

# FRIDAY NIGHT, 2007. NORTHBRIDGE. AGE 25.

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## ABSTRACT

This paper compares aspects of three influential models of urban experience through an autoethnographic narrative approach. This paper seeks a way to describe an evening in Northbridge which engages substantially with lived experience, following Michel de Certeau. This position is contradictory to the perspective most often presented in architectural media, where spatial opportunity as gifted by the designer is the heralded influence. The primary research contribution of this paper is in the approach it brings to reading architectural space. There is growing interest in experiential qualities of architecture and urban space. Representational modes are needed that engage with places as they are lived and represent this subjective plurality. This paper is innovative in drawing on the rigour of autoethnographic approach to synthesise the researcher's experience and contextualise this within the architectural discourse of urban experience.

## INTRODUCTION

This paper starts from the position that architecture's lack of concern with inhabitation is problematic, and that ways are needed within architecture to represent embodied urban experience.<sup>1</sup> This paper compares aspects of three influential models of urban experience through an autoethnographic narrative approach<sup>2</sup> seeking a way to describe an evening in Northbridge<sup>3</sup> which engages substantially with the lived experience.

This paper is an architectural exploration of space, which challenges the fetishized description of built form through a first person narrative, focusing on the actions and negotiations of the narrator. These negotiations occur on two levels. First, Northbridge is negotiated as a physical and cultural context – the narrator's self is crucial to defining the field of these conflicts and how they take place. Second, three models of urban inhabitation are negotiated. Each character represents the position of an author working with a particular model. Through the character's dialogue a reading of Northbridge is sought. Thus, the dialogue of the characters is an expression of the researcher's textual and analytical journey in seeking to find an expression of urban inhabitation for architecture; just as the narrated action is a partial expression of the researcher's experience of Northbridge when she was 25.

In this paper a series of perspectives are adopted by the characters as the author's testing process. The use of the narrative form for the bulk of this paper allows for trying-on and taking-off different perspectives in a way which is counter to a

traditional academic style, but a more honest representation of this research journey, and essential for an understanding of urbanism.<sup>4</sup> Within this shifting text the reader is invited to make their own judgements and conclusions, and to draw upon their own experience for a point of comparison. However, via the autoethnographic narrative that follows, this paper argues that after Michel de Certeau urban space is enacted through wilful performance, framed by local conventions and spatial opportunity, but defined by neither of these. This position is contradictory to the perspective most often presented in architectural media, where spatial opportunity as gifted by the designer is the heralded influence.

The narrative begins by taking making critical appraisal of the flaneur. This passage expresses the researcher's initial scepticism of the flaneur-persona as urban analytical tool, but also the ease with which she slipped into this role when 'in the field.' This section is structured so that the flaneur-persona becomes temporarily internalised within the narrator's behaviour. The echoing of statements between the 'old man' and the narrator's exaggerated position towards the end of the passage reinforce the distanced-observer position of the flaneur and thus presents this author's criticism of the flaneur's perspective as one disengaged with the place of which it claims ownership.

It is important to note that transposing Benjamin's flaneur<sup>5</sup> through space and time to an evening in Northbridge does not represent a critique of this character's role in understanding 1800s Paris,<sup>6</sup> but rather questions its appropriateness for the contemporary setting. In contrast, the possibility of

engaged participation is explored as a starting position from which to approach a reading of urban place. That is this paper finds that George Sand's "no-one knew me, no-one looked at me"<sup>7</sup> moment in when cross-dressing in Paris does not reflect the author's experience as a young woman, out in the evening in Perth – a small city and her home town.

The second passage introduces 'Fiona,' a character who continues with the narrator in attempting to unravel a productive model of urban experience. The Fiona character represents the position of Fiona Wilkie<sup>8</sup> in suggesting that place is defined by a set of rules. This rule, or game dependant model is presented as a participatory alternative to the flaneur's detached-observer perspective. The question of the role of the built environment within this model is introduced within this section, and further developed with the introduction of the perspective of Andrew Wood,<sup>9</sup> represented within the narrative by 'Drew.' His reading of consumer spaces such as Vegas through a performed knowingness is used here in combination with Wilkie's rules of place to begin to unpack the specificity of a Friday evening in Northbridge.

Some consideration is given to a morphological reading of Northbridge from a birds eye perspective, after Aldo Rossi and contemporaneous urbanists. The spine of James street is acknowledge as significant as 'stage set' to the evenings 'play'. It is concluded that the "collective memory embodied in the street plan"<sup>10</sup> forms part of the rules of place, but like social convention did not tell the whole story of the inhabitation of the moment.

The theoretical set up of the previous section is both interrupted and grounded to the pavement by a small fraction of de Certeau's discussion of urban walking,<sup>11</sup> as expressed by the 'Mike' character, within 'scene change'. The space of James Street, which had gained some speculative validity in the previous section, is again confronted this time by the practice of 'asyndeton' which reduces the street's significance in the narrative of experience. Likewise, the structure of the text echoes these fragments and ellipses in jumping from event to event, rather than presenting a stereoscopic description of Northbridge's main street.

The final section of the narrative recaps the argument of the paper using symbolism. In this section police and money represent the authority of de Certeau's concept city. The character's behaviour reflects temporally rather than spatially grounded inhabitation - appearing and disappearing in and out of a grid of control. Led by 'Mike' the characterisation of de Certeau each of the characters, representing their different theoretical positions, concede that theirs is only part of the understanding of space. This paper

adopts Wood's reading of the fleeing consumer spaces in Las Vegas, and builds on de Certeau's framework of urban experience as resistive practice to identify an insider reading of the consumer playscape of Northbridge as, like Vegas, potentially a place of consumer's resistive inhabitation.

However, to reach this conclusion a dominant specter of architectural exploration of the city must first be considered and dismissed. In this passage the seduction of this inside-outside, knowing-alooof flaneur persona is examined and judged (perhaps paradoxically by the 'old man' representing the knowing flaneur himself) to be too distanced from Northbridge to give a productive reading of the space.

## THE AGED FLANEUR

7:30 pm Friday 7.09.2007 James St, Northbridge

*Where I arrive in Northbridge, unaccompanied, and walk the James Street strip in critique of the flaneur.*

Descending the grand proportioned stairs from the cultural centre in long loping strides I watch William Street streaming with noise and light, people and traffic. I hurry towards it, eager for the spectacle of the crowd<sup>12</sup> after the confronting sterility of the cultural centre. At the traffic lights on the corner of James and William I'm pressing up against the hard edge of it. The torrent of vehicle engines is more dramatic in the faded light, their headlights bearing down on our soft bodies too fast as they accelerate towards the Horseshoe Bridge. They are the final boundary guards to the night city. I keep to the edge and wait with the others for the change of the lights. Spot-lit we make our crossing, as a mass. The road is crossed, and the comforting myth of the communality of the crowd is gone. It fractures, parts splitting off in all directions, my own trajectory carries me metres down James Street past closed shop facades and an empty lot, before I find myself walking alone, along grey concrete.

The all-night kebab shop is still empty and the club next door is closed. The street's sedate. I overtake a bunch of people talking about what they're going to have for dinner. Over the other side of the road there's a whole pile of smokers outside of the pool place. Cars pass between them and me, but I don't pay them any attention.

In the light spill from the TAB ahead, an old man stands and stares me down as I approach. He's wearing a smart jacket and an accusing look. I make to step around him and he grabs at my arm. I pull back out of reach but stop to look into his befuddled face.

'I could be anyone, I could be you,'<sup>13</sup> he challenges aggressively.

'You're an old man, lost in all these people. You can't be me. I'm young, a woman, and have all night and the whole world ahead of me.' I speak politely enough, but I'm not willing to just smile and nod.

'I can go anywhere I choose. All doors are open to me, and if they seem closed it is because they do not interest me.'<sup>14</sup> He pulls himself up and sways only a little.

'Look at you old man, you can go anywhere, if you can walk straight enough, if you have the money in your pocket. But you will not be there, not be part of the place. You are outside it, old man.'

'I can walk straight enough!' he says angrily. 'I know what's what. I am distant from here only in that I am intoxicated on the spectacle of the place itself.'<sup>15</sup>

'You're deluded, old man. You're drunk all right, but it's on misery and self-loathing. You are here to try and forget the pain of yourself in the bright lights of other's lives.'<sup>16</sup> But you are not of this time and place, you can only ever be a tourist: outside of all the practices shared between the people walking by. You claim to know all there is of this place from a self-absorbed looking.' I finally step around him, his anger seems to have dissipated. He laughs at me, but lets me go.

I've covered a block before I know it. The night is just beginning around me. Walking past restaurants it is as if I am invisible, the touts ignore me addressing their polite enquiries and delicious sells to couples and groups. Few cafes are open and those that are seem unattractive. All those other places for meeting and eating or drinking seem barred until I have someone, somewhere to meet. I walk the length of James Street up to that Irish pub on the corner. The quiet drinkers on the veranda watch me pass. I read questions in the looks, diffracted through pint glasses.

'Hey, girl? Whatcha doing here, by yourself?'

'I'm meeting friends.' I say, 'I'm meeting friends.' Over and over, to all those curious eyes, 'I am meeting up with friends.'

I cross over the road in front of the ornamental gates of the park, and turn back towards the action. A mob of girls are walking up to a mob of boys sitting on the wall just ahead.

'Hello!' 'Hello!' 'Hello.' call the boys. I'm ignored. The girls are walking a bit faster than me and my brooding thoughts and I'm filtered through the group. I'm dressed pretty much the same in jeans and puffy black jacket. Walking on the edge of the group: the game goes on without interference.

A bouncer calls out to me. 'Hey girl! Come over here.' He's standing at the base of the stairs leading up to a strip club. He looks familiar from years ago. On the pavement ahead of us is a crowd, spilled out from the flung open doors of the bar on the corner. Some of them are even sitting, leaning up against the wall, out on the street to smoke or lurk. I slow right down but come no closer.

'Come on, just for a minute.' He has a stunning woman leaning on him and giggling. I realise I'm to be the fall guy for his dumb joke. 'Hey, hey! You know where I can get some dishwashing liquid? We wanna put it in that guy's pipe, see if it blows bubbles when he puffs on it.' Pointing to some kid with a pipe in the crowd, the pair laugh like conspirators. I smile and shrug and nod, left no choice. I walk on.

I weave through restaurant floors which press up against the traffic edge of the street. Diners and waiters have pulled the interiors out, under awnings.

At the next corner the old man is back again. He's standing there facing towards me, in the middle of the footpath, holding his mobile phone out at arm's reach to try and read the display. A bus load of revellers divide around us both, so that for this moment we are alone in the crowd.<sup>17</sup>

'I could be anyone, any of these nights could be mine.' I tell him. 'I could have her life, I could have his night out. Those could be my mates. I know these people, they're mine.'<sup>18</sup>

'You're a young lady, with a backpack, broken boots. You have no power, no authority'<sup>19</sup> you can't be anyone. You don't know how it is to be her, and certainly not him. You cannot claim this crowd of others simply by seeing them.'

'Maybe I can't be richer, or blacker, I can't be a boy, I can't suddenly know the right people, or have moved in a rough crowd. But I'm young and free and I'm mine. I can go anywhere I want.' The crowd's parted and I stride off down the street to prove my point. He follows, keeping pace, so I continue my barrage.

'I haven't stopped yet because nowhere interests me. The spectacle of the crowd itself is what I'm drinking up. I know these people. Flooded here on the demand of the city. I could be one of them, if I stopped thinking and just fell in line. You must wear this, eat here and be seen drinking there. Dancing is ok, if you appear so drunk that you're oblivious to your own shame. You must come out to Northbridge, it's what everyone does, they say, and so they do. They enjoy it because they are told they must. So if you say I cannot be any of these people, perhaps you are right. We few stand out from the crowd watching and considering, fascinated with the little movements, noses pressed to the aquarium glass.'<sup>20</sup>

He lets me wind down before replying, 'Alone, Northbridge is closed to you. You are invisible to the restaurant spruikers. Just walking on the street you do not register as a blip to the police. Your assertion of self-possession, looking away from boys walking your way, you tell them they cannot have you, and so you cannot claim them. The commodities on sale tonight are not aimed at you, young lady. You have no connection to anyone or anything here. You are abandoned in this crowd. Come back again when you have found your friends.'

He says this last to my back as I stalk on - not caring whether he goes to find a table for one in a seafood restaurant or a milk crate in a corner.

## GAME ON

**8:00 pm Friday 14.09. 2007 James St, Northbridge**

*Moving into the idea of playing games with rules.*

James Street is a sports field I'm crossing. The game is in process around me, teams calling out to each other and bumping up against each other. Although I know the rules well enough to keep from being in the way, without teammates I'm an ignored intrusion. A spectator in the middle of the playing field I'm still missing the action. The roar is something around me. As enraptured as I can become in the noise and movement, I'm ignored. Or rather, the focus is just elsewhere.

There is a buzz in my left jeans pocket. I lean up against a closed shop face and look at the screen. It's my best mate; I answer. The siren blows, game on!

'Hello Fiona!'

'Hey Rob, how are ya?'

'Ok. So, where are you?' The first part of the game is getting the crew together. Walking Northbridge alone has lost all its interest. By the time I can see Fi headed towards me on the next block, I'm on the phone to Drew.

'So where are you? Oh. Fi and I are at the other end of Northbridge I'm afraid!' She catches me up in a hug as I'm still speaking on the phone. 'How 'bout we'll walk towards each other and if Fi and I find a pub on the way we'll let you know? OK!' I hang up and turn to Fi with a grin. 'Hello! How are you? Where'd ya wanna go? Drew's at the other end of Northbridge walking this way.' I'm moving already as I'm talking, pulling her along with my rapid words and bouncing steps, back towards the corner of William and James, the start or the heart of Northbridge. Her smile's spreading at my eagerness. 'Shall we just duck into the first pub we like the look of?'

'Sounds good.' We practically skip down the road for a bit.

Our rules don't even need discussing. The nature of the game has been established over so many previous nights, and good times. There will be drinking and talking and silliness, dinner as having come straight from work neither of us has eaten, perhaps there will be pool and dancing like idiots. I'll rant about something with an embarrassing enthusiasm, Fiona will play on words and make leaping conversation. We'll join in with other people, old friends or friendly strangers and get home somehow, just fine.

I can see Drew diagonally opposite. He seems a bit concerned not to have found us already Fi and I scurry into the noise radius of the Brass Monkey. My phone buzzes and I answer it, 'I can see you across the road. No... Turn around, the other road!'

He laughs and hangs up, waiting for the lights to change.

We end up at the Brass Monkey for a beer. I could have predicted it, but I was happier pretending we were on our way anywhere. I pick a door to the front bar and pass through, it's packed, I duck round some people and keep going. The area near the loading doors is cordoned off and we bunch up to look around. The only table we can see anywhere is in the smoker's courtyard. It's a bit of an awkward hunt for enough chairs, we pull them up around a table, next to a tree. I flop into my chair performing the stage direction for my soon to follow story of how busy it was at work today, how many hours I worked, and how much anxious-fun it was, but how glad I am the week's over now. But something more pressing strikes me first and I turn to Fi.

'Look, What's with all this about rules? Aren't we heading out to escape all that?' I ask.

'These sorts of places are particularly adept at providing scripts and audiences that shape our choices.<sup>21</sup> It's pretty ironic seeing as, like you say, we're trying to escape the regimentation of the rest of the week,' joins Drew.

'Yeah, funny. But that's no answer. Scripts and rules like what?' I press.

'Well, when I say rules I mean for things like place,' says Fi, 'and a personal repertoire, and the audiences' codes of conduct.<sup>22</sup> Just the rules of place would include physical barriers, explicit rules, borrowed codes and implicit conventions,'<sup>23</sup> says Fiona.

'Let's take Northbridge for an example. Physical barriers would encompass...' I lead.

'Things like the layout of the streets and which shops are closed and which bars open,' finishes Fi.

'Clear as mud. Explicit rules?'

'Like no smoking, no street drinking, no service this area, no alcohol without a meal at a restaurant and all the usual laws and traffic regulations that apply.'

'And then there's implicit conventions,' says Drew.

'Now this one sounds, interesting. Would it include all the cultural expectations and traditions of how to behave when you're out getting trashed with your mates?' I ask, tongue in cheek.

'Yep. You said it,' she unexpectedly affirms with a grin.

'Look, we've been here for a whole 30seconds. I think we need a drink,' I say.

'Exactly. It's an implicit convention,' laughs Fi.

'I was thinking more an explicit rule. Beer?'

'A glass of white wine, please,' says Fiona as I stand up.

'Certainly. Drew, I am going for a beer. Would you like one?'

When I return to the table I'm still putting down the drinks when I start up enthusiastically: 'It's the kind of thing you love to find out when you move to a new place, right? You've got to learn how the locals work it, so you can play with that same framework. So you can let others know that you know.'

'A performed knowingness?'<sup>24</sup> Drew raises an eyebrow, and his pint.

'If you mean getting pleasure out of being in on the joke,' I answer.

'The repertoire – a set of choices, (culturally, traditionally, personally or physically defined) available to people in a particular place – is created in part by what has gone before in that place,'<sup>25</sup> spouts Fi.

'But in the end, these rules don't tell you all that much about the actual experience of going out for a drink with your mates in Northbridge,' I say.

'Yeah, just looking at do's and don'ts isn't the whole story or the whole place,'<sup>26</sup> agrees Fi.

'It's just a script,' shrugs Drew.

'Yeah, the script and the setting by themselves are not a play. A play must be performed, lived in the now to be complete.' I say.

'If we can talk of a repertoire or script in this way, then we are led to the linked notions of re-writing or amending the script or adding to the repertoire,'<sup>27</sup> says Fi.

'We can influence the way a place is experienced through our own performance of it?' I ask.

'Mmmm,' muses Drew and puts his glass to his lips.

## MAP OF A NIGHT OUT

**8:30pm Friday 21.09.2007 The Brass Monkey, Northbridge**

*Where, having found my friends, we question the role of built form in navigating a night out.*

Having taken a substantial draught, Drew puts down his beer carefully on the centre of his coaster, 'You know, with somewhere like Northbridge, I'm not sure how tied to actual place it can be anyway.'

'Having just walked around having a good look at the local architectural stock I can assure you it's nothing spectacular,' I rejoin, acting as if I should know what I'm talking about.

'Yeah, come and look at this for a min.' Drew stands up from the small table we're clustered around.

'Where are you off to?' I ask suspiciously.

'The fire escape.'

'Oh. Really?' I look mournfully at my beer. 'Well at least let me get half way through before we get kicked out.'

'Come on Rob. We're not going to get kicked out.' Fi and Drew lead the way drinks in hand, up the fire escape to the roof level. The skyscrapers are like poster bills on the night sky.

'Look at that,' says Drew with satisfaction.

'What, the city?' asks Fi

'No, down there.'

'The top half of James St?' I hazard, not entirely sure what I'm looking at.

'Yeah, I guess it is. Doesn't look anything like the street from the bottom!' says Fi. 'All the buildings are so consistent, and so low! It's like piles of streets around here!'

'And, why is that such a surprise?' leads Drew with some satisfaction.

'Well, I would have expected the form of the street and buildings to match my mental image<sup>28</sup> and I suppose the street grid has some influence, but when you're down there it's more like a sushi train, all these different spots for sale. All of them trying to look bright, tasty and different. You just grab the ones that take your fancy.' I reply slowly.

'That's the punctum then,'<sup>29</sup> muses Fi slowly, 'The point to understanding Northbridge for you is

selecting and sampling progressively through the night, a pub crawl.'

'That's what I'm saying,' says Drew gazing out. 'You don't need to know how this bit of the city is built to construct your night out. The experiences on offer could be anywhere, once you leave the street, and even most of the time on the street you're not really there. Not here in Northbridge, I mean. Instead you're part of a placeless construction of a night out.<sup>30</sup> One that progresses, more or less in spite of physical typology, style, history and place.'

'You can read that script off those night bus ads: Restaurant, Pub, ATM, Nightclub, Kebab Shop.' Fiona points out each location in the air between us.

'That's exactly it!' I laugh. 'I can't count the number of nights I've had that I could map out with that ad!'

'Oh, you're such a yob, Robyn. It fits perfectly within your repertoire,' Fiona teases.

'Cheers!' I respond, having no need of a defence. I clink my glass to hers and take a swig of my beer. 'When in Rome, you know...' I say as if conspiratorially. 'It doesn't have to be here though, but... I mean Northbridge or Fremantle are both good for a pub crawl, I suppose South Perth not so much. I guess they support different kinds of spatial occupation... so it's not just our repertoire that's the deciding factor.'

Drew laughs and shakes his head, then consults his lit-up mobile. 'Mike's downstairs looking for us,' he grins.

## SCENE CHANGE

**9:00pm Friday 28.09.2007 James St, Northbridge**

*Performing our script as consumers, we gloss over the street except as a heterotopia of destinations.*

Past the threshold to the bar and back on the pavement of James Street the four of us hesitate a moment. Cars are banked up at the lights. The pub behind us is noisy with music and voices, noticeable again now that we are just outside of it.

'So, back on the street, if we accept that our night out is scripted, we will be like Rosencrantz and Guildenstern,' I propose.

'Wait, what did you just call me then?' interrupts Drew quickly.

"Rosencrantz?" I hazard knowingly.

"Am I pretending to be you then?" he counters.

"Certainly not!" I pause, then change my mind, "Well, if you like."

"Shall we continue?"<sup>31</sup>

'We will be like them, and play our parts and try and find our own meanings.'

'Right, so let's take stock of the situation. What is our brief?' interjects Mike.

'To glean what afflicts the prince!' I exclaim loudly.

'No! Wrong script! Try again!' He points at me, swapping roles.

'Ah! We're here, in Northbridge on a Friday night. I would say we are scripted to consume. We've started well by consuming some beers. But I would say at the moment we are assigned the role of seeking a restaurant for dinner and wine.'

'Now that is a script I'm privileged to work with. Let's go!' Fiona sets off down the street.

So we are scripted to consume. The landscape arranged to serve this function. On the street it is as if we have pulled up a stool at the sushi train. Once there, we are stationary, fixed in location for all the options to slide past us. We will pick out those that suit us, within the one script many options exist. It is a heterotopia of a kind.<sup>32</sup> James Street in itself is just a locality. A collection of these destinations. Each destination within James Street offers up an experience attempting to be distinct and more desirable than the others.

The pavement is bright in patches under street lights, the lights themselves go unnoticed. The other areas of brightness on the street are shop fronts, the fluorescent police jackets somewhere ahead and the tiny neon pamphlets handed out by silent pairs, 'Jesus died for you.' We walk down the street in search of dinner, dodging the pamphlets and weighing up our options.

'So, whada ya reckon?' I bump Fiona's shoulder playfully.

'Something to suit the student budget?' she assumes.

'Kebabs?' suggests Drew as we pass the open mouth of a kebab shop, meat turning and dripping behind the counter.

'Nah, I couldn't. I'm so scarred after the last one. You know that 24hr one near my place? It was foul.' I reply with a mock shudder and we pass it by.

As a series of destinations, Northbridge at night is not about the promenade. The life on the streets consists of people walking from the pub to the restaurant, to the other pub, to the club. The only acceptable behaviour here is purchased. To have the chance to choose, you need buying power. Or at least the semblance of it. Any other action on the street is other. It's not for dwelling, which means there's room here for the other to dwell.

Such others are to be treated with suspicion and fear by us, privileged to at least the semblance of consumption.

I'm looking across the road for a likely looking spot, examining the facades, signage, interiors for somewhere to suit my budget and tastes.

'Hey girl!' says a voice from the dark building beside me and I swivel round in surprise. 'Nice jeans.' A lady sits on a milk crate up in the doorway of a closed shop. Her flared stonewash jeans are crossed at the knees and she leans right forward on them her back quite straight, so her hair hangs across her face.

'Um, thanks.' I say.

'Would you have any spare change?' she asks without any show of eagerness. I'm unsettled by something about her, but not threatened, and having stopped, I feel powerless to just walk away. I rummage around in my pockets for the coins from the beer earlier.

The street is no more than a conduit. The situation of being in the street is not a comfortable one. After all, Northbridge is dangerous, isn't it? It's like an alleyway, you use it but don't want to dwell there or rather, be seen as the type of person who does dwell there. I take a few quick steps to catch up with Mike, who must have hung back a bit when I suddenly stopped. I shrug at him and we keep going.

Two girls in heels and small shirts heading in the opposite direction, continue their conversation as we pass, recounting a fragment of another night out. 'and then we went to the elephant and he was such an idiot...' They are so intent on their conversation we step aside to let them pass, all unnoticed.

'Hey, wait. Stop.' I grab hold of Mike's arm. 'Did you see that? What just happened?'

'See what? The two girls walk past and abbreviate us into nowhere?' Mike turns back and looks at the receding forms of the two girls as they pass the lady on the crate, oblivious as she calls out to them.

'Abbreviate us? But yeah, I think we're talking about the same thing.'

'Well, think of it in terms of what they said, 'and then we went to the elephant,' right? They compressed the journey from one destination to another through spaces they saw as meaningless to their story. Augoyard would call that *asyndeton*, meaning the suppression of linking words.'<sup>33</sup>

'Right so how does that relate to what's going on here?'

"In the same way, in walking it selects and fragments the space traversed; it skips over links and whole parts that it omits."<sup>34</sup>

'Ok, so I see what you mean by abbreviate. James Street isn't a destination in itself and so it gets glossed over in a telling or even when performing a night out in Northbridge.'

'I reckon so.' Mike and I turn back and look for the other two just as Drew comes bounding towards us.

'What's wrong?' he calls out with winking irony.<sup>35</sup> "We can't stop here. This is bat country!"<sup>36</sup> We laugh and continue on down the street. Just ahead Fi has stopped and is waiting for us to catch up. She points out a bright white box interior with plain tables mostly full and a timber counter recalling South East Asia, rising towards the ceiling in the centre of the space towards the back, like a sign.

'You lot right with noodles for tea?' She asks.

## CONSUMER FRAGMENTS

10:30 pm Friday 5.10.2007 James St, Northbridge

*Where it is suggested through a symbolic negotiation of the presence of police and money that inhabitation be considered as the creation of small and fleeting resistive landscapes within an imperfect grid of control.*

We pour out of the restaurant like the last mouthful of wine in the bottle. Still far too early for a club we continue down the pavement. Back on the street we're looking for the next drink.

'To walk in the city is to lack place and seek a destination.'<sup>37</sup> Mike says half to himself, half to the passing revellers.

My wallet's looking a bit slim. So I call out, 'I'm just going to pop over to the ATM.' The cars are going slow already, prepared for my less than alert crossing. I look back to see if anyone has followed me and catch Mike and Drew taking the moment in the spot lights of the oncoming cars to perform a sumo stomp, before scooting off the road.

I giggle through my bank transaction and behind me I can hear, 'So, whada you wanna do?'

'I dunno. Whada you wanna do?'

'I dunno. Whada you wanna...'

'Look, whatever else I think we should hunt a gin and tonic.'

'Those crazy savage beasts!'

'Who?'

'The gin and tonic! We'll need a plan...'

As I turn around, cash stashed safely in my wallet, two police in fluoro yellow jackets walk slowly by. Brought suddenly back to the patrolled Northbridge my mates drop their gestures of hunting wild beasts and break the war circle to step to one side of the footpath. The cops just keep walking. We're not even a blip on their radar.

'I'm suddenly very aware of my surroundings when the cops are around. But as soon as they're gone I'm happily oblivious again,' says Mike as I join the deflated circle.

'Yeah, it's like they only enforce the law where they are.'

'It's not like anyone wants to get caught J-walking, street drinking or pissing on a wall but it doesn't mean I won't do it if I think I can get away with it!' he continues with a grin.

'But, it's against the law,' I say. 'How can pissing on a wall be ok at one moment and inconceivable in the next?'

'Sure, it's against the law: against the generic rules. But the local convention of Northbridge says it's fine, and even funny so long as you don't get caught. You can really see it in the way everyone treats the road here. It's like the later it gets the more pedestrians rule, not cars. Drivers are forced to accept that pedestrians are prone to run and stagger in front of moving vehicles,' says Fi and we move off down the foot path again, potentially in search of wild gin and tonic.

Spaces seem to slip and slide over each other as we walk. The cops glide past taking their sphere of control with them, our playful constructions of fearless hunters after semi-mythical beasts surface and submerge again in moments of opportunity. A discussion of laws and enforcement would not tell the story of this evening, nor would tracing the exchange of money, or a detailed description of the physical street – no matter how much each of these may reveal about the larger society and frame the events.

Ten metres on there's a percussion band set up where the closed glass edge of a bank steps back under the building line, momentarily widening the footpath. Some kind of syncopation travels in my step. Mike's already darted ahead and is dancing on the spot. The rest of us join in on the groove with more or less stupid grins. One passing couple starts with a skip and puts on a bit of a dance step while they walk past holding hands, her skirt flares out around her legs as she twirls. A group of boys call out appreciatively and one bursts over to perform three silly dance steps in less than five seconds before sprinting back to his mates.

The tune changes and we dig in our pockets for change. There's a tinkling of coins as we nod to

the musicians and jitter on. The individuals within this complex setting are making meanings with these exchanges that are not inherent within the coins. Consumption is scripted but the meaning of the act to those who perform and read them are written beneath the surface, visible through spaces between the words. Mike suddenly laughs out loud and turns around, skipping backwards to tell us, 'You couldn't map this journey!'<sup>38</sup>

'Not if you drew every concrete paver and every building facade we passed!' I agree.

'Not if you scripted out all the roles and dialogue. You still wouldn't have it!' joins Fi.

'Of course not! It's made up of consumer spaces, too fragmented, inchoate, fleeting, and ephemeral to map. They may not be a violent resistance to the landscape of consumption, or present an authentic alternative.' Drew waves his hands as he talks. 'But these performances are meaningful enough; they affirm the potential to play in the landscapes of power. And sometimes playing is the most radical choice one can make.'<sup>39</sup>

## DISCUSSION

What does 'meaningful enough' mean in the context of everyday urban experience? 'Enough' as a mediating term suggests the shifting negotiations of individuals going about and living their lives. 'Enough' as this moderator removes any suggestion of a naive acceptance of the face value. Instead, as de Certeau would have it, the urban inhabitant is a wilful and knowing individual able to recognise and negotiate the strings of connection within a commercial setting such as Northbridge, Perth.

Is it 'meaningful enough' to suggest that play can be resistive in a landscape of consumption? Barthes' notion of the photographic Punctum gives a suggestion here. The Punctum of a photograph, according to Barthes, is the tiny detail that gives a mass-produced image its significance to an individual. It is a detail that has meaning because of its connection to the individual's personal history. In Barthes' words, "it is what I add to the photograph and *what is nevertheless already there*."<sup>40</sup> In the context of urban experience this suggests how an action within a nighttime play-scape may be 'meaningful enough,' while still framed by Wilkie's rules of place or simply rules of consumerism and consumption.

Moreover, what is 'meaningful enough' in architectural representation of space? And what approaches will assist the discipline in moving away from a fetishized focus on building-object removed from social relations<sup>41</sup> to an honest engagement with user experience of space? For Ian Borden,



to avoid this problem architectural historians must move away from seeing architecture only as things, imagination as that only of architects, mapping as only by drawing, and space as only interior, façade, composition and garden.<sup>42</sup>

This paper takes de Certeau's model of the wilful and knowing urban walker<sup>43</sup> as a starting point in seeking to find representational mode of individual urban experience. This paper critiques the flâneur as ideal urban inhabitant for being too disengaged from the setting they ambivalently observe. Likewise, morphological analysis of place is shown to be lacking in the detail of place experience. Instead a narrator engaged with Wilkie's rules of place is sought, one capable, after de Certeau's walkers and Wood's knowing tourists, to play in the landscape of power. To make their experiences 'meaningful enough.'

The primary research contribution of this paper is in the approach it brings to reading architectural space. There is growing interest in experiential qualities of architecture and urban space<sup>44</sup> and representational modes are needed that engage with places as they are lived. This paper joins Havik<sup>45</sup> in taking a literary approach to this question, however this work is innovative in drawing on the rigour of the autoethnographic approach to synthesise the researcher's experience of evenings in Northbridge in 2007, and contextualising this through the use of characters which represent positions within the relevant discourse.

Work such as this has implications for architectural discourse. The fleeting encounters of urban space are not adequately rendered in monumental imagery, morphological analysis, or an outsider's detached and knowing caricature. As architectural enquiry shifts to an interest in engaging with urban place as it is lived, there is a need for approaches which represent the subjective plurality of space within our disciplinary toolbox.

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<sup>1</sup> For example: Borden, *Skateboarding, Space and the City*, p. 7. and Havik, 'Lived Experience, Places Read', p. 37.

<sup>2</sup> Ellis, *The Ethnographic I*.

<sup>3</sup> Northbridge is one of the major night-time leisure centres of Perth. In 2007 the extensive redevelopment and family friendly push for the programming of the public spaces currently underway (in 2012) had not begun, and the area had a well-established 'dodgy' reputation.

<sup>4</sup> Havik, 'Lived Experience, Places Read', p. 45. and Landry *Creative City*, pp. 246-247.

<sup>5</sup> Benjamin, 'Charles Baudelaire'

<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Wilson develops an excellent argument for the flâneur's detached observation as a vital position in understanding the rapid transitions of 1800s Paris. 'The Sphinx in the City' pp. 47-64.

<sup>7</sup> Wilson cites Sand's 'Historie de ma vie, Part 4' in a discussion of women dressing as men to take of the flâneur persona in 1800s Paris. 'Sphinx in the City', p. 52.

<sup>8</sup> Wilkie, 'Kinds of Place at Bore Place'.

<sup>9</sup> Wood, 'What Happens [in Vegas]'.

<sup>10</sup> Hebbert, 'Street as Locus', p. 588.

<sup>11</sup> de Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 110.

<sup>12</sup> Benjamin, 'Charles Baudelaire'

<sup>13</sup> Baudelaire, in Benjamin, 'Charles Baudelaire', p. 55.

<sup>14</sup> Baudelaire, in Benjamin, 'Charles Baudelaire', p. 55.

<sup>15</sup> Benjamin, 'Charles Baudelaire', p. 55.

<sup>16</sup> Benjamin, 'Charles Baudelaire', p. 48.

<sup>17</sup> Benjamin, 'Charles Baudelaire', p. 55.

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- <sup>18</sup> Baudelaire, in Benjamin, 'Charles Baudelaire', p. 55.
- <sup>19</sup> Benjamin, 'Charles Baudelaire', p. 59.
- <sup>20</sup> Benjamin, 'Charles Baudelaire', p. 40.
- <sup>21</sup> Wood, 'What Happens [in Vegas]', p. 325.
- <sup>22</sup> Wilkie, 'Kinds of Place at Bore Place'.
- <sup>23</sup> Wilkie, 'Kinds of Place at Bore Place', p. 248.
- <sup>24</sup> Wood, 'What Happens [in Vegas]', p. 324.
- <sup>25</sup> Wilkie, 'Kinds of Place at Bore Place', p. 250.
- <sup>26</sup> Wilkie, 'Kinds of Place at Bore Place', p. 249.
- <sup>27</sup> Wilkie, 'Kinds of Place at Bore Place', p. 250.
- <sup>28</sup> A reflection of Aldo Rossi's faith in Morphology, however it is the argument of this paper that the co-responsive model adopted from Halbwachs does not deal with the detail of individual experience. 'The Architecture of the City.' p130.
- <sup>29</sup> Punctum: a word used by Roland Barthes to describe a detail that changes the reading of a photograph, unique to each viewer. Wilkie 'Kinds of Place at Bore Place', p. 252.
- <sup>30</sup> Wood, 'What Happens [in Vegas]', p. 318.
- <sup>31</sup> Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*.
- <sup>32</sup> "heterotopia - a juxtaposition of incompatible spaces in dialogue with one another." Wilkie, 'Kinds of Place at Bore Place', p. 249.
- <sup>33</sup> de Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, 101.
- <sup>34</sup> de Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, 101.
- <sup>35</sup> Wood, 'What Happens [in Vegas]'.
- <sup>36</sup> Thompson, *Fear and Loathing*, p. 18.
- <sup>37</sup> de Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 102.
- <sup>38</sup> de Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 97.
- <sup>39</sup> Wood, 'What Happens [in Vegas]', p. 328.
- <sup>40</sup> Barthes, 'Camera Lucida', p. 55.
- <sup>41</sup> Borden, *Skateboarding, Space and the City*, p.7.
- <sup>42</sup> Borden, *Skateboarding, Space and the City*, p.7.
- <sup>43</sup> de Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*.
- <sup>44</sup> Including Pallasma, *Eyes of the Skin.*, Landry, *Creative City.* and Havik, 'Lived Experience, Places Read'.
- <sup>45</sup> Havik, 'Terrisotires', pp. 70-78.