websites in general and blogs in particular, before attention turned also to the study of network structures' (Bruns, 2012, p. 1330). My decision to include network visualisations in a thesis otherwise concerned with theories of identity, place, and narrative is justified thusly: when paired with theory and discussion, visualisations can be used effectively to illustrate the complex, diverse networks that emerge on the basis of shared proximity. They do more than simply chart hyperlinks or surface-value relationship, hinting instead at multi-layered involvement in online communities. In this section, I will use visualisations prepared in Gephi as a reference point for discussing both the Perth food blogging community and Eat Drink Perth specifically.

Gephi is an open source network visualisation program that, whilst relatively easy to operate, offers users a great deal of flexibility in terms of the way data is presented. Described as originating from an 'active and highly responsive open source development community' (Bruns, 2012, p. 1334), Gephi is useful for working with extremely large datasets, such as census data. However, it is also a practical tool for visualising networks and activities relating to smaller networks, such as that considered in my research. In particular, the ability to manipulate networks in Gephi — both manually and via the in-house application of statistical algorithms — means that visualisations can be augmented to clearly demonstrate the presence of common networks or issues amongst nodes. In terms of my research, network manipulation predominantly occurred in the form of coding, which allowed for the visualisation of multiple links between blogs, bloggers, and social platforms.

One of the ways in which Gephi is useful is in identifying clusters within networks, and the links that join them to the broader network. An example of this is included

below (*Figure 7*) in an early iteration of Perth's blogging network. Compiled prior to making the decision to focus exclusively on food bloggers, this network visualisation clearly groups blogs into clusters. Herring *et al* (2005, p. 4) have argued that such analysis 'quantitative questions' such as 'the overlap between sets of weblogs, the distances between nodes, the reciprocity of linkage between weblogs, and the relationship between the number of inbound links... and outbound links'. Such an approach was of interest to me in this study as I hoped to determine a relationship between place identity and network. The 'high clustering coefficient' (Liben-Nowell et al., 2005, p. 11624) of networks (that is, the notion that if person A and person B are both friends with person C, then A and C are probably friends with each other) is such that relationship trends emerge. This occurs in face-to-face networks as well as online networks (in the form of friendship groups or families, for example), although it is undoubtedly less complicated to visualise the occurrence of clustering in online networks, given that such data is easily accessible due to the public articulation of network connections online.

A visualisation such as the one below is useful when tracking blogs from many genres. In this case, all nodes represent bloggers based in Perth, but with the colours of both nodes and edges indicate closeness in a community. The central, orange node — the largest, indicating that it is the most linked-to blog in Perth (at least within the bounds of my research) belongs to a fashion, parenting, and lifestyle blogger. The pink nodes represent fashion blogs, whilst the orange nodes to the right of the image represent food blogs, with many linking to baking blogs (gold nodes), which in turn are closely affiliated with craft blogs (red nodes).

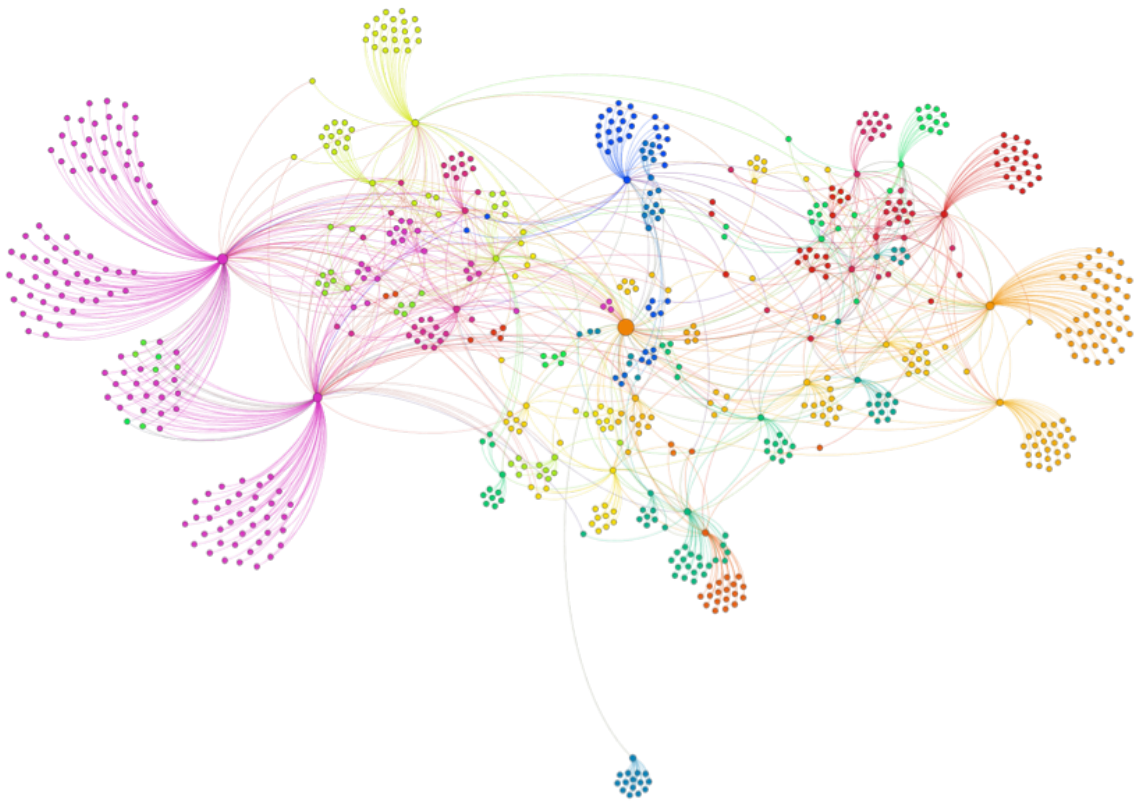

Figure 7: An early representation of Perth's blogosphere.

Perth food blogs

The sample group chosen for this study represents but a very specific and limited microcosm of the blogosphere. By purposely tailoring data collection to focus upon Perth food blogs, I ended up with a sample group that is not entirely representative of the blogging community at large. 60% of the bloggers explicitly claimed to be female and 9% male, while 4% of the blogs were co-authored by a mixed sex team. 26% of bloggers did not state their sex on their blog; reading through posts, one could infer that the vast majority of this group was almost certainly female. The average lifespan of each blog over the course of the research period was 20 months; the longest-running blog, *Man That Cooks* (www.manthatcooks.com), had been published for 141 months at the last survey point. The majority of bloggers were aged in their 20s and 30s, with very few revealing their actual age on their blog. ("Twenty something" and "thirty something" proved to be exceptionally popular descriptors, with more than 60% of bloggers referring to themselves using one of

these terms.) Around 45% of the bloggers were of Asian ethnicity, compared with 8% of the wider Australian population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012).

Less than one third of the bloggers revealed their occupation on their site; amongst those who did, occupations included school teacher, communications professional, physiotherapist, nurse, engineer, public servant, programmer, and web designer. Almost a quarter of the group identified as writers and/or photographers. This last statistic is interesting, as it reflects a growing trend. As blogging continues to gain momentum — and it does, despite the rise of social media — there is a tendency for bloggers (in particular, but not exclusively) to refer to themselves as writers and/or photographers. Specifically in this case, many bloggers referred to themselves as *food writers* and/or *food photographers*. Other food-specific titles included *food stylist* and *recipe developer*. Further research indicated that few of these self-professed writers, photographers, stylists, and developers — terms predominantly used by newer, rather than established, bloggers — were actively employed at such, but one must question whether that matters, given the prominence of the amateur in today's creative culture (Bruns, 2008; Harris & Rae, 2009; Terras, 2011; and, for a less positive view of the Internet and amateurs, Keen, 2007).

What this trend suggests is that blogging is gaining legitimacy, especially within the blogosphere itself. Many of the bloggers in this group had used blogging as a springboard of sorts, gaining work as writers and/or photographers in more "recognised" media. The blogger behind *Breakfast Confidential* (www.breakfastconfidential.com.au), for instance, now also writes for WAtoday (www.watoday.com.au), a nationally syndicated online news publication. Food blogger-turned-design blogger Whitney Ng has written for local entertainment, shopping, and culture guide Scoop Magazine, while blogger Emma Galloway (www.mydarlinglemonthyme.com) has recently released a cookbook through Harper Collins. Additionally, bloggers Max Brearley and Max Veenhuyzen are both well-known journalists in their own right. The desire for aspiring writers and photographers to label themselves as such whilst still in the blogging stage is understandable, given the provenance from which the practice emerges. The common threads that tied all of the blogs together were food and Perth. For the majority of bloggers, both 'food' and 'Perth' were mentioned in the personal

biographies published on the 'About' page of their blog. Many bloggers referred to their 'obsession' with or 'passion' for food, eating, and (less often) cooking.

An interesting point to note is that a follow up studies conducted in 2014 and 2015 suggest that the number of food bloggers in Perth is growing rapidly. My own research, based largely upon surveys of Google search results, Twitter, Instagram, and Urbanspoon, indicated that the number of food blogs was rising. This finding was corroborated by the author of local food blog Chomp Chomp (www.chompchomp.com.au), who published 'Hottest 100 Perth Food Blogs' lists in January 2014 and 2015. The 2014 list, which documented 2013's most popular blogs based upon Alexa website rankings,[66] almost read as a carbon copy of my own sample group, which contained all-but seven of the top one hundred blogs on the list (Chomp Chomp, 2014). A few blogs on the 2014 list had not yet been started by the time my data collection ended; further, some blogs included on the list would did not meet the criteria I had set for the sample group — for example, Love Freo (www.lovefreo.com), a blog that documents Fremantle-based events, arts, shopping, and entertainment, along with food and drink opportunities.

The 2015 list, however, told a different story (Chomp Chomp, 2015). Thirty-nine of the top one hundred Perth food blogs, based upon the same Alexa metric as used the year before, did not feature in my sample group as they did not exist during the period of data collection for this project. I believe the reasons for this are twofold. Firstly, despite the prevalence of social platforms over the past decade, blogs continue to be a popular forum for self-expression — perhaps increasingly so. Secondly, the dramatic increase in the number of Perth food blogs appears to reflect the city's growing food and dining scene, which has seen a massive number of small bars, restaurants, and cafes open over the past few years. The following section adds to this discussion by delving into the network that surrounds Perth food blogs and investigates the narrate construction of self and place in the work of these bloggers.

[66] Alexa Internet (www.alexa.com) is a website that 'estimates and ranks' blogs by popularity, 'based on the browsing behavior of people in our global data panel which is a sample of all internet users' (Alexa Internet, n.d.). At best, Alexa rankings can be seen as a guide; at least one study has indicated, however, that compared to other website ranking services, Alexa Internet can be regarded most accurate, owing to its coverage and method (Vaughan & Yang, 2013, p. 705).

They are connected, but are they a community?

My study of Perth food blogs over a number of years provided insight into the ways in which individual and collective identities are performed and how place manifests online. As a participant in Perth-based online communities for many years, I observed a seemingly simple but under-reported phenomenon: bloggers and social media users with shared geographic proximity tended to congregate together online. This observation led me to question the relationship between place and identity, and to ask whether a common sense of place, based upon geographic location, was as salient a basis for network formation as, say, hobbies and interests. My research has indicated that this is indeed the case. Unlike certain social network sites (particularly Facebook), relationships formed via Twitter and blogs tend to be with people that the user does not know offline. The graphic below (*Figure 8*) demonstrates Perth's food blog network. The black nodes represent blogs, with size adjusted relative to the number of outward links to other blogs and to the blogger's own profiles on social platforms (each represented by a different colour, as indicated in Table 1). Of the 135 blogs studied in this project, seventeen did not link to any other platform. This is not to say, of course, that those bloggers do not *use* other platforms — rather, that in this instance the blog is not being treated as an identity hub.

The bloggers linked to a total of 14 other social platforms: Facebook, Flickr, Foodgawker, Google+, Instagram, Last.fm, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Posse, Tastespotting, Tumblr, Twitter, Urbanspoon, Vimeo, Yelp, and YouTube (clockwise from top). This visualisation indicates only outward links, representing the social element that bloggers present within the form of their site. More detailed content analysis was completed at a later stage, as I was aware (as previously mentioned) that not all bloggers include a blogroll or social links on their site. The purpose of this exercise was to gain an overview of the network in general, and to recognise trends in the linking of social platforms. It was no surprise that the percentage of bloggers linking to Urbanspoon (51.1%), Twitter (49.6%), and Facebook (47.4%) were high, but I had not expected to see that almost 20% of bloggers linked to a Pinterest account. In chapters four and five, I proposed that the social curator, using a platform such as Pinterest, acts as a sort of modern-day flâneur or hypomnemata author as he or she collates snippets of everyday life and displays them publicly over

social platforms. It makes sense, then, that food bloggers — themselves engaged with the everyday act of eating — should use such a platform. The relative popularity of Pinterest amongst bloggers suggests too that the platform may be an effective tool for bloggers to promote their own site.

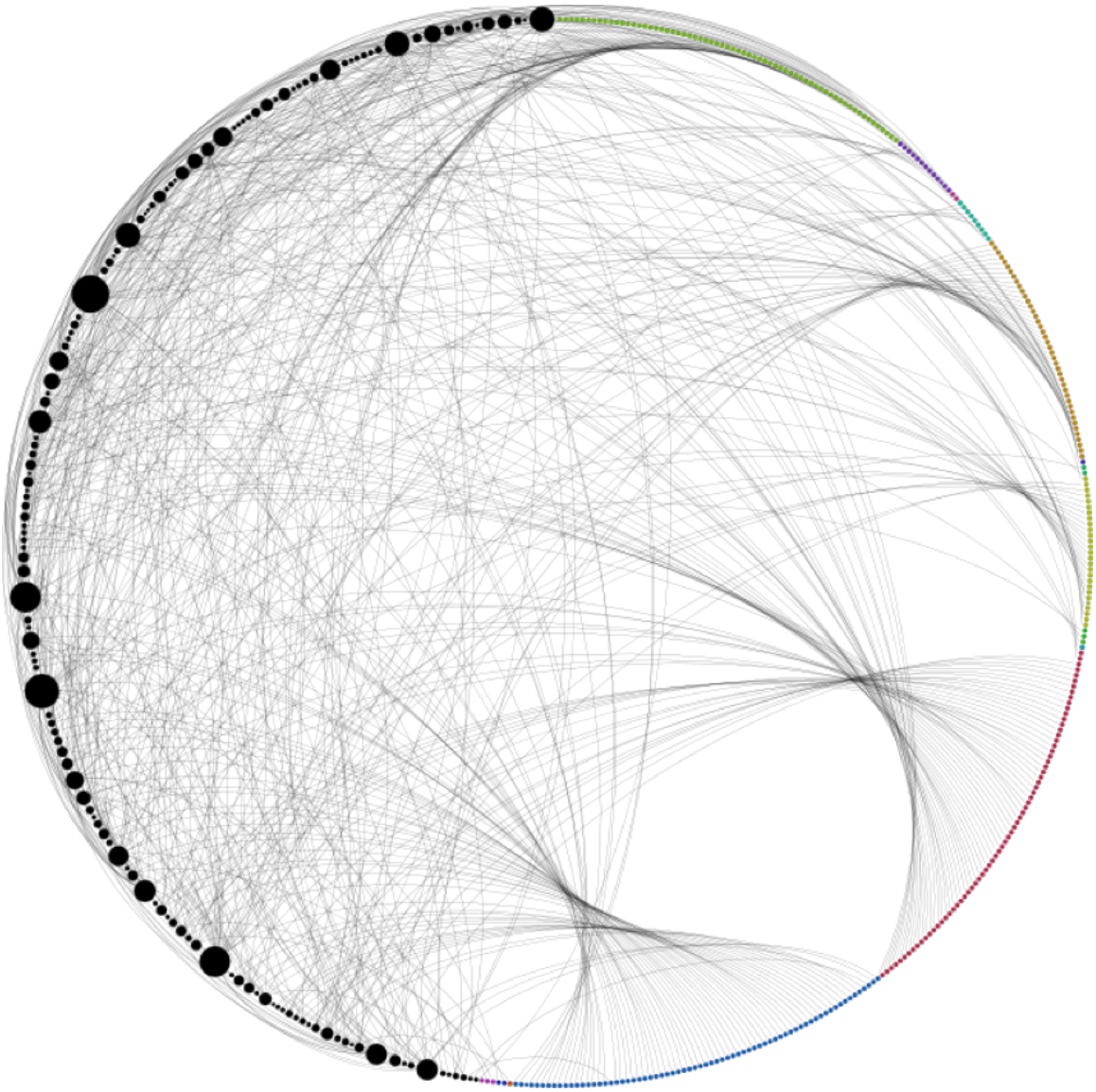

Figure 8: Visualisation of Perth's food blogger network.

Figure 9 depicts the blogroll links of Perth's food blogging community. The graph on the left shows the community ranked from most linked to (purple) to least links to (pink, with no linking edges). By comparison, the graph on the right demonstrates the same group ranked according to outbound links (that is, blogroll links from their blog). The colours are representative of the same blogs in both visualisations, and the

ranking begins at the same place (top and centre as most linked to on the left and most linked from on the right). On both visualisations, the edges display the colour of the source node. Notably, the most linked to blog does not link to any other blogs. It is also interesting to note the differences in the colour distribution and link density. The graph on the left (inward links) demonstrates strong interconnectedness between blogs in the lower left quadrant, with bloggers in this area appearing highly networked. In contrast, the graph on the right (outward links) demonstrates a distinctly different distribution of nodes; many of those who link to many other blogs receive few inward-links themselves. Following Herring's observation that the majority of bloggers do not include a blogroll on their site, I decided to explore a secondary network to determine whether the sample group was more closely interconnected than it initially appeared.

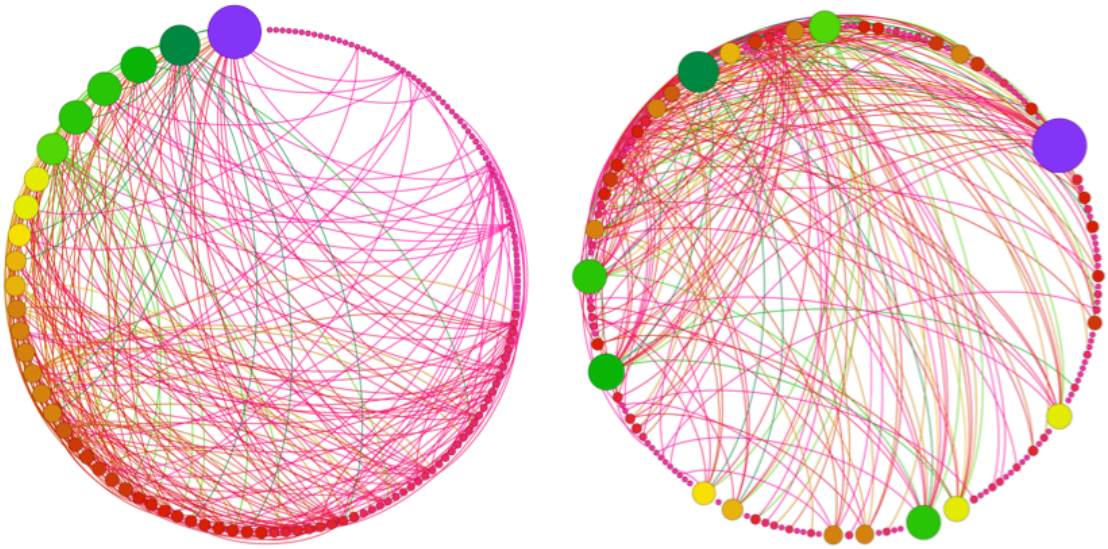

Figure 9: Inbound (L) and outbound (R) blogroll links on Perth food blogs.

As I had already made a note during the initial data collection process of any secondary platform linked to a blogger's central presence (in this case, the blog itself), gathering data about follower relationships within the group of Perth bloggers who also use Twitter was relatively straightforward. Using ScraperWiki's 'Get Twitter followers' tool (an in-built program that allows users to download the followers of any Twitter user as a table or spreadsheet), I amassed a list of the connections between the 67 Twitter users in my sample group. The results indicated an exceptionally high level of interconnectedness between Perth food bloggers who

also tweet. *Figure 10* demonstrates the links between the group of 67 Twitter users. The nodes, indicating Twitter users, are sized relative to the amount of inward links (followers) that user has; however, the graph itself is ordered according to the number of people on the list that the individual follows. The large purple node at the top is the user with the most followers, *and* also the user that follows more users than any other. This contrasts strikingly with the blogroll networks visualised in *Figure 9*. In that case, the most linked-to blog did not link outwards to any other blogs. This suggests that social structures operate differently (with "relationships" — which may mean simply following, but not engaging, with another user — more commonly articulated and open) between the two platforms. Additionally, blogrolls have been noted for, at times, being intensely political, leading some bloggers to cease displaying lists of favourite blogs on their own site (Cox & Blake, 2011, p. 213).

The way that Perth food bloggers used different social platforms to narrate different elements of the self was intriguing. In the majority of cases, blog posts focused solely upon food-related topics, including cooking and baking, the development of recipes, restaurant reviews, social and/or industry events, and (rarely) product reviews. The narrative construction of self in blog posts was decidedly food-centric, punctuated at times with personal titbits for context. On Twitter (and Instagram), however, this group of bloggers were likely to talk about more general topics. Most used Twitter to promote their blog in the form of tweets linking to recent blog posts and/or via a link to their blog in their Twitter user profile. Many mentioned the fact that they were a (food) blogger or a food enthusiast (often using the word "foodie") in their profile description. However, conversation frequently strayed from food, reflecting perhaps the more open nature of Twitter.

Visualising Eat Drink Perth

Over the course of the past four years, I have been tracking, documenting, visualising and analysing the Perth food blogger community and the *Eat Drink Perth* festival. An immense amount of data was collected, including blog posts, Twitter and Facebook contributions, online news articles and press releases, some by members of the sample group, but much by others outside of it. In the interests of

presenting a visualisation that is logical and readable, the final image in this thesis (*Figure 12*) focuses solely on blog posts about *Eat Drink Perth* by members of the sample group. At some point, I intend to make available a larger, more dynamic network visualisation, presented online with the SeaDragon application, which enables complex networks to be explored in close detail as the user zooms into high-resolution renderings of the network. Numerous members of the sample group and key stakeholders in the *Eat Drink Perth* festival have expressed interest in seeing such a demonstration, making it a worthwhile undertaking even beyond the realm of this thesis.

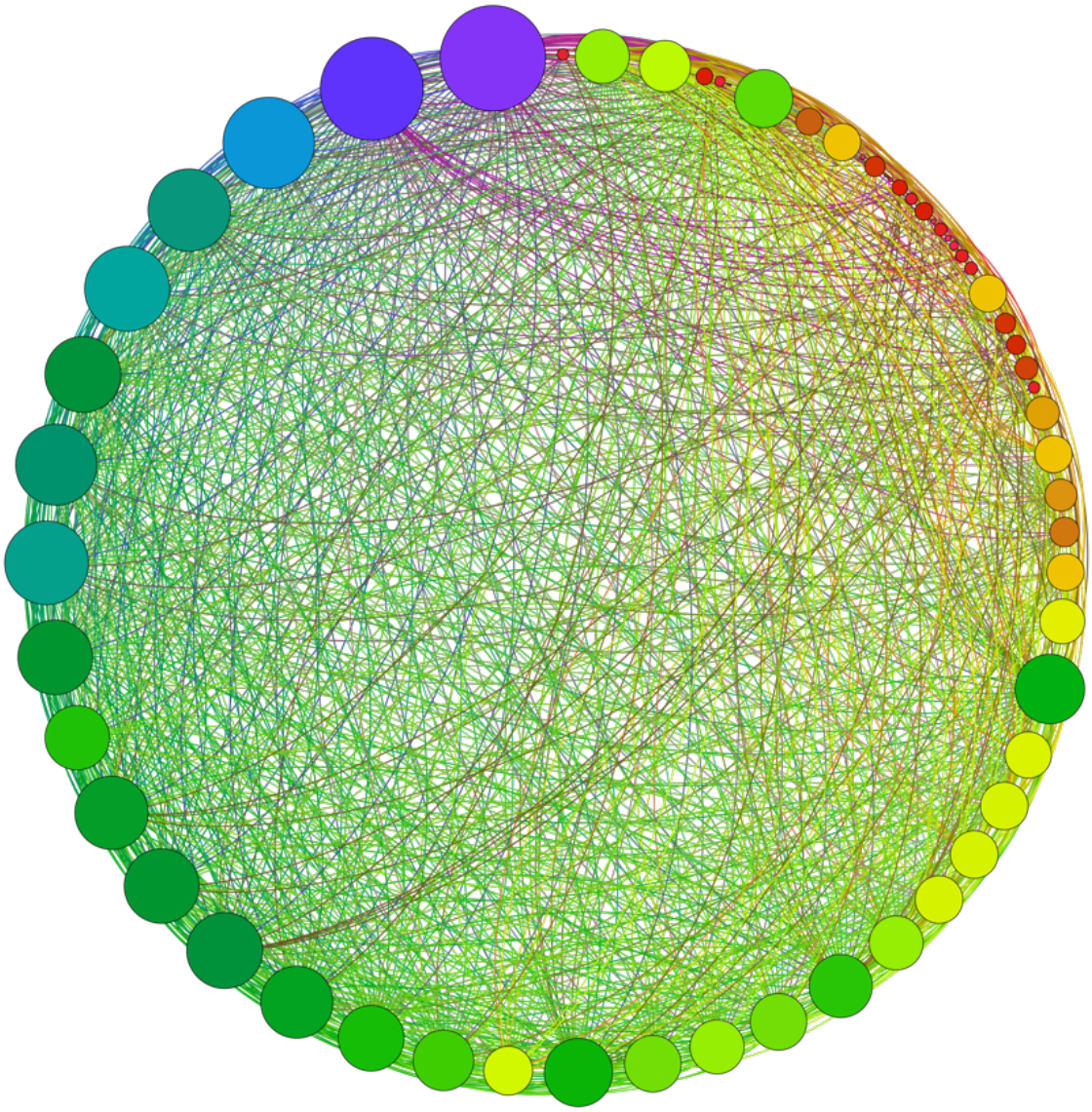

Figure 10: Perth food bloggers who also use Twitter.

I produced a map of all *Eat Drink Perth* venues over the four years that the festival has been running (see *Figure 11*). They are colour-coded for ease of visualisation and size-coded according to years of involvement, with larger nodes representing more years of involvement (1 – 4):

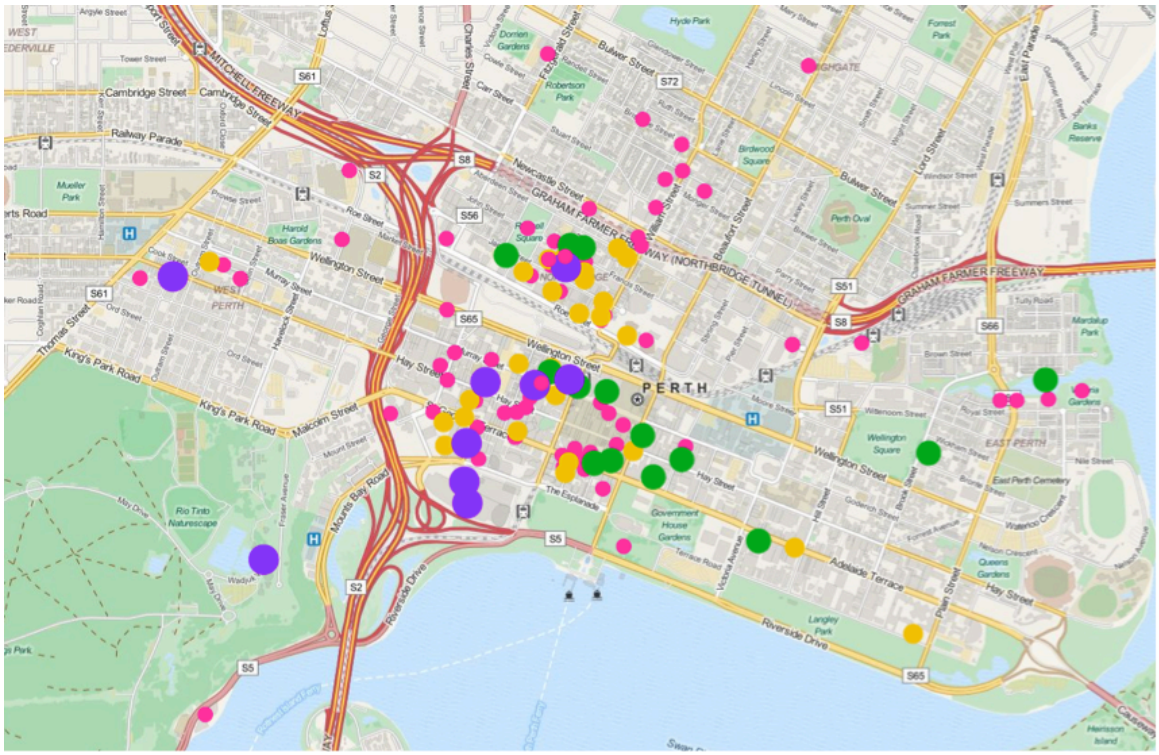

Figure 11: Venues for Eat Drink Perth events over four years (MapQuest-OSM, 2013)
Pink = 1 year; Yellow = 2 years; Green = 3 years; purple = 4 years

This task, simple though it may seem, was intended to provide an overview of the areas utilised by *EDP*. Significantly, they are all in the City of Perth region, with multiple events each night over the course of one month attracting into the CBD and the entertainment district of Northbridge those who may not otherwise visit inner-city establishments. This, in turn, potentially has positive flow-on effects; if those who are usually non-visitors to the city enjoy the experience, they are likely to tell others and to return, contributing in time to a livelier inner city landscape.

Figure 12 demonstrates a number of things. The geolocation of *EDP* events was collected and plotted in Gephi using the aforementioned *GeoLayout* plug in, before layering this visualisation over a vector map of the Perth CBD. These are

represented by the red nodes. As numerous events are held at certain venues each year (for example, the Northbridge Piazza hosts a Butcher's Picnic and the Mad Hatter's Tea Party, whilst Forrest Place hosts the Twilight Hawkers Markets, City Food Fair, and Perth Home Grown), I added a further layer of nodes (purple) to represent events, so as to prevent the map being cluttered. This also enabled me to resize nodes according to the popularity of the event as demonstrated in blog posts; the largest purple node towards the left of *Figure 12* represents the immensely popular Twilight Hawkers Market (an event that has been running as part of *EDP* for three years, and has gone on to become a stand-alone weekly market on Friday nights between November and April, such was its success during *EDP* 2011 and 2012).

The bright green nodes represent individual blog posts about *EDP*. These were coded (for example, a post on January 12, 2011 by a hypothetical blog titled 'Perth Eats' would be coded pe.12jan11) so that multiple posts by multiple authors could be represented on the one graph. This is due to the fact that Gephi does not allow for the visualisation of multiple iterations of connection between two nodes; if I had simple linked blog to event or blog to venue, there would have been no way of demonstrating that a particular blog wrote five posts over the course of two years about the Twilight Hawkers Market, or that Blogger B frequently commented on Blogger A's content. Thus, each coded blog post was linked to a blog (represented by the teal nodes) *and* to a corresponding event or venue. The teal nodes are sized according to the most prolific bloggers in terms of posts about *EDP*; this group represents both those bloggers who frequently discussed the festival, and those who did not contribute any content about the festival on their own blog, but commented on the posts of others.

The edges (links) between each node represent a number of things. The red edges between the venue and event nodes simply indicate that an event was held at a particular place. Likewise, the pink edges indicate the subject matter of a blog post. This allowed me to indicate which events a particular post discussed, as many bloggers chose to refer to numerous events in one post. The most complex and, I believe, telling series of edges are those between the blogs (teal) and blog posts (green). Here, the pale green edges indicate a link between a blog post and the blog it

is hosted on. The gold edges represent comments from a blogger on the post of another, whilst the blue edges are in-text mentions of another Perth food blog.

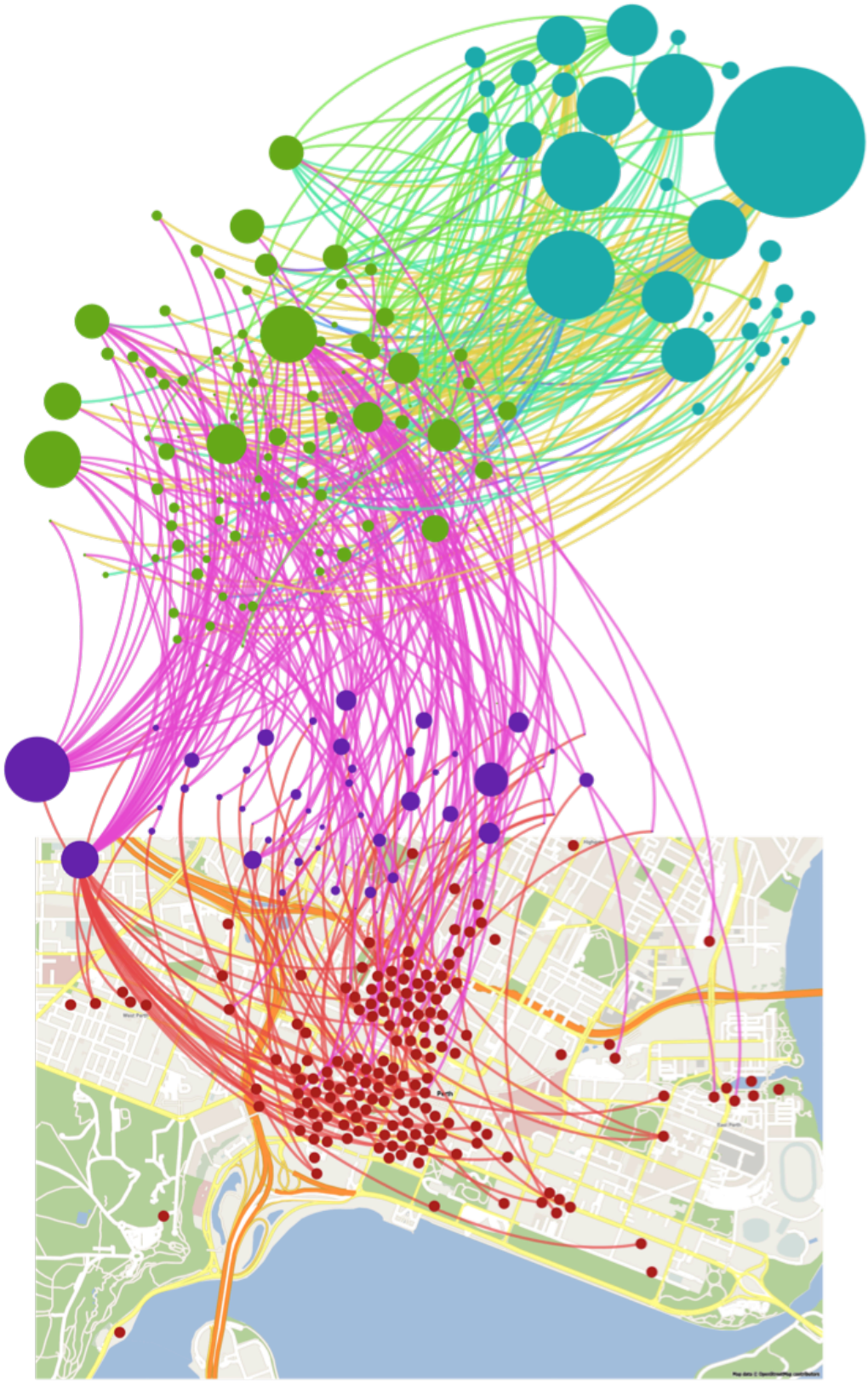

Figure 12: Visualising Eat Drink Perth

Finally, the purple edges represent trackbacks, indicating that a blogger has mentioned another in a post, and this link is made visible beneath the body of the post. Such a colour coding system seems complicated, but it was the clearest way of visualising the multifaceted nature of networks and conversations amongst this group. Graphs with straight edges can also display arrows, indicating the direction of network connections; however in this particular instance, straight edges cluttered the graph too much. As curved edges do not allow for the display of arrows indicating edge direction, a colour scheme was adopted to identify different kinds of links.

In recent years, the nature of Internet research has developed to include an increasing amount of information about the intersections between information and materiality. Work of this nature has always been possible; the Internet has, after all, long reflected and informed life in the physical world. However, technological developments (smartphones that allow location-independent Internet use, pervasive social networks, and less expensive, faster, and more consistent connections) have resulted in greater amounts of information than ever. Rogers argues:

> the Internet may be rethought as a source of data about society and culture. Collecting it and analysing it for social and cultural research requires not only a new outlook about the Internet, but method, too, to ground the findings. Grounding claims in the online is a major shift in the purpose of Internet research, in the sense that one is not so much researching the Internet, and its users, as studying culture and society with the Internet (2009, p. 29).

Rogers advocates for 'the end of the virtual/real divide' (2009, p. 29), claiming that the fusion of technology and culture has resulted in rich, meaningful information about society and humanity, and the way that they intertwine with information technology. It is in this vein that I present the following visualisations. In studying the Perth food blogger community and the *Eat Drink Perth* festival, I have done more than simply plot and analyse links. Instead, what has emerged is evidence of a location-based social network, its members bound together via the expression of shared proximity. This location-based social network doesn't rely explicitly upon locative media, and yet it does support the notion that 'locative technologies mediate

the relationship between technology use and physical/digital spaces' (Wilken, 2012, p. 244). The locative technology in this case is the blog, considered within the framework of 'volunteered geographic information' (Elwood, Goodchild, & Sui, 2012) that takes the form of text (in narrative form) and metadata (specifically the #eatdrinkperth hashtag used on Twitter and variations of that tag used as blog keywords).

A combination of approaches was required to map data about *Eat Drink Perth*. After manually collecting the addresses of all *EDP* events between 2010 and 2013, I used a browser-based geocoding service LatLong.net (Organikdevelopment, 2013) to find the latitude and longitude of each point. This site was chosen after receiving jumbled results from other browser-based physical-address-to-geocode services; correlative tests of LatLong.net indicated that results were accurate. Using the *GeoLayout* (Bastian, 2013) plugin for Gephi, I was able to plot the location of events according to their geolocation. At present, Gephi does not support the ability to upload a background image to the program, so the visualisations were downloaded as transparent scalable vector graphics (.svg) and layered over a MapQuest-OSM (2013) map of Perth in Adobe Illustrator. Two main maps were produced: one of *EDP* event venues, mapped over four years, and one of blog posts about *EDP*.

Discussion

Data visualization has become an increasingly popular way to demonstrate the presence of networks and common issues within particular communities, both online and offline. Described as 'amorphous, genetic, distributed and, of course, cloud-like', data visualisation can be used to 'depict possible points of connectivity' within and between datasets (Elmer, 2010, p. 22). In a thesis that has predominantly focused upon theories of place, identity, and the narrative self, I am aware that it may seem peculiar to present network visualisations as the capstone of the project. However, I believe that such an approach allows me to demonstrate the interdisciplinary nature of Internet research. Alone, neither network or discourse analysis sufficiently tell the story of the complex relationships involved in the formation of publicly articulated, located personal networks. By utilising an approach which is based upon the visualisation of local online communities, data about which was gathered using

techniques common in ethnographies and content analysis (together with a rudimentary knowledge of computer programming), I have been able to confirm the presence of an active, tightly-bound community of Perth food bloggers. The focus of this project was initially on Perth blogs in general, but I decided to narrow my attention to include only food blogs due to the long and complicated history shared by food, geography, embodiment, identity, and culture.

One of the most important lessons that came from employing data visualisation is that I realised the network is not as big as it sometimes seems from within. The network is, undoubtedly, highly connected, but there are niche elements, with smaller sub-communities forming. Unlike Facebook, which is said to 'enable users to articulate and make visible their social networks' (boyd & Ellison, 2008, p. 211), neither blogs nor Twitter could be said to do the same. Ali-Hasan and Adamic's study of the degree to which blogs facilitate relationships determined that blogs were unlikely to be used to sustain relationships with people the blogger already knows in person. Additionally, in aiming to ascertain the degree to which blogs help to form and maintain relationships, their results were 'highly skewed' (2007, p. 6). This is likely reflected in my results, with some bloggers being highly connected to others, both online and in person, whilst others — particularly those whom have taken up blogging more recently — are likely to have met fewer bloggers in person.[67] Similarly, Twitter does not necessarily facilitate the articulation of existing relationships as there is no requirement of reciprocal 'friending' between users. As opposed to 'friend' system of platforms such as Facebook, Twitter allows for unidirectional following, meaning that a user may follow as many others as he or she wants (Larsson & Moe, 2011, p. 731).

Gruzd, Wellman and Takhteyev observe that the notion of 'community' remains complicated in the context of online social networks. They write:

[67] Although I did collect data as evidence of "real world" relationships between bloggers (ranging from individuals who have met another blogger once or not at all, through to Perth food bloggers who are related to one another), I elected not to include the results in this study. A recent conference held in Perth in November 2013 -- *Eat Drink Blog 4* -- is likely to contaminated my initial results, as the conference was well-attended by delegates from Perth and around Australia. A number of the Perth-based delegates commented that they had been pleased by the experience of meeting other bloggers for the first time. The fact that the conference was weeks before submission did not allow time to re-visit initial results; instead, they will be included in future work relating to this project.

> If we rely on the traditional definition of community — as a spatially compact set of people with a high frequency of interaction, interconnections, and a sense of solidarity... Twitter could not be considered a community; nor, we dare say, could most of the personal networks of tweeps (2011, p. 1296).

The results of my research directly contradict this observation. Following links from Perth food blogs to related Twitter accounts, I assembled a group of 67 Twitter users who also a) live in Perth and b) have food blogs that they regularly (at least monthly) update. This group accounted for 49.63% of my sample of 135 Perth-based food blogs (representing as close to an exhaustive list of active participants in the practice of food blogging as I could find having applied numerous methods to locate said blogs). Gruzd, Wellman and Takhteyev point out four factors that are insufficient indicators of a Twitter community; all were dispelled by my research. The limitations imposed upon my sample group were such that the blogger *had* to be living in Perth throughout the project. If I became aware of a blogger moving away from the city, they were removed from the final graph. In order to maintain the integrity of this sample, I did not include any bloggers who live in Western Australia but outside of Perth. Every member of the sample group resides within the greater Perth metropolitan area (a conclusion I reached based upon both content analysis and established personal relationships with some members of the group). Thus, the claim that Twitter "communities" are incongruous with "spatial compactness" does not apply to my research. However, given that shared geographic proximity was a requirement for inclusion in my sample group, I do acknowledge that Twitter networks emerging based upon different contexts (for example, a shared interest in travel, young adult fiction, or jazz music) would be unlikely to exhibit the same degree of shared proximity amongst members.

In addition to this, Gruzd, Wellman and Takhteyev claim that Twitter communities do not demonstrate a 'high frequency of interaction, interconnections, and a sense of solidarity'. Again, my results indicated that, in the case of Perth food bloggers who also use Twitter, nothing could be further from the truth. As *Figure 12* attests, the group is densely interlinked. The most connected user followed every other member on the list (66 connections) and was followed by all but 10 users, four of whom did not follow any other person on the list. 26 of the 67 users followed forty or more

accounts on the list, with a further 15 following more than twenty accounts on the list. In addition to this, interaction between users is frequent. The scope of this project was such that I did not aim to track conversations between participants, either via blogs or Twitter. However, it became evident over the course of my research that local food bloggers *do* indeed interact with one another frequently and meaningfully, whether by leaving comments on blogs, engaging in real-time chat on Twitter, or meeting up in person for meals and events.[68] Over the course of collecting data and analysing data (blog posts) about *Eat Drink Perth*, certain trends emerged, including the presence of informal sub-communities within the greater community. A number of events have been organised and attended by Perth food bloggers, both during *Eat Drink Perth* and at other times.[69]

One pioneering online community, the WELL, was described as 'a community held together by talk, the textual mirror of a physically dispersed tribe that felt itself linked together by a shared invisible energy' (Turner, 2006, p. 147). Communities such as the Perth food blogging community studied in this chapter seem to almost exist in directly opposite terms. Rather than being 'physically dispersed', the individuals unite over their shared love of food within the bounds of their common physical proximity. The 'shared invisible energy' that linked members of the WELL together has, in this instance, been replaced with a marked degree of visibility. In saying that, however, the extent of the connections binding this network together were at times surprising. Despite following the Twitter profile of every individual on the list, I did not expect to see such a high degree of connectedness between users. Further, relatively few of the 135 blogs sampled could be considered 'weak ties' (Granovetter, 1973), with most presenting multiple connections to other local food bloggers.

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[68] My own presence in the broader community of Perth-based Twitter users and bloggers proved invaluable here, for it allowed me to observe trends that would have possibly been overlooked, had I been observing the group from afar, or relying solely upon data retrieved by mining tools. However, this did not result in any bias or ethical dilemma; instead, my casual observations of the group (all of whom I follow on Twitter) prompted me to further investigate the activeness of the relationships between Perth's food bloggers.

[69] It is worth mentioning here that food bloggers are often invited to media events. Not all food bloggers accept such invitations, but those who do are likely to meet others in the food blogging community. The issue of accepting offers from companies (whether media passes to attend events, all expenses paid travel opportunities, or meals at restaurants) is a point of controversy within the food blogosphere.

An earlier study by Wellman focused on the challenges inherent to early social network analysis. In this context — pre-SNS — communities were not so easily or articulated. Additionally, the global access granted to Internet users had long problematized the conceptualisation of community online, often resulting in online community being compared to (very different) offline communities:

> Although community was once synonymous with densely knit, bounded neighborhood groups, it is now seen as a less bounded social network of relationships that provide sociability support, information, and a sense of belonging. These communities are partial (people cycle through interactions with multiple sets of others) and ramify through space (Wellman, 2001, p. 2031).

Online communities are 'far-flung, intermittent, (and) networked' (Wellman, 2001, p. 2031), but still very much real – as are the individuals who forge them. Instead of relying upon shared proximity and the traditional ties of family, heritage, or church, online communities offer kinship where there might not have otherwise been any, based upon subcultural identification, fandom, and serendipity: the simple act of "being there", in a chat room or forum, and becoming part of the social group. In a way, the ability to choose community could be thought of as a more authentic act than being a community member due to chance. I argue there that certain communities — potentially those based upon shared-proximity — still do emerge in the way that offline communities always have. The Perth blogging community could almost be regarded club-like in structure, with unofficial leaders, norms, and politics. Just as a tennis club may form from a mixture of closely related, loosely connected, or entirely unknown individuals, so too does the Perth blogging community reflect complex, diverse relationships with differing levels of intimacy and connectedness. The common thread for all participants is their love of food.

Downing, reflecting on phenomenology and place, makes a point that is crucial to my research. He describes the experience of objects (in his case, 'memorable images of place') as enabling the individual to 'intuit its essence, that is, the underlying form that makes a place "what it is"':

> Fundamentally we do not know about objects in the world; we use them, and the problem for the phenomenologist is to explain how it is that we can withdraw ourselves from our tools in order to look at them as things. The domains reported here are significant form 'realized' through

> particular places – each a reference to a functional realm. We come to 'know about' the world through these changing and evolving domains (2003, p. 217).

Events such as (but not limited to) Eat Drink Perth aim to engage citizens, attract tourists, and revitalise Perth. Event promotion, both via official channels and through the use of blogs and social media, go some way to letting the people of Perth know that there is more to this city than meets the eye, but whether it is making a serious impact is difficult to ascertain. Future research in this area would include an increased amount of community engagement away from blogs and social media in order to gauge the wider impact of Eat Drink Perth and other Perth festivals.

Conclusion

Blogs and social platforms are ideal environments for both the promotion of events and the expression of identity. In studying a group of 135 food bloggers from Perth, Western Australia over the course of four years, I have seen the community swell, moving from the blog platform onto Twitter, then Facebook, and (increasingly) onto many other platforms, as well. Members of the Perth food blogging community — a term that I acknowledge to be fraught with complications, given the multidimensionality of Internet communications — use their blogs as spaces for exploring and performing various elements of identity. They approach the practice of food blogging from a variety of backgrounds, with a range of opinions regarding what 'food blogging' entails. Some food bloggers review restaurants; others only ever post cake recipes. Most engage with their audience on a platform other than a blog, with the most prominent secondary platforms being Facebook and Twitter. However, a substantial number of Perth food bloggers are also Urbanspoon members, syndicating their blog posts to the Urbanspoon interface. In addition to these tools, a further fourteen social platforms were explicitly linked to from blogs, with varying degrees of popularity.

The process of observing, engaging with, and analysing the Perth blogging community over the past four years, I have noticed a number of recurrent themes and attitudes amongst the community's members. The most significant change is that engagement in community events seems to be increasing over time. A contributing

factor here is undoubtedly strategic event promotion on behalf of organisers, who have acknowledged that recruiting bloggers and SNS users to promote events guarantees a substantial, varied audience. As mentioned in the previous section, the unidirectionality of Twitter and blog relationships means that users are likely to form bonds with (or, in many cases, simply be followed by, without any direct interaction) others from a variety of backgrounds and social circles, thus increasing the range of blog- and SNS-based event promotion. Certainly, I observed a steep rise in the number of blog posts and tweets about *Eat Drink Perth* in those years (2012 and 2013) that the City of Perth enlisted a dedicated group of bloggers to promote the event on the *Eat Drink Perth* website (http://eatdrinkperth.showmeperth.com.au) and on their own blogs.[70]

This study focused on *Eat Drink Perth* both because of the obvious ties between food and embodiment (we all need to eat to survive, after all!) and the fact that attending *Eat Drink Perth* events requires people to get out of their homes and to be-in-the-world. Additionally, eating is obviously an embodied activity, but it also locates individuals. They are located in the social space of the public dining room, in the company of known and unknown others who are all in pursuit of the same thing (that is, good company and a good meal). At the same time, eating is a meaningful activity on other levels. When we eat, we consume both the history of the food — how far it has travelled, the conditions under which it was produced, and the ecological impact that the process of farm-to-table had — and the history and culture of other people (Bell & Valentine, 1997; Cook & Crang, 1996). This chapter investigated the Perth food blogger community, finding it to be a small, highly networked but nonetheless diverse group of people who are actively engaged in the process of re-placing the networked self. They achieve this by blogging about events that happen in the community, in turn contributing to the sense that Perth is indeed an interesting, progressive, and culturally significant place. Users are networked by way of having distributed online identities, enacted via various social platforms. They are also networked and placed by the subject matter of their posts, as they

[70] The 2011 *EDP* festival did not engage a group of bloggers as promoters, but rather worked closely with local blogger Matt O'Donohue (Abstract Gourmet -- http://abstractgourmet.com), who took it upon himself to encourage food blogger friends to promote the event via their sites. As far as I have been able to ascertain, O'Donohue is no longer associated with *EDP*.

discuss Perth, eating, socialising, and being-in-the-world as encountered via life in this city.

Chapter Eight

Conclusion

Introduction

Over the past few decades, the Internet has both enriched and challenged humanity. The benefits of the Internet are numerous and immense: never before have we had access to so much information and so many people. It has never been so easy to learn, to experiment, and to explore. At the same time, the Internet forced us to confront and question everything we know about what it means to be social beings: how to interact, how to source information, how to communicate, and how to experience and interpret everyday life. Indeed, the Internet has forced us to rethink what it means to be human, particularly in the sense that so many acts that once occurred face-to-face now occur via the screen. Most significantly, we are learning to navigate multiple spaces at once as technology becomes progressively more embodied and locative.

The Internet used to look very different. Prior to blogs, social networking sites, locative media, and smartphones there was, for the most part, just text. However, despite the lack of visual imagery, cyberspace was rich with creativity as users wrote themselves into being. The written word, unlike photographs and videos, afforded early Internet users a great deal of freedom — in theory, at least. The immediacy of computer-mediated communications changed the perception of space and time as 'the archaic "tyranny of distances" between people who have been geographically scattered increasingly (gave) way to this "tyranny of real time"' (Virilio, 1993, p. 10). In chat rooms, bulletin boards, email, and personal home pages, human interaction defied physicality as they connected with distant others in an instant — 'the *interface'*, writes Virilio (1993, p. 10),

> replaces the interval that had formerly constructed and organized the history and geography of our societies, leading to an obvious culture of paradox, in which everything arrives without there being any need either to travel or to leave in the slightest physical sense.

Although not all approached the technological changes of the time with the fervent apprehension of Virilio, it was commonly thought that:

> the Internet makes physical location largely irrelevant. Interaction between two people in the same building is indistinguishable from interaction between people half a world apart. This creates a kind of spaceless proximity that did not exist to this extent before, a sense enhanced by the speed of transmission and the immateriality of time (Baym, 2001, p. 64).

Fifteen years ago, it did not matter where you were when you were online: your physical self — the body, the space it occupied, and any challenges that may be associated with embodiment and location — were said to be forgotten when you connected to the Internet. There, you had access to more people and knowledge than ever before.

The perceived virtuality of Internet communication dominated scholarly thought throughout the 1990s. Cyberspace was said to offer an escape from the "real world"; it was thought of as a realm wherein we could escape the fleshy, fallible, and often controversial confines of the material body. In cyberspace, you had to write yourself into being; as such, you could be whoever you wanted to be. 'Users literally become the authors of their own lives', writes Kitchin:

> identity becomes multiple and decentred as different aspects of life on-line are disengaged and happen in different worlds, sometimes at the same time. Further, cyberspace gives the user more time to construct carefully his or her persona, delicately crafting emotions and appearances and giving a control not experienced in face-to-face conversations (1998, p. 395; see also Correll, 1995).

The text-based social spaces of the Internet supported identity play, and there was no need to play as your "real" self. This perceived digital disembodiment suited the early Internet: it was decidedly spaceless. With no bodies and no spaces, there were just places... but even these did not look like the places we were familiar with offline. The increased popularity of the Internet in the 1990s was seen by some as indicative of a breakdown of space and time as we knew it. Communication had become asynchronous and disregarded the tyranny of distance. What it meant to *be* — and what it meant to *be together* — was reconsidered entirely.

In recent years, the almost-simultaneous uptake of Internet-enabled mobile phones and social networking sites have allowed us to re-engage with the physical world and have yet again changed the way that we think about Internet communications. However, today's Internet — accessible from anywhere with a WiFi or mobile phone signal — is not at all distinct from the "real world". Where once digital technology was thought of as forcing a barrier between human beings and between people and places, today it facilitates connections and strengthens our lived experience. We live in hybrid space. This chapter acts as both a summary of the work contributed in this thesis and a guide to future research, bridging the gap between our current and potential understanding of communications, experience, and the world.

Findings

This thesis has presented three overarching themes — phenomenology, place, and identity — that thread their way through the chapters of this thesis. Each chapter worked with these themes to explore the ways in which the self is performed online as the product of embodied, located, and lived experience. Such a framework enabled me to explore a number of sub-themes: location and locative media, forms of online communication, community, and the impact that ubiquitous Internet is having upon the way that human beings see themselves and the world. My research took inspiration from a wide range of traditions, including Internet studies, culture studies, anthropology, urban studies, performance theory, and narrative theory. The diversity of the research undertaken speaks volumes of the interdisciplinary nature of research about communication. This is particularly true of research about Internet communications, a field that continues to grow (and thus maintains the need for new approaches and interpretations of online social life).

The findings of this thesis are outlined below.

1. The phenomenological conceptualisation of human beings as the product of being-in-the-world — as constituting constituted by space and having the capacity, through lived experience, to transform abstract space into meaningful place — is as relevant today as it has ever been.

This thesis began with an in-depth study of traditional phenomenology, looking at the philosophy's development through the work of Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Ihde, whose interpretation of phenomenology as a framework congruent with the advancement and infiltration of technology dispelled the notion that communications technologies limit the ability for lived experience. The main tenets of phenomenology — that all knowledge and awareness comes from lived experience, that we constituted by the presence of places, objects, and people (and that we, in turn, construct these as part of our being-in-the-world), and that interaction is the key to human existence — were repeated throughout this thesis.

2. Place is everything. We are engaged in a co-constitutive relationship with the physical world and the people who inhabit it; we know ourselves through lived experience.

Significantly, my research also indicated that location is *everything*. The pertinence of location manifests in two ways: firstly, as locative data. The rise of locative data and media is closely linked to the pervasiveness of smartphones, which ensure not only that millions of people carry GPS tracking devices with them at all times, but also that those people can access Internet services independent of location. The paradox of location-independent access is, of course, the fact that the devices used to access the network are, in fact, perpetually locating users. Smartphones have afforded a greater degree of mobility than ever before, but they are not without their complications. As with any new technology that experiences a rapid uptake, society (not to mention government) is still working out how to negotiate the rules when it comes to smartphones as ubiquitous instruments of everyday life.

The second way in which my research proved the significance of location was evidenced in the blog and Twitter networks demonstrated in Chapter 7. My research found that bloggers and Twitter users are, usually, highly connected to others with whom they shared physical proximity. It is likely that most individuals included in my research sample also have networks that extend far beyond the bounds of Perth, Western Australia — such is the nature of community in the digital age. However, I was satisfied that my research proved beyond doubt that the ability to seek out the company of geographically distant others does not detract from the fascination one

has with locating nearby others. Allen has argued that online communities 'serve as the venue and rationale for that most desired and yet often elusive of human endeavours — connection with others like ourselves' (Allen, 2007). I believe that this is indicative of what I have observed over the course of conducting my research. When it comes down to it, we all want to find 'others like ourselves', whether that likeness comes in the form of particular subcultural interests or the common thread of shared proximity.

3. Bloggers and users of other social platforms often form networks online with others who share their physical location, contributing (along with the rise of mobile and locative media) to the dissolution of the online/offline divide.

Over the past few decades the body, when considered in the context of Internet communications, has been has been in a state of flux. The body was often conceptualised as 'an unfortunate barrier to interaction... the "meat", the dead flesh that surrounds the active mind which constitutes the "authentic" self' (Lupton, 2000, p. 100) in utopian, dystopian and critical renderings of the Internet alike. Today, it is regarded as very much a part of the communicative process, and the continued place of embodiment and locatedness as location-aware technologies become increasingly prominent. As Jurgenson points out, 'social media *augments* our offline lives (rather than replaces them' (2012, p. 85). Increasingly, we use digital social spaces and technologies — blogs, social networking sites, locative media — to enhance our physical experience of the world. The effect is such that 'the online and offline are not separate spheres... one can be used to bolster the other' (Jurgenson, 2012, p. 85).

Thus, it makes sense that when using these online spaces, we actively seek out 'connection(s) with others like ourselves' (Allen, 2007, para. 16) I believe that this is indicative of what I have observed over the course of conducting my research. When it comes down to it, we all want to find 'others like ourselves', whether that likeness comes in the form of particular subcultural interests or the common thread of shared proximity. My findings in Chapter 7 confirm this. Although it may simply be indicative of the nature of the subject chosen (that is, it makes sense for food bloggers to seek out other food bloggers that share their physical location, as they will be blogging about restaurants, events, and experiences within reach), I believe

that we have a tendency to locate physically proximate others with whom to interact online. One of the aims of this research was to corroborate my personal observations as an Internet user over the past two decades, and the results detailed in Chapter 7 certainly do this.

4. Storytelling is an intrinsically human pursuit and something that we all do, which potentially explains the popularity of blogs and social networking sites and contributes to the ongoing writing of places and place identities.

The main reason I was drawn to research blogs and, I suspect, the reason why I am so drawn to blogs in general, rather than other forms of social media, is that I love stories. More than a decade ago, Nardi *et al* (2004, p. 43) proposed five reasons why people blog: 'documenting one's life; providing commentary and opinions; expressing one's deeply felt emotions; articulating ideas through writing; and forming and maintaining community forums'. These reasons hold true today. As bloggers write themselves into being, they engage in one of the most basic human undertakings: storytelling. Narrating the self is something that we have always done. We have been writing those stories for as long as we have had the technology to do so. From the ancient Greek hypomnemata to diaries, letters, and personal websites, and through to the blogs and social networking sites of today, individuals write themselves, their audiences, their experiences, and the places they inhabit into being as a way of making sense of life and understanding the self. By writing stories about people, experiences, places, and events, bloggers (and, no doubt, users of social platforms) are actively engaged in the writing of history — they are authors of Lorimer's 'small stories' (2003, p. 269), first introduced in Chapter 3 of this thesis. As evidenced in Chapter 5 and Chapter 7, bloggers and other social media users use online storytelling as a way to forge community, and in these communities — real and imagined — identity is discovered, constructed, negotiated, and performed.

5. As Internet technologies develop, we find new ways to tell stories about ourselves, often using non-written methods such as photographs and metadata tags. These individual stories, when combined, forge incidental networks and tell larger stories about a place and the people who inhabit it.

A principal focus of this thesis was to investigate the relationship between place identity and the expression of self in online communities. Understandably, the purpose and direction of my research has adapted many times over the years; what began as a thesis intended to support the relevancy of blogs in a world dominated by social media platforms evolved into an investigation of the ways in which embodied, located, and lived experience is encountered by online communities in Perth, Western Australia. As it happens, in reaching the conclusion of my research, I have succeeded in meeting my initial research goal as well, despite focus shifting somewhat over the years. In that regard, my research has demonstrated undeniably that blogs do indeed remain relevant in the face of social media dominance; indeed, the nature of blogging has changed (for instance, the majority of bloggers now link their blog to profiles on social platforms), but there are few, if any, more suitable forms for written, public self-expression. The succinctness of Twitter and other "snack"-style platforms work to complement the longer narrative form of blogging.

Significantly, my research also indicated that location is *everything*. The pertinence of location manifests in two ways: firstly, as locative data. The rise of locative data and media is closely linked to the pervasiveness of smartphones, which ensure not only that millions of people carry GPS tracking devices with them at all times, but also that those people can access Internet services independent of location. The paradox of location-independent access is, of course, the fact that the devices used to access the network are, in fact, perpetually locating users. Smartphones have afforded a greater degree of mobility than ever before, but they are not without their complications. As with any new technology that experiences a rapid uptake, society (not to mention government) is still working out how to negotiate the rules when it comes to smartphones as ubiquitous instruments of everyday life.

The second way in which my research proved the significance of location was evidenced in the blog and Twitter networks demonstrated in Chapter 7. My research found that bloggers and Twitter users are, usually, highly connected to others with whom they shared physical proximity. It is likely that most individuals included in my research sample also have networks that extend far beyond the bounds of Perth, Western Australia — such is the nature of community in the digital age. However, I was satisfied that my research proved beyond doubt that the ability to seek out the

company of geographically distant others does not detract from the fascination one has with locating nearby others. Allen has argued that online communities 'serve as the venue and rationale for that most desired and yet often elusive of human endeavours — connection with others like ourselves' (Allen, 2007, para. 16). I believe that this is indicative of what I have observed over the course of conducting my research. When it comes down to it, we all want to find 'others like ourselves', whether that likeness comes in the form of particular subcultural interests or the common thread of shared proximity.

Limitations & recommendations for future research

I revealed in the thesis introduction that this project emerged as the result of a long-held fascination with the way my city is imagined online, as evidenced in my own practice of seeking out proximate others in the digital space. I conceptualised my research as an investigation of how place is *talked about*, using words and images, in blogs and on social networking sites. Over time, however, I came to recognise that I wasn't just researching the way we tell stories of place and self online, but rather how communication technologies better enabled us to *experience* place. This observation has been echoed in the expansive body of work about place published in recent years: scholarship that deals primarily (but not exclusively, as such research is often multidisciplinary) with locative media, mobile media, human geography, mobility, games, and social networking. Given the scope and limitations of this work, I have numerous recommendations for future research that builds upon the work presented within this thesis. As outlined in this conclusion chapter, this thesis has considered a range of issues, including phenomenology and interaction theory, the writing of the narrative self, locative and mobile media, and place identities, as encountered and enacted via blogs and social media. However, the nature of a thesis is such that it is impossible to thoroughly cover all the topics a researcher wishes to address, much less give adequate attention to the indeterminable nuances of the various disciplines implicated in the project. As such, it is imperative to acknowledge the limitations of the research, and in doing so make way for future research in the field.

Scope and size of research group

This thesis is supported by an extensive theoretical context, in terms of my attention to phenomenology, place and place identity, and locative media. The practical examples and studies contained within, however, primarily relate to Perth blogs (particularly food blogs), representing just one microcosm of digital life. This thesis does not claim to have uncovered answers to problems that might impact bloggers and social media users around the world, nor does it suggest that the observations I have made of Perth's food bloggers are representative of all bloggers or indeed all bloggers more generally. There are numerous considerations that must be taken into account in order to make claims that are representative of a broad spectrum in any way: people in different places use the Internet different; the behaviour of one group of bloggers in one place may be specific to that group and place; the behaviour of food bloggers is not necessarily indicative of all bloggers; not all blogs are personal; not all social media users treat the various platforms they use the same. A larger sample group and data size would have likely resulted in different outcomes and been more effective in painting a picture the ways in which place identities are performed online in Perth and in general.

The findings of this thesis are limited in that they really only consider the online manifestation of one place — Perth — with a more considered focus upon the theory underlying place identities and the depiction of said identities in blogs and on social networking sites. It would be worthwhile to consider, in future research, the way that the place identities of people living in other locations (both more 'global' cities, like London, Tokyo, and New York, and smaller places, such as country towns and remote communities) are encountered, understood, and performed online. Such research would allow for a more thorough contextualisation and comprehension of the relationship between physical location and selfhood, as well as the way that digital content can influence and be implicated in processes that lead to real-world cultural, social, and political changes.

The aspect of place-related research that I find myself most drawn to at this juncture, however, involves investigating hyperlocal place identities. While researching Perth blogs and social media I noticed a growing trend towards articulating location-based micro-networks around streets, community events, and suburbs. In this city, local

community events such as farmers markets and street festivals have become increasingly popular in recent years, leading me to believe that there is a rich repository of localised place identity narratives to be explored, which in turn could be useful in better understanding society and culture more broadly. The role of web- and location-based technologies in promoting, engaging with, discussing, and reviewing said hyperlocal places and community events has particularly strong potential as a research subject both as academic scholarship and in its potential capacity to affect policy and participation.

Changing technologies

Owing to the mass adoption of smartphones and other GPS-enabled mobile devices over the past few years, the Internet has become *massively* located, as Wilken acknowledged in the editorial introduction to *Convergence* journal's 2012 special issue on locative media. The separation between physical space and cyberspace no longer exists; instead, we operate in hybrid space, where information and materiality are intertwined, co-constitutive, and interminably changing each other as users rely upon location data, received via smartphones, to navigate through the world, and in turn contribute to the authoring of location information. While my thesis was concerned with location proximate networks and the influence of place upon the realisation and performance of self, the scope of the project was such that while locative media, mobile media, and location-based services were discussed as a way of offering context to the existing research, they were not thoroughly examined in their own right within this project.

I believe that this particular research would have benefited from an in-depth study of the way people use mobile locative media and location-based services. I see two particular focuses for future research in this area:

- How users employ these tools while in public places (for example, using location-aware, augmented reality mobile applications to change the way that place is perceived and experienced) and the impact that this has upon both place identity and mobilities
- The way that these tools can be used to facilitate storytelling in and about place. In this instance, as well as tracking geotagged content or user-generated hash tags and interpreting the significance of their use, I am

interested in looking at the way that users collect, curate, interpret, and deploy content about places.

The concept and preliminary research has begun for a research project relating to these limitations and recommendations for future research, as well as to those mentioned in the previous point about the limitations of this project's scope. The future project will develop the research in this thesis while also drawing upon further work in heritage and mobility studies in looking at how users document and share content about places over time. The ultimate aim of the project will be the development of a) an online mapping service to which users can contribute images, videos, audio recordings, blog posts and other online social content, and other forms of written content (such as news articles and diary entries) and b) a location-aware smartphone application that, when engaged in a particular location, allows the user to access stories about that location's history, contribute their own stories, and view historical images superimposed onto the modern physical environment.

Digital research methods

In recent years, burgeoning field of digital humanities has become increasingly popular and recognised within scholarship. Digital humanities research has brought about a renaissance in both the subjects that humanities researchers study and the methods they use to do so. As the field flourishes more guides, tools, and techniques for research, data collection, interpretation, and publication are being made available for researchers. Whilst this is an encouraging step in the right direction, during the course of my research I found that many digital humanities tools lacked sufficient documentation and/or breadth, and almost all required additional knowledge, especially of computer and web programming languages, a problem addressed by Bruns and Liang (2012). Conversely, many of those that operate as 'out of the box' tools for data collection and analysis were insufficient for my needs. Personally, I found this limitation most frustrating: while I attempted to learn as much as I could in order to use various tools, I was plagued by the suspicion that there was a more efficient method I had not yet discovered or that I was only seeing part of the picture, owing to the fact that I had no background in programming. Additionally, the significant growth of digital humanities in the past few years has seen a number of new tools developed and disseminated for conducting humanities research, curated on sites such as Digital Methods Initiative (https://www.digitalmethods.net). With

this and greater knowledge of programming languages such as JSON and Python I believe that I could have considered larger sample groups and data sets, potentially changing the outcome of my research.

Ethical considerations

Although all of the blog- and social media-related data used in this research is publicly accessible online, I was still plagued by the concern that I was behaving in an unethical manner. This, I suspect, reflects something that I mentioned in Chapter 5: bloggers and blog audiences (and, presumably, social networking site users and their readers) form a relationship of trust. Reading a blog is one thing; using that blog to form assumptions about blogger practices, habits, identities, and implications is quite another. As Papacharissi and Gibson have noted, '(the) question of privacy in a digital era, and in particular, in the Social Web realm, resurfaces as the structural affordances of networked spaces remediate the texture of publicity, sociality, and privacy' (2011, p. 74). The increased use of social media, blogs, and locative media comes at a cost — the cost of privacy. In the context of the social web, the definition of privacy has changed and continues to do so, and users are willing to sacrifice "traditional" privacy in exchange for access to tools (such as locative media and location based services), networks, and information. But, as boyd has reminded us, 'there's a big difference between something being publicly available and being publicized' (2010, para. 37).

Indeed, for today's Internet users, privacy is about 'the control of information' rather than absolute security, and requires a more interaction-based, case-by-case interpretation of situations — 'knowing how to read people, how to navigate interpersonal conflict, how to make trust stick' (boyd, 2014, August 1, para. 7) — in order to determine how private or public communications are, because it is not always clear-cut online. I felt conflicted when considering the nature of publicness and privacy in my own work; the researcher in me recognised that there are important stories to tell about the ways that place identities and performances of self emerge and are enacted in online writing, but the blogger, social networking site user and, indeed, community member in me struggled to reconcile the fact that I felt as though I was invading the privacy of the subjects. I suspect that this is something that could be overcome by researching groups that I am more removed from.

Conclusion

A project that set out to investigate how Internet users talk about physical location in the texts they produce for the Internet and how place manifests in the online networks created between users has revealed so much more about how intertwined our material and digital lives are. Throughout the chapters of this thesis, common themes arise that link lived experience — phenomenological *being-in-the-world* that places the embodied, located human being at the centre of all life's encounters — to the construction and understanding of identities and places. We have always written ourselves into being; we are the product of storytelling, of interaction, and of subjective reflexivity. Our actions in space transform abstract locations to meaningful places when we attach to them our own stories and memories. Blogs, social networking sites, and other communications platforms and technologies are offering us a greater opportunity than ever to contribute to the writing of places, whether in the form of food blogs that document embodied encounters, location-based mobile services that allow us to check in, review experiences, or improving mapping services, or any number of emerging and yet-to-arrive technologies that will further strengthen the ties between human beings, places, and information. This thesis has contributed to the still-developing field of research about how people use technology to better understand the physical world, and provides an insight into the way that we can understand our own role in writing, and being written by, an increasingly technologised, information-rich world.

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