

**School of Media,  
Creative Arts and Social Inquiry**

**Capturing Traces:  
Formal Compositional Photography and the Unseen City**

**Lance Dean Ward**

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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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## **Abstract**

This practice-led research project is an investigation into how formal compositional photography can be employed to create an engagement with overlooked utilitarian spaces of the city. In order to find and capture these spaces, a form of engaged exploration within the city is used. Employing approaches to walking used by the flâneur, the observational methods of Georges Perec and an understanding of the history of street photography, the city is explored and examined on foot. Its utilitarian spaces are considered not for function but instead for the information revealed about everyday life within the city. The intrigue in these specific spaces comes from the raw information found on their surfaces, giving a sense of how these spaces are used, and giving an indication to the presence of past users of the space. Within this project, I have come to understand these spaces as a form of edgelands; spaces in which past histories and physical traces accumulate and tell of everyday life within the city.

To bring about an engagement with these spaces, formal compositional photography is used to create photographs that have a visual and physical presence within the gallery space. The photographs are created with the intention of being hung on a gallery wall following the histories of the tableau. The photographs within this project explore various spaces within the city, and examine how formal composition can be used to challenge how these spaces are presented. This culminates in a body of large traditional scale works where each photograph is a carefully considered composition from the city, while at the same time tells a story of how the city is interacted with and used on a daily basis.



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## Introduction

Author Italo Calvino in his book *Invisible Cities* wrote: “The city, however, does not tell its past, but contains it like the lines of a hand, written in the corners of the streets, the gratings of the windows, the banisters of the steps, the antennae of the lightning rods, the poles of the flags, every segment marked in turn with scratches, indentations, scrolls” (Calvino [1974] 1997, 9). This quotation by Calvino revealed to me something about the city I was always curious about, namely, the traces and stories of the city dwellers that had come before me. I found this interest in the city in other media as well. Movies such as *Blade Runner* (1982) and *Akira* (1988) told stories from a giant or mega-city, stories which often have city- or even world-changing ramifications. Aside from these large storylines, I developed a curiosity towards the cityscape in these science fiction cities, wondering what day-to-day events occurred in the gloomy, overlooked back alleys. It was these fictional cities that inspired me to look at the real life cities these films drew inspiration from, searching for real world marks and traces that told stories of the space. The history of a city is contained within its physical surfaces, the past interactions that leave marks and traces on these surfaces showing hints of a past or present use. This creative research project investigates how the city can be explored and how the use of formal compositional photography can bring attention to and engagement with these traces.

The city is a multifaceted space; it contains a vast amount of information, and it appears in many forms giving details about life in the city. This information is present due to the interactions of city dwellers with each other and the various spaces of the city. The city is constantly being added to, creating a space of flux, of constantly shifting trends and information. Author Haruki Murakami (2008) notes that objects, people and ideas are constantly moving in and out of the city, while urban planner Kevin Lynch (1960) observes that the physical city space is also in a state of flux due to constant change by construction. This project focuses on the physical traces in the city, investigating overlooked spaces and how the users of these spaces leave behind traces of their everyday interactions, building up information and hints about past use on the physical surfaces of the city like a patina.

This project consists of a body of creative works, exhibited at City Art Space in Western Australia in May 2019, and an exegesis consisting of four chapters. Chapter one outlines the definition of the city for this project and discusses the use of walking as a method for exploration. The city allows for travel and exploration across its spaces in a variety of ways, yet one of the most embodied and experiential methods of moving through the city comes from walking. Walking, as an action, is most commonly used as a mode of transportation; however, when given a purpose beyond transport, the results of walking can be very different. The flâneur was a figure who employed walking as a mode of looking not for commodities of the city but experiences instead. Walking the malls and streets of Paris in the 1800s, the flâneur aimed to see the familiar streets with a fresh perspective. It is the use of observation paired with walking that creates these moments of engagement. Author Georges Perec has been an influence on this project with his methods of observation and the manner in which he documents the everyday, making even the most mundane actions seem intriguing. He offers small insights into people’s everyday lives drawn from his intense observations central to his day of sitting and watching. This bears similarity to the work of Berenice Abbott, who observed and documented a changing New York City in the 1930s. Her photographs not only documented her observations of the city, but also captured the political and social concerns of the time. Both Perec

and Abbott used observation as a way to create works that documented the city and the traces, interactions and transformations that occurred there.

The culmination of walking, observation and photography can be found in street photography, a form of photography that uses the city as its backdrop or stage in which to capture moments and scenes. Street photography elevates the everyday from the commonplace happenings to situations that can create intrigue in the viewer. This is similar to Percec in that his writing draws attention to the everyday he witnessed, yet he somehow also makes it feel as if we are looking at clues to some greater mystery that is yet to be revealed. Street photography is not just a documentation of life within cities; the photographer uses the city as the setting to tell a story or show an idea that they wish to convey. This is often conveyed through photographing people; however, in the case of still life street photography, instead of figures, everyday items are used to convey an idea or tell a story. This particular type of street photography was most influential on this project as it was a perfect meeting point of walking, observation and the use of showing or telling stories from the city through objects rather than people. Chapter one concludes with a discussion of one of my earliest works *Untitled (East Perth Length Walks)*, which reflects on the way in which street photography, walking and observation have been used to create a method of city exploration for this project.

Chapter two focuses on the use of formal compositional photography to draw attention to, or change understandings of, objects and structures. Artists Bernd and Hilla Becher were some of the first artists to use formal compositional photography to alter how an object is perceived—specifically, coal furnaces and industrial structures. The Bechers photographed these objects not for their functionality, which is how they were commonly perceived, but instead they documented and catalogued these structures with a focus on their formal elements. They would create grids of similar structures allowing a viewer to compare and contrast the formal compositions of each structure. The Bechers use of formal composition has been an influence on other contemporary artists such as Ola Kolehmainen who, instead of documenting structures, uses buildings as a raw material to create formal photographic objects. The use of formal compositional photography has played a key role in the image creation process of this project. This foundation resulted in the creation of two bodies of work, the *Wall Works* series and *Isolated Views* series. These works use formal composition as their foundation to create photographs that frame various parts of the city, yet at the same time are autonomous as objects. Chapter two also outlines the field of contemporary formal photography by looking at three artists who have been central to this project: Andreas Gursky, Michael Wolf and Bert Danckaert. These three artists show how formal compositional photography can be used to create images that seek to document everyday life or present a space to promote exploration and curiosity towards the urban environment. I use these three artists to help define where my practice is situated in the current field of formal compositional photography as well as what my formal compositional photographs are aiming to achieve.

Having established methods of exploring and capturing the city, Chapter three sets about defining the specific spaces of the city. Spaces that are viewed and understood primarily for their functionality often lead to them being passed through and given little recognition. The term non-place as outlined by Marc Augé ([1995] 2008) served as the foundation for defining these spaces of the city. Augé proposed that non-places were the spaces in-between places; those spaces that users travel through while on the way to other places. He saw places as having histories and identities, whereas the non-place lacked these elements. My two bodies of work, *For Lease* and *Joondalup*

*Shopping Centre*, were a specific investigation of non-places and how the term could be used to describe parts of the city that were in a sense well maintained yet in a state of disuse, lacking histories and identity, while waiting to be occupied again. The *For Lease* series was an exploration of how vacant shops did not show signs of what had operated in these spaces before, or what would operate in the future. There were spaces of isolation due to their lack of function and occupation, spaces in need of purpose and function so they could be occupied once more. The *Joondalup Shopping Centre* series was an investigation into how an occupied space can change when people are removed. Investigating these spaces and finding traces of the people who had been in these spaces returned the project to the city streets where I focused on the utilitarian spaces of the city.

The enquiry into non-places brought the empty office spaces and shop fronts of the city into consideration for the project, however the back alleys and utilitarian spaces of the city still lacked a clear definition. Chapter three clarifies these spaces with a discussion of the term edgelands. This term was coined by authors Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts (2012) in their book *Edgelands: Journeys into England's True Wilderness*. They use the term edgelands to describe the spaces that are in-between urban and rural spaces. These spaces bear similarities to non-places in that they are passed through with little attention paid to them, however they differ in that edgelands contain hints to their past histories littered within them. The histories and traces of past use that are contained within edgelands bear similarity to the utilitarian spaces of the city. The back alleys of the city are in-between spaces; they are required for the city to function. They are rarely occupied by people or for any substantial amount of time, yet the interactions that do occur there are often apparent through physical traces left behind. I argue then that these utilitarian spaces are pockets or isolated areas that can be defined as edgelands within the city. With this association, these spaces can be seen not for their functionality, but how the objects, marks and physical traces they contain tell of their past, and the narratives that have occurred within these spaces.

The final chapter in this exegesis is a discussion of my own process of creating photographs, selecting photographs and finally exhibiting them. I call this process the 'Serendipitous Long Game'. The process involves the joy of finding, composing and creating photographs, which in turn leads to an experience of finding similarities between photographs from completely different times and cities. This results in a series of images that allows for different spaces to be compared and contrasted, most notably in the works *Between Here* and *Between There*. These two works were created in different cities at different times and yet have many notable similarities between them. The fourth chapter finishes with a discussion of the final works, a series of works that serves as a reflection of the entire project. The final series of works blends ideas and compositional approaches from previous series to create works that draw the project together as a whole.

The chapter ends with the works *Addition* and *Subtraction*, two photographs that are self-referential of the project as a whole. These works are found compositions within the city, yet they bear a striking resemblance to how my works are presented within the gallery. As found formal compositions located in overlooked parts of the city, these works serve as a fitting discussion to end on.



## Chapter 1: Walking and Observing as a Mode of Exploring the City

This chapter sets up my parameters for understanding the city as a site that is the centre or meeting place of a variety of objects, people, materials, interactions and events. As all these elements come together in the city, spaces become dense with information. As a result, entering and interacting with the city presents a series of choices about what it is that we give attention to. In this research project, I focus on the ways in which interactions between people, objects and the space of the city create traces, and how these traces allude to the presence of people and the past histories that have occurred within the city space. To find these traces within the city I explore the space through the use of walking and observation, drawing on the walking methods of the flâneur. Historically, the flâneur employed a method of walking that focused not on shops and other commodities of the city, but on experiencing a space, and absorbing the information it has in order to experience the space differently. Of key importance to this method of walking is the use of observation, discussed in this chapter through the writings of author Georges Perec and the observations he noted. Perec's book *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris* (1975) is a creative work that was born from his considered observations within the city; this work served as a starting point for me to consider how a creative work could emerge from walking and observing within the city.

The use of observation and walking is paired with the photographic medium. The works of Berenice Abbott are discussed to outline how an artist's intent or observations on a subject can manifest. Abbott was a key figure in the development of street photography, an approach that elevates the mundane and everyday in the city into intriguing or narrative driven photographs.

The final section of this chapter is a discussion of one of my works *Untitled (East Perth Length Walks)*. This work was created as a result of the method of walking and observation within the city, and demonstrates how this manifests within my broader creative practice. The significance of this work is not in the final images presented but the culmination of elements that led to the final images.

### 1.1 Defining the City

The city is not a stagnant site. It is a living entity that is in a constant state of flux. The city's physical properties, objects and users that reside within it are constantly changing. Author Haruki Murakami in his book *After Dark* describes the city as follows:

In our broad sweep, the city looks like a single gigantic creature—or more like a single collective entity created by many intertwining organisms. Countless arteries stretch to the ends of its elusive body, circulating a continuous supply of fresh blood cells, sending out new data and collecting the old, sending out new consumables and collecting the old, sending out new contradictions and collecting the old. (Murakami 2008, 6)

Murakami describes the vastness of the city, outlining how the space is forever growing and changing; the new and old co-exist in the same space creating the single entity called the city. I understand new objects and new buildings change the city both visually and spatially, which in turn changes how users move through and interact with the space. These new elements mix with the old creating a space that is continually shifting in detail yet still identifiable through its constant name: the city. Urban planner Kevin Lynch in his book *The Image of the City* states:

Not only is the city an object which is perceived (and perhaps enjoyed) by millions of people of widely diverse class and character, but it is the product of many builders who are constantly modifying the structure for reason of their own. While it may be stable in general outlines for some time, it is ever changing in detail. (Lynch 1960, 2)

The changes in detail are not just the result of large scale changes such as new buildings. There are also many small and unnoticed changes that come from the interactions of city users with each other and the objects and spaces of the city. These smaller and often less significant interactions, which could be considered part of the everyday of the city, are what drew me to focus on how the city changes. More specifically, I became interested in how a small interaction could affect the city spaces and leave behind a physical trace of that interaction.

This becomes an interesting cycle for the city; that people are constantly adding information to the city while not always being aware that they are. We tend to enter the city with tasks that need to be completed and these tasks tend to be the main focus for the city user. As Lynch states, “Most often, our perception of the city is not sustained, but rather partial, fragmentary, mixed with other concerns” (Lynch 1960, 2). The changes to the city that occur from these tasks and interactions are often given less thought than the completion of the action itself. Thus, the traces left behind from various actions and interactions add further information to the city space. On this subject, Lynch states:

Moving elements in a city, and in particular the people and their activities, are as important as the stationary physical parts. We are not simply observers of this spectacle, but are ourselves a part of it, on the stage with the other participants. (Lynch 1960, 2)

If, as Lynch states, the perception of the city is most often partial or mixed with other concerns, then it could be understood that only the most noteworthy interactions and visual moments will be perceived and recalled by city users. As such, city dwellers leave behind traces of their interaction with the city despite not being aware of doing so and these traces can persist long after they have left the city. The interactions of city users affect the city physically, creating marks and traces and changing the city space, sometimes in the subtlest of ways. It is amongst these subtle traces, hints of past actions, that I find my intrigue and fascination with the city.

In this research, I have chosen not to focus on iconic or well-maintained parts of the city; instead, I focus on the functioning spaces of the city. These spaces manifest in the form of back alleys, sidewalks and utility spaces that are necessary for the functioning of the city. These spaces are often understood primarily for their functionality with little consideration being paid to them visually. Yet these utilitarian spaces offer insights into the everyday interactions and processes of the city. As Lynch outlines:

They [city users] are clear enough about the ugliness of the world they live in, and they are quite vocal about the dirt, the smoke, the heat, and the congestion, the chaos and yet the monotony of it. But they are hardly aware of the potential value of harmonious surroundings, a world which they may have briefly glimpsed only as tourists or as escaped vacationers. They can have little sense of what a setting can mean in terms of daily delight, or as a continuous anchor for their lives, or as an extension of the meaningfulness of richness of the world. (Lynch 1960, 2)



Lynch's idea of a continuous anchor could also be applied to the utilitarian spaces of the city. These spaces are important in their functionality and seldom refurbished as long as they continue to function correctly. As such, they collect information on their surfaces over time in the form of physical marks and traces of their use. These traces give insight and information about the past interactions that have occurred within these spaces, more so in some cases than on the glossy facades of the commercial and well-maintained areas of the city. Similarly, writer Leo Hollis in his book *Cities are Good for You* states that "to judge a city by its physical fabric alone is a mistake; this is not the genius of the metropolis. Complexity comes from our interactions: we are constantly making connections, moving from place to place" (Hollis 2013, 24). Hollis argues that spaces within the city have complexity that is brought about via interactions. Similarly, I argue that utilitarian spaces in the city tend to be glanced over and considered for their function rather than appreciated for the richness of information they hold.

The richness of information I find within utilitarian spaces comes from a consideration of what has happened in the past. This gives the space more complexity. Both Lynch and Hollis have identified that deeper meaning and understanding comes from interactions with the city; how it is moved through and interacted with. Based on this, within my creative practice, I specifically consider the utilitarian spaces of the city not for their functionality but the information they hold like a patina on their physical surfaces in the form of marks and traces. This creates spaces that are complex. Not only do they facilitate the city through their functionality, but they also hold the presence of past users and everyday interactions through the traces that have been left behind.

## **1.2 Walking in the City – The Flâneur**

The city is a central hub filled with large amounts of information. Each city dweller negotiates this mass of information in differing ways. Each dweller uses a method of looking, finding and understanding information that is intriguing or of note to them. To find and focus on the specific traces within the city that intrigued me, I first considered the method by which I moved through the city. Specifically, I use walking as a method of finding and experiencing spaces that showed traces of use and the presence of people that used them. I walk without a set destination through the streets of the city, allowing my motivation for walking to be led by finding various traces that intrigue me. The city always has something new to offer; its landscape is constantly changing and I use walking as a way to explore these changes and find new spaces to capture within. Author Rebecca Solnit in her book *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* states:

Cities have always offered anonymity, variety, and conjunction, qualities best basked in by walking: one does not have to go into the bakery or the fortune teller's, only to know that one might. A city always contains more than any inhabitant can know, and a great city always makes the unknown and the possible spurs to the imagination" (Solnit 2001, 171).

The city is a space to be experienced, a vast space with changing details, and the act of walking is an integral method of moving through the space.

Walking is functional as a mode of transportation; however, if the act of walking is afforded consideration, it can shift from pure functionality to a conscious act that is done with meaning and intent. As Solnit explains:

To make walking into an investigation, a ritual, a meditation, is a special subset of walking, physiologically like and philosophically unlike the way the mail carrier brings the mail and the office worker reaches the train. Which is to say that the subject of walking is, in some sense, about how we invest universal acts with particular meanings. Like eating or breathing, it can be invested with widely different cultural meanings from the erotic to the spiritual, from the revolutionary to the artistic. (Solnit 2001, 3)

Solnit claims that by being conscious of the act of walking, the functional aspect of transportation becomes a secondary intent. As such, the act of walking becomes a focus for the walk. For example, in the case of a walking tour of a city, past histories are traced and the participants of the tour begin to consider the past and how the streets they are walking on hold information and history. The act of walking can then be the excuse or action that allows for consideration and thought on other topics. In this project I use walking as an exploration tool. Although I am moving through the city, it is not towards specific destinations, rather I am being guided by visual elements to find spaces that offer traces of their past; that is, traces of actions and the people that have been present within these spaces.

When discussing walking, the subject of the landscape will always be a consideration, within which there are two major spaces to consider, namely, the rural (or natural) and the urban. Solnit discusses the rural and the urban, and their differences:

The history of both urban and rural walking is a history of freedom and of the definition of pleasure. But rural walking has found a moral imperative in the love of nature that has allowed it to defend and open up the countryside. Urban walking has always been a shadier business, easily turning into soliciting, cruising, promenading, shopping, rioting, protesting, skulking, loitering, and other activities that, however enjoyable, hardly have the high moral tone of nature appreciation. (Solnit 2001, 173)

Solnit goes on to argue that no one has mounted an effort to defend or preserve the urban space as they would a rural space (Solnit 2001). The rural landscape could be considered the more appealing or beautiful space to observe and engage with, and has the high moral tone of connecting with nature or having some space to collect one's thoughts. "[T]he average rural walker, looks at the general—the view, the beauty—and the landscape moves by as a gently modulated continuity: a crest long in view is reached, a forest thins out to become a meadow" (Solnit 2001, 174). It is easy to understand, then, why the rural has a higher moral tone when the discussion is around the beauty of the space, yet this discussion is about the general; the feel or look of the entire landscape, a gentle moving between parts of it. The city, however, provides a different opportunity for exploration to that of the rural; it is a space rich with information and an inexhaustible amount of tiny details that all have a story to tell should anyone wish to investigate them. Solnit discusses this in relation to a gatherer: "Just as a gatherer may pause to note a tree whose acorns will be bountiful in six months [...] so an urban walker may note a grocery open late or a place to get shoes resoled" (Solnit 2001, 174). The hunt for what is around the next corner and what new observation, situation or piece of information can be found within the city space is what makes it a space of exploration. The amount of information that is present within the city allows an observer to engage with the space as much or as little as they like. The appreciation of the rural or natural landscape is well documented, yet as Solnit claims, there has been little effort to defend or preserve the urban landscape in the same manner. I wish to mount an effort towards an appreciation for the city and more specifically towards the spaces that are less appealing or maintained. To find these spaces, walking is the most

obvious choice; however, walking alone is not enough. A desire to explore and a willingness to find new experiences must accompany walking so that these unappealing spaces can be appreciated from a new perspective. To achieve this type of walking, I look towards the working methods and actions of the flâneur.

The history of walking as a considered action for observational engagement with the city can be seen in the flâneur. The term flâneur was introduced by Charles Baudelaire in 1863, having read Edgar Allan Poe's *The Man of the Crowd* (which can be considered one of the first instances of the flâneur) Baudelaire found within Poe's work a new type of urban dweller, one who is both observer and participant in the crowd and the city. Baudelaire's first definition of the flâneur appeared in his book *The Painter of Modern Life*. Baudelaire discusses how the flâneur moves and lives within the city:

The crowd is his element, as the air is that of the birds and water of fishes. His passion and his profession are to become one flesh with the crowd. For the perfect flâneur, for a passionate spectator, it is an immense joy to set up house in the heat of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite. To be away from home and yet to find oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the center of the world and yet remain hidden from the world [...] (Baudelaire 1863, quoted in Coverley 2010, 61)

As Baudelaire states, the flâneur is most happy in and amongst the crowd, hiding within its ranks, nested in and amongst the hustle and bustle of the city and the people in the street, hiding in plain sight. Being a part of the crowd allows for a more engaged experience of the city. The interactions that happen and the traces left behind can be observed in real time, which then further informs the curiosity towards the traces found within the city. This is where the flâneur's intent was very different to that of a normal city dweller; they were on a mission of observation and exploration. Their concern was not with the destination or other production based tasks; instead a flâneur observed the street around them, strolling at a slow pace, with the goal of visually absorbing everything the city had to offer, which in turn allowed for new experiences. As I walk in the city, I consider the approach of the flâneur as a way to experience the city—it allows for a way of looking that is concerned with experiences, and by being nestled within the crowd much like the flâneur I get to experience the everyday first hand and notice those small changes that others might not. Through this method of walking, many different visual aspects of the city can be considered, not just the biggest billboard or most expensive shop.

Baudelaire's image of the flâneur can be regarded in the same way as Solnit's description of a walker in the rural space, a stroller who admires the beauty of the space around them. Solnit states, "For most of us the country or wilderness is a place we walk through and look at, but seldom make things in or take things from (remember the famous Sierra Club dictum, 'Take only photographs, leave only footprints')" (Solnit 2002, 174). Solnit outlines here how the rural environment is explored and observed rather than interacted with. I see a similarity between the rural walker and the way in which the flâneur observes the city and enjoys the view, rather than critique its imperfections or seek out specific products or shops within it. Both rural walker and flâneur are less participants in the environment and more observers of it, whereas city dwellers interact and add information to the space. This creates a position of engaged observation for the flâneur; they are not affecting or changing the city but are instead experiencing all of the changes that others are creating in real time.

### 1.3 Observation and Attention to Detail

While exploring the city I discover traces through engaged observation; looking with attention and the intention to discover hints to past interactions. I do this by taking in all the details that a space has to offer. The longer I observe a space the more information the space presents. Author Georges Perec used observation as a method of interrogating the spaces he occupied. In his book *Species of Spaces and Other Places* (1974) Perec writes down practical exercises and ideas for how to better observe the street:

Observe the street, from time to time, with some concern for systems perhaps. Apply yourself. Take your time [...] Note down what you can see. Anything worthy of note going on. Do you know how to see what's worthy of note? Is there anything that strikes you? Nothing strikes you. You don't know how to see. You must set about it more slowly, almost stupidly. Force yourself to write down what is of no interest, what is most obvious, most common, most colourless. (Perec [1974] 2008, 50)

Perec is offering the reader an insight into how he chooses to observe the city. He does not approach it with preconceptions or subjectivity, but tries to remain neutral so that he may see the city from a different perspective. He is asking the reader to sit and study, to absorb and experience the city, giving consideration to every component that is found within it. In his book *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris* (1975), Perec uses this method of observation to detail every event, object and person, no matter how insignificant, which passed through his field of view from the café window he is sat at. Perec's book is a document of observation: a three-day interrogation of the space he occupied. His writing notes the changes that occur within the space: people moving, events such as weddings and funerals, cars driving past, or birds perched on buildings. Perec's observations have a level of detail that could be compared to a security camera (Virilio 2008); however, it is the crafting and composition of his writing that brings attention and importance to his observations, elevating them from a pure recording to a scene that is worthy of contemplation.

Perec's writing is a considered study and interrogation of all that occurs within a space. He is not judging how little or insignificant an action or detail is, instead he gives everything he observes the same consideration. Writer Paul Virilio discusses working with Georges Perec and his observational methods:

So he [Perec] attempted to record everything, as would a security camera: to record the ordinary, the banal, the habitual. That is, the signs of an event to which we may not have paid attention, that we may not even have perceived. What interested Perec was the potential of the banal to become remarkable" (Virilio 2008, 109).

Perec's writing, especially his ability to bring deeper understanding and consideration to fleeting moments and various events, became a source of great influence upon my own methods of observing the city. His close observation of the city allowed his writing to highlight many unnoticed events that occur within the space, yet it was only through his periods of long, focused observation that he could notice these details. Through my photographs, I want to give insight into the everyday of the city, but also allow the details and traces found within the photographs to highlight those signs of an event that may have not even been perceived.

Perec's writing was one of the first instances I encountered of how a method of long observational engagement with the city could result in a creative documentation of that interaction. The flâneur,

despite engaging with the city through walking, was often more concerned with the experience rather than documenting that interaction; it was more of a personal and internal experience of the city. Perce's observations and writing engaged me, helping to create an image of the scene, and through his detailed descriptions, I had a sense of wonder and intrigue regarding the most everyday observations from the street. The resulting creative work would become a trace of the artist's engagement with a space that could then be shared with others. Where Perce masterfully described what he saw with exact precision through his creative writing, artist Berenice Abbott used photography to document her observations of a changing New York City.

Author Terri Weissman in the book *The Realisms of Berenice Abbott: Documentary Photography and Political Action* discusses the works of Berenice Abbott, and more specifically her *Changing New York* series. Weissman states:

*Changing New York* largely documents New York's transformation from a nineteenth-century city to a modern, twentieth-century metropolis. In her images of abandoned buildings, tenement housing, homeless men, street peddlers, and city crowds, Abbott effectively depicts the painful process of urban development, the decline in sovereignty and autonomy of individuals, and the rise of corporate power at the expense of human-scaled family-owned businesses. (Weissman 2011, 123)

Abbott's work is a documentation of the changing city, showing parts of the city that were new and other parts that no longer existed. Her photographs documented a very specific time in New York's history focusing not just on the changing physical city but how it was evolving politically and socially. Abbott's work, much like Perce's, is a creative work that is born from observation; however, where Abbott's work differs from Perce's is in her intent. She documents the city to highlight the social and political changes. Perce's writing offered the reader a series of observations, with some questions that spurred the imagination, allowing the reader to become curious about these spaces. Abbott's work, however, shows in full clarity how the shift in the city affects people, objects and physical spaces within it. Abbott's work offers a trace of the history of New York City, showing how it once was and how it was beginning to change, and the effects of that change. Abbott was an observer, much like Perce or the flâneur, yet the images she created, as does Perce's writing, still remain of importance.

#### **1.4 Street Photography: Capturing Moments while Observing and Walking**

The use of photography within the city has a long history, with some of the first photographic images depicting city scenes. Artists such as Berenice Abbott were the forerunners of this form of photography known as street photography. Researcher and author Jane Tormey in her book *Cities and Photography* describes street photography in this way: "As another metaphor for the 'everyday', the street provides a backdrop or stage on which all manner of encounter takes place" (Tormey 2013, 95). The city becomes not just a site for consumption and work, but instead it is a stage for the street photographer; objects and people enter the viewfinder, which allows the city and the everyday that unfolds there to become the raw materials for their photographs. Authors Sophie Howarth and Stephen McLaren in their book *Street Photography Now* discuss street photography as

an unbroken tradition stretching back to the invention of photography itself. It revels in the poetic possibilities that an inquisitive mind and a camera can conjure out of everyday life [...] In their

spontaneous and often subconscious reaction to the fecundity of public life, street photographers elevate the commonplace and familiar into something mythical and even heroic. They thrive on the unexpected, seeing the street as a theatre of endless possibilities, the cast list never fixed until the shutter is pressed. They stare, they pry, they listen and they eavesdrop, and in doing so they hold up a mirror to the kind of societies we are making for ourselves. (Howarth and McLaren 2010, 9)

The street and indeed the city are spaces filled with unlimited possibilities. Much like the flâneur who chooses to be guided by experiences within the city, or Georges Perec who uses observation to focus on the everyday happenings within the city, so too the street photographer is guided by their focus on a particular aspect of the city. In the case of Berenice Abbott, she focused on the changing nature of New York City, and how its growth had affected the city dwellers that live there. It is thus the intent or concept of the individual street photographer that will guide and inform which information is captured within their photographs.

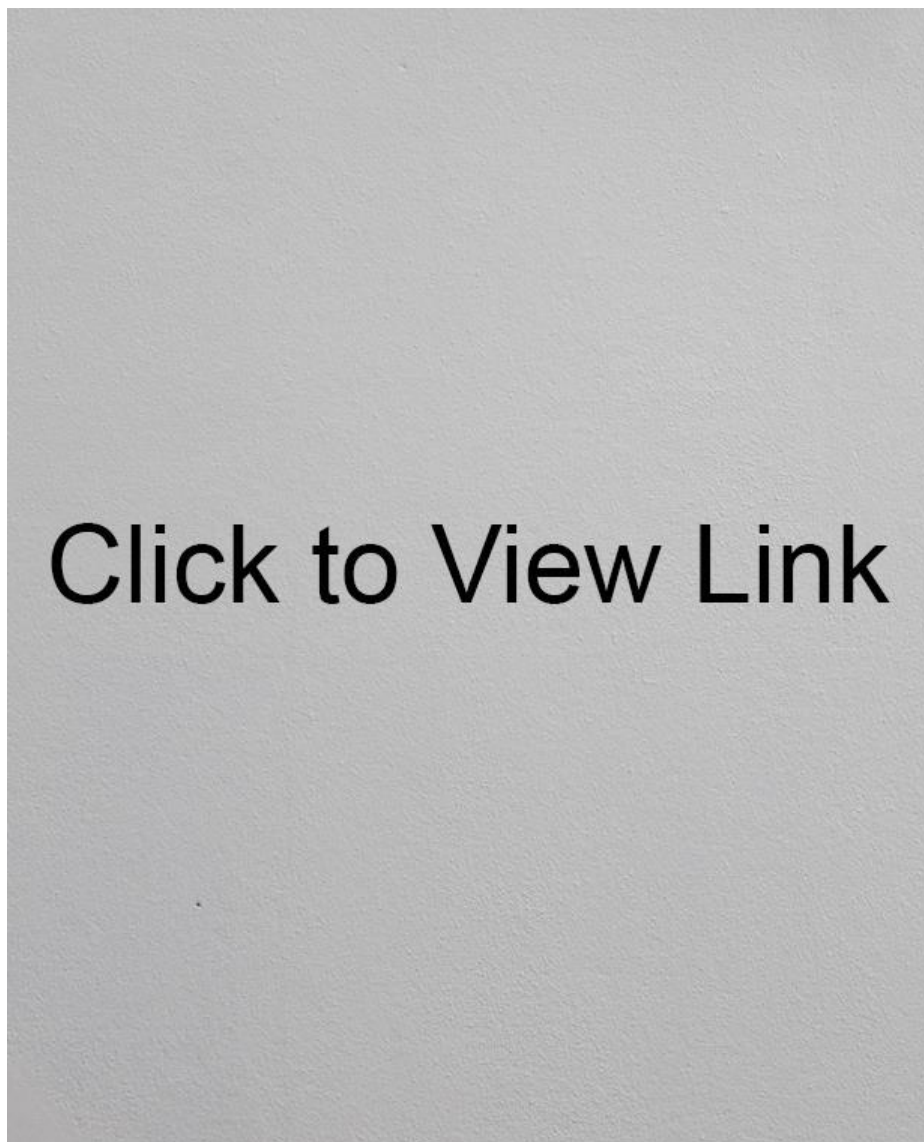


Figure 1: Berenice Abbott, *Bread Store, 259 Bleecker Street, Manhattan, 1937*, gelatin silver print, 38.1 x 24.1 cm. New York Public Library Digital Collections.

Street photography distinguishes itself from documentation in that it not only presents moments of a scene from the city, but uses these scenes and the objects contained within them to further a concept or narrative. As Tormey outlines: “Whilst ‘street photography’ depicts what people are doing in cities, the photographer’s idea supersedes the specific reality of content—fragments, even abstract shape, can represent a full range of human experience, frailty, alienation and exchange” (Tormey 2013, 97). Street photography is not a pure documentation of life on the city streets; instead it presents moments that could be seen as signifiers to other ideas. These signifiers can be seen in Perec’s observations and how they are used to spur questions about how we observe, or in Abbott’s photograph *Bread Store, 259 Bleecker Street, Manhattan*, (Figure 1) which shows how small businesses were being taken over by large corporations. Tormey explains:

The central significance for photography in the street is the attitude of the photographer who can be motivated in different ways, such as seeking out instances of injustice, aesthetic congruence or entertainment. The manner in which the photographer intervenes in taking the photographs, and the manner in which individuals, spaces or objects are presented, determines the level of commentary, expression or subjectivity. (Tormey 2013, 95)

The significance or elements of the city that I focus on within my work are the traces found within a space. I use these as signifiers of the presence of people and histories within these spaces. They allow for a questioning of these spaces; what histories have occurred within these spaces, and who frequents these spaces and for what purpose? As such, I frame and capture these traces in a way that makes them the focus of my photographs, not directly affecting these spaces but capturing them in a way to direct how they are observed.

Historically the interest with the street has focused its subject matter on the people who live within the city, the moments and interactions between those people, expressions on their faces, and the other signifiers of the daily life within the city. Within my photographs I choose to avoid directly photographing people, instead I depict what may be considered the ‘backdrop’ and use it to show the presence of people through the traces they leave behind. As Tormey discusses:

The photograph presents physical and symbolic aspects of the city, and provokes associations and ideas beyond the objects depicted, in several ways. First, photographing objects in an unusual place or juxtaposition is a typical method used to ‘elevate’ the everyday. Transforming the forgotten, hidden and ordinary object to something extra-ordinary can be seen as a common theme throughout the twentieth century [...] Second, a photograph can represent desire or provoke memory. By representing the past in the appearance of things, photographs keep it present, and give an illusion of retrieving the past, so that the photograph (‘memory-object’) serves as a substitute for something else. (Tormey 2013, 107)

I position my use of photography within these two ideas, elevating the traces found within the city space and using these traces as a way of representing past events and the invisible presence of people within the space. These traces fuel my curiosity towards these spaces; the fact that they appear to be absent of people and yet the traces found within these spaces show that people are present within them.

The use of objects to represent life within cities is also a consideration of many street photographers. Howarth and McLaren attest to this by referring to the use of objects in street photography as “still life street photography” which they describe as:

Images that poetically document the things we buy, sell, fetishize, consume or discard. Although they generally do not include people, such photographs are nonetheless very human images that focus attention on the material props of our everyday lives. A single glove, an overstuffed sandwich, a car advertisement or a 'For Sale' sign can speak volumes about what we value and what we don't. (Howarth and McLaren 2010, 60)

This description by Howarth and McLaren of still life street photography creating human images has become a crucial idea in the photographs I create in this project. The scenes I depict show traces of people that have occupied or been in these spaces; a tyre mark on a wall, an empty coke can under a bin, an open window on the side of a building. All of these small details show the presence of people within the city, how the city functions and changes on a daily basis.

The question of value that Howarth and McLaren raise also forms an important consideration within my work. The spaces that I photograph are not the iconic parts of the city, but instead could be understood to be lacking value, due to their functionality and utility. Berenice Abbott took a similar approach. She chose to exclude many of the famous tourist sites within New York City as she did not wish to have her work perceived as a guide book (Weissman 2011). By doing this, Abbott drew attention to those other parts of the city, and "suspend[ed] an assumed familiarity with the world in order to, for instance, find hidden details in common objects" (Weissman 2011, 127). The suspension of an assumed familiarity with the city is at the core of the flâneur and the writings of Georges Perec as well. I believe that when familiarity is suspended it allows for an opportunity to reassess what is valued about spaces within the city. Abbott's works are of importance today due to her subject matter; a changing New York City in the 1930s being some of the best documentation of a New York City that no longer exists. Her images are important now, yet at the time of taking them, the spaces within the city that she photographed were often abandoned or lacked value, and through her images she brought a human element to these spaces that otherwise might not have been noticed had she not photographed them.



### 1.5 *Untitled (East Perth Length Walks)*



Figure 2: Lance Ward, *Untitled (East Perth Length Walks)*, 2013, 848 6x4 inches, colour photographs, bound together by elastic bands, presented on two white shelves, 18 x 30 x 26 cm.

Berenice Abbott, Georges Perec and the figure of the flâneur encountered and engaged with the spaces of the city at a time before computers and the internet. As such, their working methods required a different attention to time and skill. Abbott created hundreds of photographs to document New York City, a costly practice in the 1930s that required a considerable amount of equipment, and many rolls of film. The same could be said for Perec, who spent his time documenting everything that would pass by in the same manner as a contemporary security camera, a technology that was not widely available when he created his works. The flâneur and the method of walking to experience the city was from a very specific time, so much so that the arcades in which the flâneur walked were demolished in the rebuilding of Paris, and the flâneur in that first iteration disappeared with them.

The significance of discussing these working methods is that through the internet, mobile phones and other technology, these older techniques have perhaps become undervalued. The volume of photographs and skill in creating them displayed by Abbott is lost in the ease of scrolling through social media and seeing thousands of other images that are perhaps inspired by street photography and Abbott's working methods. Similarly, Perce's keen observational eye is accessible through twenty-four hour live-streams found on YouTube, negating the need for a written record. Instead we can watch these scenes for ourselves and rewind if we miss something. Furthermore, Google Street View could be considered a contemporary version of the flâneur where our sense of exploration of both familiar and exotic spaces can be encountered from the comfort of our computer chair or phone.

In response to this, it was important for me to make my process of photo creation a practice of skill and effort, returning to these working methods of engaging or being present with the space. For me, this gave more importance to the photographs I created, allowing me to recall each city and remember the experiences I had there from the series of photographs I took. Similarly, I want to share the experiences of exploration and discovery with the viewer of the work, by giving an insight into the working process so that the photographs I present might have greater significance than an image encountered on the internet or mobile phone.

The work *Untitled (East Perth Length Walks)* (Figure 2) was a work that aimed to present my method of walking and observation that had been developed through my reading. This work implemented the walking methods of the flâneur; walking with a goal of experiencing a space, while at the same time using considered and engaged observation to find traces and details within the space. The results of two walks were two stacks of photographs depicting various functional objects and spaces. In this process, 848 photographs are taken, each one a separate composition created during the walk, however only one image per walk is visible on top of each stack. This work specifically focused on my methods of walking and observation within the city and the resulting photographs that occurred through this process.

This work was exhibited for the conference *Reading Public Spaces*, held in East Perth, and served as a trace of my methods of walking and observing within the city. The two stacks of photographs, along with the final single photographs that appeared on top of each stack respectively, were not the focus of the work; instead they served as an indication of the images that resulted from my walking and observation. This work was the starting point for my consideration towards how I would present my work as well as my working methods. Having established my methods of walking and observation within the city, the focus of the project subsequently moved towards the composition of the images and the influences that impacted on and informed my compositional considerations.

In conclusion, walking and observation are universal acts. As such, they are commonplace and can be done without contemplation. Similarly, the functioning, utilitarian spaces of the city are commonplace in serving their functional purposes and indeed can be passed through without being given any notice. However, if, as Solnit suggests, we "invest universal acts with meaning" (Solnit 2001, 3), or if we look to these utility spaces as not just serving a function but showing a human presence, through the traces found there, as still life street photography suggests, then I assert that the value that is placed on these actions and spaces can be elevated above their "assumed familiarity" (Weissman 2011, 127). The traces captured as a result of invested meaning can serve as

an entry point to considering the histories within these spaces and the importance of these spaces that might not have been perceived prior to the creation of the photograph.

## Chapter 2: Formal Compositional Photography

### 2.1 Formal Photographic Art Histories – The Bechers and Ola Kolehmainen

The use of formal composition within my photographs is informed by the creative works of a select group of artist-photographers, predominantly Bernd and Hilla Becher and the artists they tutored and inspired.

The Bechers' photographic style sought to capture images from the everyday, specifically industrial structures, with high detail and clarity. They often chose a frontal, formal compositional viewpoint to capture their subject matter. The Bechers' works were often presented in a grid of up to nine images, creating a collage of photographs that allowed the viewer to compare and contrast each image and each structure. This seriality of the work was yet another formal element in their making process. Their works have a documentary quality, presenting highly detailed and descriptive images of their subject matter. Their images were not staged or heavily manipulated compositions, instead they were an objective capture of a subject which, in turn, led to a questioning of what differentiates their images as 'art' and not documentation. In the book *New Topographics*, writer Britt Salvesen discusses the difference between documentary (or document) and documentary style that artist Walker Evans outlined:

Evans sought to clarify his point by comparing an exemplary document—a police photograph of an accident or a murder—with his own works, created in a documentary style [...] Evans made the distinction on the grounds of utility. The police photographer (or studio portraitist or real-estate agent) has to identify and frame salient information for an anticipated function, and in any given context there are probably only a few ways to do that successfully. The artist, declaring his product to be useless, can identify and frame the same information while multiplying or ignoring its potential purposes. (Salvesen 2013, 16)

This is where the Bechers' photographs similarly look as if they could be documentation but are instead in a documentary style. Their photographs serve no explicit purpose but are instead art, picturing objects from the everyday in a front-on formal viewpoint.

The Bechers' photographs took the aesthetics of photo documentation and its familiar subject matter, namely, the everyday, and abstracted it through the formal compositions and constructions of their photographs. In "Subject, Object, Mimesis: The Aesthetic World of the Bechers", writer Sarah E. James discusses this idea:

Although true to their subjects in a documentary sense, their photographs of coal bunkers or water towers are not orthodox documentary images. There is no narrative. The everyday is abstracted, punctuated by seriality, and the structures are aestheticized, made reminiscent of beautiful relics or functionalist sculptures. (James 2010, 55)

The Bechers created a method of image creation that challenged what was expected from a photograph. Their images were familiar in the sense that they depicted scenes from the everyday but chose to avoid any narrative cues in their images. The focus instead was the formal qualities of the structures pictured. They shifted the importance away from an event and framed these structures so that an appreciation of their form was the focus of the images. The structures pictured became akin to minimalist sculpture; forms that have had their functionality removed or at least downplayed in an attempt to have them seen anew.

The Bechers' photographs were unique in their approach to photographing structures. Their use of a frontal viewpoint, repetition and the lack of geographical detail of the structures they captured led to a series of photographs that favoured formal composition above all else. The Bechers created hundreds of photos of various everyday structures across Europe and America. At the time of creating those images, they were not concerned with the histories of these structures, just their forms. However, since then, their photographs have become some of the only traces left of the structures they photographed. The Bechers helped to establish the Düsseldorf School, in which they taught the new wave of contemporary artists their formal compositional considerations and working methods.

The Finnish artist Ola Kolehmainen creates photographic objects from buildings. He uses formal composition and methods of abstraction and extraction to create large scale formal images. Art historian and curator Mark Gisbourne in the book *Ola Kolehmainen: Fraction, Abstraction, Recreation* describes Kolehmainen's subject matter as being "almost invariably taken specifically from modern architectural sources" (Gisbourne 2007, 87). Kolehmainen studies specific buildings not to understand their history or functionality, but to understand them visually and how the environment around them affects their façade. Kolehmainen is not documenting these buildings for historical reference or due to a specific event, instead he is abstracting them through photography, using them as raw material for the creation of his images.

Kolehmainen creates what I consider to be photographic objects or minimalist compositions in the same way that the structures the Bechers photographed are an appreciation of form rather than a documentation of the structure. Kolehmainen's photographs become objects in the sense that they are self-contained. Once extracted from the world, the photograph needs no narrative or geographical context; it has become a new object to appreciate for its compositional and formal qualities. Gisbourne discusses this further:

If in the first instance as photographs they are born of mechanism, there is also undeniably a sense in which they are visual apparitions extracted from the world. And I use the verb 'to extract' in order to specify that the photographs do not seek implicitly to document, point to, or identify the architectural sources whence they are taken. That information is provided should you need it, but the primary intention is to create a memorable image that is true to itself. (Gisbourne 2007, 87)

Kolehmainen focuses on creating formal compositions first and foremost, and his photographs could be seen as abstract images were it not for minute recognisable elements within the photograph. His crafting of composition, however, is not purely about the elements found within the frame. Instead he gives consideration to how these elements relate to the physical edges of the photograph. This helps to make his photographs become isolated objects; not needing narrative or context to support them. His crafting of composition is so highly considered that the photograph is often engaging for his compositional skill rather than the geographical location or context of the image. This can be seen in Kolehmainen's work *Grünes Haus* (Figure 3) in which he crafts a striking formal composition out of the grid-like structure of a building.



# Click to View Link

Figure 3: Ola Kolehmainen, *Grünes Haus*, 2005, C-print mounted to Diasec, 175 x 325 cm.

Kolehmainen's works could be considered a contemporary progression from the Bechers' mode of working. Instead of capturing the whole structure, Kolehmainen instead focuses on the formal elements that are present *within* a building and extracts these in order to create a photograph that could be considered autonomous from the original source material. This is in contrast to the Bechers' work which seeks to strip functionality and context from the structures depicted, while still showing them within a landscape. Kolehmainen's photographs instead become objects through cropping, formal composition, and the relation of these formal elements to the physical edge of the photograph. Rather than photographing a structure and calling it a sculpture, Kolehmainen uses the extracted composition to create a new photographic object.

The working methods of the Bechers and Kolehmainen led me to create my first series of works simply titled the *Wall Works*. I embraced the ideas of using formal composition and the frontal viewpoint to make photographs that downplayed the historical context or geographic location of the site. I also sought to make photographs that were more object-like, by using various elements found within a space to create photographs that were not only formal in composition but, in much the same way as Kolehmainen, became objects.

## 2.2 The Wall Works



Figure 4: Lance Ward, *Untitled (Straight)*, 2014, giclée print, 115 x 75 cm.



Figure 5: Lance Ward, *Untitled (Up)*, 2014, giclée print, 115 x 75 cm.



Figure 6: Lance Ward, *Untitled (Down...Pipe)*, 2014, giclée print, 115 x 75 cm.





Figure 7: Lance Ward, *Untitled (Scratches)*, 2014, giclée print, 115 x 75 cm.



Figure 8: Lance Ward, *Untitled (Scuffs)*, 2014, giclée print, 115 x 75 cm.



Figure 9: Lance Ward, *Untitled (Chips)*, 2014, giclée print, 115 x 75 cm.

In this exegesis, I use the word 'image' to refer to the scene captured, the representation of the world that has been seen through the camera lens. The word 'photograph' is used to describe the printed physical object; the paper with the image on it in the gallery. I make this distinction to show how my thinking towards the creation of artworks is not just about the capture of an image from the world, but how this image will manifest as a photograph back into the world.

Clarifying the terms image and photograph will assist in the discussion of my working methods of capturing and creating artworks, and aims to show my consideration of how I approach the creation process. Through my working methods, I capture thousands of images, yet it is only a select few that will become photographs. The images are considered in relation to one another; series are constructed and formed, which results in the final selections being printed, often at a size that is large for a traditional photographic scale, and becoming 'photographs'. Despite the fact very few will make this cut, as was shown in *Untitled (East Perth Length Walks)* (Figure 2), each image is still constructed and planned as though it will eventually become a photograph.

The *Wall Works* (Figures 4-9) series presented three sets of formal compositional photographs. Each set contains only objects, marks and traces that were found within the space, and as with all my photographs, there is no post editing or staging within the images. The images are then a direct result of my capturing arrangements from the world, using formal composition to highlight relationships between and within the space that may have been unnoticed. The lack of post editing or staging is important to the work as I aim to bring a sense of appreciation towards these spaces and the traces they hold. I attempt to do this by showing them in a raw state, allowing formal composition to heighten the visual impact of what is already present in these spaces.

These works aimed to give the photographs an object quality, that is, they appeared to have depth or a three-dimensional quality while still being a flat photograph. This was a deliberate and considered action used to create a quality that would make the viewer question if the work was a photograph or a three-dimensional object. To further enhance this feeling, the composition itself also considered the physical edge of the frame and used it as part of the composition whereby elements within the image would run parallel to the physical edge of the photograph. The feeling of depth was also enhanced by the use of lighting and texture, specifically in the works *Scratches*, *Scuffs* and *Chips* (Figures 7, 8 & 9). The textured walls give an illusion of depth to the photographs, similar to a painting where the brushstrokes can be seen on its surface. This illusion of depth shows the consideration towards making the photograph appear object-like.

The creation of a photograph that is an object requires crafting and consideration. A photograph that is constructed and crafted like this is not intended for mass consumption in a magazine, newspaper or on social media. Instead it is created to be hung on a wall and experienced. Contemporary artist and writer Jeff Wall in an interview with writer Magnolia Pauker discusses a picture with this level of craft as a tableau:

The pictorial form that is most identified with autonomy is what the French call the tableau, a picture you don't handle, that you don't manipulate like you would a book, newspaper or computer screen. It doesn't matter what size the tableau is, but it usually hangs on a wall confronting the viewer as an entity. Having a quality of an entity, the tableau creates a certain experience and produces a certain kind of spectatorship. (Pauker 2012, 656)

The tableau by this definition is an autonomous object. It is not an image to be held or owned; it is its own entity, and sits opposite the viewer and looks back at them in a confrontational manner. Art critic and historian Michael Fried in his book *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before* discusses the key elements of a photographic tableau in relation to French critic Jean-François Chevrier's writing on the tableau form:

Chevrier's emphasis on the importance of 'the confrontational experience' is correct as far as it goes, as is his claim that such an experience marks a break with traditional modes of photographic reception and consumption [...] The new work [...] is conceived for the wall from the start [...] with the result that it enters into a new kind of relationship with its viewers, who are themselves transformed, reconfigured as viewers, in the process. A crucial aspect of the new relationship, Chevrier rightly suggests, is an enforced distance between work and viewer, without which the mutual facing off of the two that underlies the notion of confrontation would not be possible. (Fried 2008, 144)

Fried notes that a tableau is created to be displayed on the wall, and thus the composition is created with the knowledge it will be displayed on a wall. This is also true of my own photographs, each

composition is created with the knowledge it will be hung on the wall and be an entity or object that looks back at the viewer. By this I mean that it is not merely a photograph to be consumed as are newspaper images or social media posts, but instead these photographs require physical interaction. A viewer must walk up to the photograph and experience it in the space in which it is hung. I also see my works as being confrontational in that I am presenting what are often seen as banal or everyday scenes, but in a manner that highlights them, generating an intrigue towards why these spaces are of importance to be displayed at this size and scale.

The confrontational ability of a photograph, to create distance between viewer and work, comes from the scale at which the photograph is created. Fried notes:

Although Chevrier says nothing here about considerations of size or scale, they are implicit in his claim that the new work is 'designed and produced for the wall' and that it is intended to summon 'a confrontational experience on the part of the spectator.' Only works of a certain size could self-evidently hold the wall in this way. (Fried 2008, 143)

To be an entity or object on the wall and look back at the viewer, a photograph must be of a certain size and scale, it needs to command attention and have some level of authority in how it is presented. For this reason, I present many of my works at a scale much larger than a 6 x 4 inch photograph. In the case of the *Wall Works*, I present them at near life size so that the white walls of the gallery draw attention to them, and highlight their use of formal elements and the traces found within the photographs.

As my project has progressed over a number of years, social media has developed into a platform to share formally composed and crafted images from people's everyday lives. I use the word 'image' as these compositions are presented in a digital format and are often not presented as objects or photographs in a gallery space. This is not to discredit these images but rather to reinforce my distinction between an image and photograph, namely, that a photograph is a physical object that does not require a screen to be shown. This is also the reason I understand my own images to be a tableau; the intention is not to view them on a screen, but in the gallery space. In the interview with Pauker, Wall further discusses such an understanding:

Assuming that this picture is of a certain nature, it confronts the viewer. You can't really interact with it and you don't have control over it in that sense. If you're looking at a postcard, having it in your hand or your pocket would be part of the nature of your experience and possession of it. With a tableau this doesn't occur. Instead, the tableau feels like its entity is standing opposite the viewer. Since it has this stand-offish quality, the picture can be said to look back at you as much as you are looking at it. So the tableau or picture has an independence from the person looking at it, a very specific, unique quality. (Pauker 2012, 660)

The way in which my photographs are viewed—as large traditional scale, crafted compositions within a gallery space—is crucial to the power and impact these works have. If they were to be viewed on a small handheld screen then the presence of these photographs would not have the same impact. This is part of how I have attempted to distinguish my work from the trend of formal composition found on social media. I want my works to be an entity or object that demands the viewer's physical presence. They are not images that are intended to be liked or saved or interacted with through a digital screen, instead they face the viewer at an equal scale and with presence. I felt it important to delineate my photographs from the formal compositions found on social media.

From the start of this project I have seen the use of formal composition become more prominent on social media and appealing as a method to bring attention to not just the city but the person's social media presence.

My works and working process as a whole has always been object based. I print my work at a traditional photographic scale in inches relating them back to the object-based nature that photography once was. All the tests as to the pairing and reviewing of images are done with physical photographs. I print my images at 6 x 4 inches to use as a form of test sheet, which I then use to carefully consider and select my images down to a finite set, which will eventually form the final works. I then print these selected images at 11 x 17 Inches to test the pairing and placement before they are printed as final works. The physical nature in which I work is comparable to being able to experience the photographs as a real entity, in much the same way that I experience the city. My working methods of choosing to print physical photographs instead of working digitally is due to the fact I wish to try to give viewers a sense of wonder and exploration that I had in the city when creating these photographs. I feel that presenting an image digitally confirms in an instant that the photograph is a representation—the ability to zoom, scroll and move on to the next image as quickly as it was taken requires very little engagement. By printing the photograph, a viewer begins to have a physical interaction with it. They can walk up to and around the photograph, and interact with it. The photograph occupies the space it is presented in.



Figure 10: Lance Ward, *Untitled (Peeling Green)*, 2014, giclée print, 115 x 75 cm.

The *Wall Works* were initially concerned with formal composition and how to bring attention to an otherwise banal or unkempt space within the city. The texture and lighting created a scene that drew focus and kept the eye lingering and moving around the image. The textured surfaces contained various physical traces, and it was these traces that enacted a curiosity towards these spaces. The work *Untitled (Peeling Green)* (Figure 10) gives an example of these traces; the painted surface has begun to peel, as the title suggests, showing how the environment has affected these details. The wall is stained from water and being out in the elements, while the small drain hole tells of the utilitarian use of the space. Also, the varied texture of the wall itself shows previous repairs to this particular wall. These traces add further information to the space and the photograph; they become details to question. These traces became details or signs that the space had been interacted with—symbols that people had been present within those spaces. This formed my intrigue towards these spaces: what had happened before I was there, how did the trace or detail come to be in this space, and how could my images raise these questions in others?

### 2.3 Views Through Windows



Figure 11: Lance Ward, *Untitled (Block)*, 2015, digital photo on lightbox transparency, 59 x 84 cm.



Figure 12: Lance Ward, *Untitled (Hard Edge Window)*, 2015, digital photo on lightbox transparency, 84 x 59 cm.



Figure 13: Lance Ward, *Untitled (Plane)* 2015, digital photo on lightbox transparency, 84 x 59 cm.





Figure 14: Lance Ward, *Untitled (Plant)*, 2015, digital photo on lightbox transparency, 59 x 84 cm.

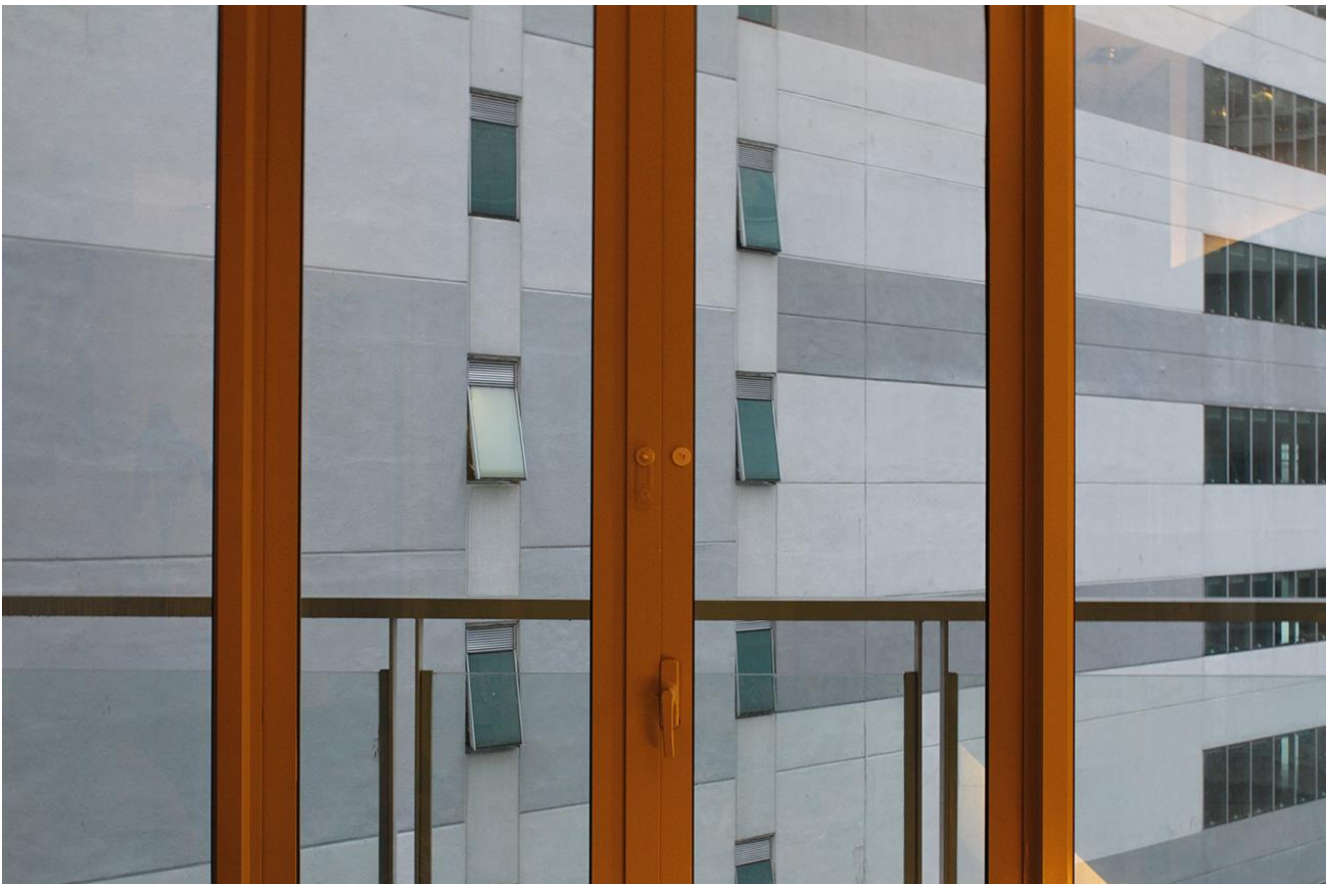


Figure 15: Lance Ward, *Untitled (City Viewed)*, 2015, digital photo, acrylic mounted, 50.5 x 76 cm.

The observation of daily life as seen through windows emerged as a central theme in my series of works titled *Isolated Views* (Figures 11-14 & 16). These works, all shot from elevated city buildings, drew parallels between the way the windows and the viewfinder of a camera can equally frame everyday life. This consideration of the viewfinder came from a physical experience I had encountered while inside a tall building—as I moved in relation to the window frame, my view of the city changed, and new details would appear or disappear. Instead of using the zoom on the camera or taking a few small steps side to side as I would have with the previous works, this experience allowed me to use my whole body to move and craft compositions through the window, giving me a much more embodied or physical engagement with my own practice. This experience led me to capture compositions through windows, offering formal compositions of the space above the street.

Still adhering to the use of formal elements in these works, texture gave way to pattern and instead of light being used for its shadow creation, here light created reflections on the glossy facades. These formal elements were used to create very clean images, less expressive and textured than the previous work; they appeared more abstract through the use of grids and pattern. With this series of works I created compositions with clear inspiration from Ola Kolehmainen in both formal composition and viewpoints. Yet the shift in viewpoint and formal elements allowed me to consider the city in terms of flat planes that could be created through distance. When exhibited, the works in *Isolated Views* (Figures 11-14 & 16) used the physical frame of a lightbox as a reference to the window frame. I was attempting to create a physical depth in my photographs by presenting the images as views through the windows, once again playing with the idea of the photograph being an object. Incorporating the window frame into the composition, *Untitled (City Viewed)* (Figure 15) presented a photographic object that used the frame from inside the building to disrupt the composition and give a feeling of looking out of a window. To further enhance this experience, the photograph was mounted behind acrylic, to give the photographic object a dual reflective capacity akin to the window.



Figure 16: Lance Ward, *Untitled (Urban Bastion)*, 2015, digital photo on lightbox transparency, 84 x 120 cm.

The clean facades and gloss materials of the surrounding buildings spoke less of marks and traces left behind by city users and instead heightened how the city façade could make formal compositions. These images generated a different intrigue for me than the previous *Wall Works*—I saw these flat gloss façades as thin veils that hid life and the everyday that was happening on the other side of them. Who was dwelling in these spaces? What actions and interactions were happening on the other side of these facades? The work *Untitled (Urban Bastion)* (Figure 16) from the *Isolated Views* series brought this consideration to my attention. After capturing the image, I noticed that the patterned surface contained windows that had objects pressed up against them. The glimpse of these objects against the windows gave me an entry point into the other side of the building, which led to my curiosity about the actions that were occurring within the city at any given moment.

## 2.4 Contemporary Artists Andreas Gursky, Michael Wolf and Bert Danckaert

The contemporary photographic artists Andreas Gursky, Michael Wolf and Bert Danckaert each use formal composition to capture various parts of the world and, more specifically, urban landscapes. I understand that my own work relates to these three contemporary artists not just in terms of formal composition, but also in intent and in some cases their subject matter. In this section I aim to outline how my work relates to these particular artists.

Contemporary artist Andreas Gursky's images offer not so much a historical cataloguing of structures or landscapes, but instead offers an omnipresent observation of various elements of modern society. It should be noted that Gursky was a student of the Bechers. The frontal point of view, high detail and formal composition of his works are clear visual cues from the Bechers' teachings. Gursky, however, differentiates himself from the Bechers through his intent. He does not photograph structures to reduce them to a minimal form, instead he brings attention to globalisation and modern society. Author Martin Hentschel in his book *Andreas Gursky: Works 80-08* discusses Gursky's images and his intent:

The morphological eye, which in principle makes itself felt in every one of Gursky's photographs, reveals his diagnostic potential precisely there where he brings seemingly heterogeneous subjects into formal congruence. In this way the artist manages to extend the Bechers' morphology into a diagnostic tool for society the world over. And with that he edges ever closer to his declared aim, the 'encyclopedia of life.' (Hentschel 2011, 31)

Gursky aims to document modern society and globalisation. He wants his collective works to be an "encyclopedia of life". His images, despite being individual works, are a career ambition to show "society in all its affluence" (Hentschel 2011, 31). This becomes apparent from his varying yet somehow related subject matters. The scenes he depicts, from the stock room trading floor to the large 99 cent warehouse, show the scope of modern society and each one of these photographs is connected via their role within society, feeding into Gursky's aim to create an encyclopedia of life. Hentschel states: "Gursky is less interested in the individual and more in humans as a social type—or indeed as 'species'" (Hentschel 2011, 32). Gursky's choice in the presentation of his photographs is also an indicator of the consideration given towards the scale of his subject matter. He presents his photographs at a large scale which is achieved by stitching together a number of different photographs, to give a physical sense of the immensity of the subjects he is looking at. His use of a universal or omnipresent viewpoint and the extremely large physical size of the photographs makes the viewer feel the immensity and scope of the scenes he is presenting.



Click to View Link

Figure 17: Michael Wolf, *Back Door 03*, 2003, C-print, 50.8 × 40.6 cm.

Photographic artist Michael Wolf explores aspects of modern society but chooses a subject matter that is far more personal in scope. He chooses to focus on objects found within Hong Kong city and how the city dwellers there interact with them. Authors Sophie Howarth and Stephen McLaren in their book *Street Photography Now* discuss the works of Michael Wolf:

German photographer Michael Wolf's photographs a quirky and unique anthropological study. His vision of one of the most densely populated areas of the world is one surprisingly devoid of people: city-dwellers are present in his images only through the objects they use and sometimes abuse. Under the scrutiny of Wolf's photographic gaze, their random detritus morphs into a series of installations,

made up of ordinary objects that are as fascinating for their form as for their function. (Howarth and McLaren 2010, 224)

Wolf's works are a documentation of the way in which city dwellers in Hong Kong use the limited space they have, displaying the ingenuity in how space is interacted with and used. Wolf states: "Hong Kong is one of the most densely populated areas in the world. Most people do not have enough private space for their needs; therefore public space becomes private space. Private acts happen in public places" (Wolf quoted in Howarth and McLaren 2010, 224). Wolf's photographs display personal items; objects that are common in a home setting, yet they exist in public spaces. These items present a personal and human presence showing the trace of people without ever needing to show any actual people.



Figure 18: Bert Danckaert, *Horizon #67 (Macau)*, 2014, giclée print, 60 x 80 cm.

Bert Danckaert, specifically his series titled *Horizon* (Figure 18), depicts walls and spaces from the city, which resemble abstract paintings. Yet his photographs are documentations of the real world and show the clues to their grounding in reality. Scholar and curator Alison Nordström in the book *Bert Danckaert: Horizon* writes of his work:

A room full of Bert Danckaert photographs resembles a gallery of paintings. The works are large, and, at first glance, many of them seem to be composed of simple organic or geometric shapes of flat color classically arranged within the ubiquitous and intuitive photographic rectangle [...] A closer examination reveals random remnants of human activity and its detritus with the encyclopedic detail that only photography can render. There is no doubt that these images are rooted in the real world, but even writ small on the pages of a book, their formal aesthetic power dominates, confounding the desire for information that photographs usually satisfy. We are challenged to understand the intentions of this observant and contemplative photographer whose captured fragments of the world are both true and transcendent, but the works themselves may encourage us to embrace their contradictions in much the same way that the artist does. (Nordström 2016, 4)

Danckaert's photographs are heavily grounded in formal composition; however, upon looking at the photographs more carefully, the details and detritus of the interactions within these spaces are found. Danckaert specifically seeks out spaces that are unfamiliar to him and that speak of a globalised world. Nordström states:

Though in his earlier work he sought such globalized phenomena as Ikea parking lots and shopping malls, the work in *Horizon* shows a more nuanced response. Significantly, it reveals a departure from a mode of seeking the pre-conceived image that supports a pre-determined idea; it offers instead the mental space of the explorer, the follower of the horizon. Danckaert's current practice is to work alone, in cities he describes as 'randomly chosen' and which are unfamiliar to him. He does very little research in advance, simply walking the streets, all day for several weeks, in a state he compares to meditation. His subjects are not the places where he makes his photographs, but 'the possibilities of a space.' His images are ultimately about only themselves. They are more made than found, using the arbitrary materials of wherever he happens to be. (Nordström 2016, 6)

This working method of Danckaert could be seen as similar to the ideas of the flâneur; he walks within the city to experience spaces, using the "mental space of the explorer" (Nordström 2016, 6). His resulting images are formal compositions that tell no story, but instead offer a scene for the viewer to explore, showing the possibilities that a space can hold within it.

These three artists are important to understanding the field of contemporary photography that I work within. Each artist has strong formal compositional concerns and uses these formal elements to create images that are both visually engaging and yet also present the subject matter of the city. Each of these artist's works could also be considered a tableau in using large scale photographs that are created to be hung on a wall. These artists use this as a method of drawing attention to their respective subject matters based on the city. My interest in these particular artists is in how they use formal composition and ideas of the tableau to further their engagements with the city while at the same time creating a body of work that appears interconnected through their use of formal composition and subject matter. Each image is a standalone work and can be viewed independently of each other, however when viewed together the works are related and add further information to the subject matter being investigated. This becomes most apparent in Gursky's works and his goal of creating an encyclopedia of life.

I understand my own work to be conceptually akin to the works of Michael Wolf and Bert Danckaert. Wolf's work specifically looks at the objects that occupy the city and how these objects give insight into the way in which people use these spaces. His works do not show the presence of any people, instead they are implied by the objects he shows; this is a concept that I use within my own works. I

use this as a way of adding curiosity to the spaces captured, thereby creating intrigue about who uses this space and for what purpose. I understand Wolf's works to operate in a similar manner; these objects tell of daily life in a large city, but they also create a curiosity in me to know who uses these spaces and for what purpose. Although the objects that both Wolf and myself use are everyday objects, their specific use is still unknown: what are the gloves in *Back Door 03* used for, and why do they need to be dried? These are the sort of questions that Wolf's images pose and that I understand my own works pose as well.

Danckaert's work is less about the specific objects that are found within a space and instead are more about creating an image that allows the space to be explored and seen anew. As Nordström explained Danckaert's work is not so much about the specifics of a place but instead his photographs draw attention to "the possibilities of a space" (Nordström 2016, 6). His images offer a space for consideration, showing a space that would be otherwise unappealing or overlooked, but drawing attention to it through the manner in which he photographs the space. Nordström goes on to say:

We see differently in places where cultural clues do not distract, and the 'possibilities of a space' are about seeing something for the first time, purely and without interpretation. The necessarily information-free spaces of an unfamiliar place and culture facilitate this kind of innocent looking, which at the same time they force us to look intensely and to take nothing for granted. (Nordström 2016, 6)

This is the key aspect of Danckaert's work that resonates with my own. He presents spaces, not to discuss or focus on the place they are from, but instead looks at the possibilities that the space has within them. I aim to achieve a similar idea with my own works, not focusing specifically on the place my works are from, but instead on the possibilities of wonder and intrigue that a space can have. Photographing these spaces elevates them to demand attention, and asks the viewer to look and consider all the elements found and presented within the space.

For my own photographs, I aim to create images which have strong formal composition and that promote exploration and observation. However, the details of the work are specifically where I wish to create a sense of wonder or mystery, the traces as I have discussed, the utilitarian objects, the detritus left behind; these are the details that create a sense of wonder for me. This is the central thrust of my photographs, offering space to be considered and giving importance to the traces that speak to the presence of people and the interactions that occur within the city that go unnoticed.



## Chapter 3: Edgelands in the City and the Traces They Hold

### 3.1 Defining Spaces, and an Engagement with Non-Places

When walking the city I find myself drawn to the back alleys, side streets and spaces where utilities are kept. The spaces I explore are away from the well-used streets and main shopping malls. In order to discuss and understand these spaces better I began to define these city spaces. Most often I would fall back on describing spaces as being ‘overlooked’, yet this did not accurately distinguish or give insight into these spaces. As such, it was important to seek out specific terms to gain a deeper understanding of the spaces that are central to this project. My initial research led me to consider the term “terrain vague” coined by Spanish architect and critic Ignasi de Solà-Morales and the term “wild zones” coined by author Tim Edensor to be the best definitions of these spaces. It was clear, however, that these terms often related to spaces that had ceased to function and fallen into ruin. As a concept, terrain vague strikes a balance between disuse and freedom; even though these spaces were no longer functional, they nonetheless still allowed for freedom of exploration and intrigue (Solà-Morales, 1995). While wild zones are places of uncertain value offering an alternative to the highly controlled city environment, this uncertain value comes in the form of danger and uncertainty as to what is around the next corner, creating a space of wonder and danger (Kohn 2010). These two definitions could be applied to the city spaces in which I had been working, as I considered that the traces found within these spaces could carry uncertain values, in terms of what objects could be found there and the freedom of interaction from the actions and interactions of those who had come before me.

The emphasis of both terrain vague and wild zones was on spaces that were falling into ruin and the subsequent appeal of those spaces due to their ruinous qualities. This was in contrast to the spaces I explore within this project that are generally still functional. The term “non-place” served as a framework to understand how a space can be passed through without giving it consideration, and why this attitude towards a space might occur. The French anthropologist Marc Augé in his book *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* defined the term “non-place”. Augé claims that non-places are spaces that are isolating; they are not meeting places, they do not facilitate communication other than through text or signs, and are not inhabited or lived in (Augé [1995] 2008). Although these spaces are used by people, ultimately non-places are transitory and isolated. Users tend not to interact with each other and so non-places act as spaces that users inhabit for brief periods of time, usually in transit towards other destinations.

Marc Augé founded the concept of non-place on the ideas of place and space as outlined by the French scholar Michel de Certeau. Certeau saw space and place as two states; place being “the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence” (Certeau [1984] 2011, 117) while space “is composed of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it” (Certeau [1984] 2011, 117). Certeau understood spaces to be places that are moved through, but spaces lack the fixed relationships between elements that a place has. This was the foundation for Augé to build his concept of non-place, that non-places were spaces between places and had little to no permanence, and contained transient objects and people.

Augé positioned places and non-places in opposition to each other by proposing that the elements that make up a place are not found within a non-place. Augé states that places are “relational,

historical and concerned with identity” (Augé [1995] 2008, 63) and anything that did not have these traits would be considered a non-place. A place, by Augé’s definition, still has within it a presence of the past histories that occurred there, and instead of erasing them, it claims these past histories as part of its identity. A non-place would then not contain any links to its past histories, creating a space that is absent and unmemorable. Certeau, according to Augé, considered non-places as a negative idea, proposing that a non-place is merely a place that had lost its histories and was a shadow of its former self. Augé, however, did not consider non-places as negative, instead he understood them to be in-between places, serving as transit areas rather than memorable places. Through this understanding of non-places and, more specifically, their perceived lack of history and identity, I created my next body of works, namely, the *For Lease* series and the *Joondalup shopping centre* works. These two series were a departure from my previous works which had made claims for unobserved spaces having history and identity. Instead I wanted to focus on how the clean, well-maintained areas of the city specifically lacked history and identity in opposition to the utilitarian spaces of the city.

### 3.2 The *For Lease* and Joondalup Shopping Centre Works



Figure 19: Lance Ward, *Untitled (For Lease 1)*, 2016, giclée print, 75 x 115 cm.



Figure 20: Lance Ward, *Untitled (For Lease 2)*, 2016, giclée print, 75 x 115 cm.



Figure 21: Lance Ward, *Untitled (For Lease 3)*, 2016, giclée print, 75 x 115 cm.



Figure 22: Lance Ward, *In Quiet Service*, 2017, giclée print, aluminium mounted, 75 x 115 cm.



Figure 23: Lance Ward, *Strangers in the Night*, 2017, giclée print, aluminium mounted, 115 x 75 cm.



Figure 24: Lance Ward, *Patiently Waiting*, 2017, giclée print, aluminium mounted, 75 x 115 cm.

In defining non-place, Augé suggests spaces such as the motorway, shopping centre and airport are all examples of non-places. For Augé, these places are transient and have a functionality, be it terms of travel, housing of goods for sale, or serving as a staging area for travel. They do not promote interaction between users of the spaces and instead favour isolation. The concept of non-places made me realise that the clean, well-maintained facades and buildings that I had avoided in my initial works could come to be unnoticed or disengaged with due to their perceived lack of functionality and their lack of history. Further to this was the feeling of isolation that non-places created, that a busy well-travelled space could create a feeling of absence despite large quantities of people being present within them. This concept was contrary to my initial reading of the glossy facades of the city streets; I had only considered them as spaces that a city dweller would want to visit and seek out or pay attention to. These key factors of non-places focused my observations away from the utilitarian spaces of the city and instead I began to explore a way to highlight how the clean and well-maintained spaces of the city could become unobserved and carry a feeling of isolation. This was realised in the *For Lease* series and the *Joondalup Shopping Centre* series.

The *For Lease* works (Figures 18, 19 & 20) present a series of photographs of shop fronts that are vacant and disused yet still maintain the clean and well-maintained appearance of the utilised parts of the city. These vacant shops tell nothing of their past and nothing of their future; they are spaces that advertised their absence in an attempt to bring people and functionality back to those spaces.



In considering these spaces, and in acknowledgement of Augé's non-places, I wanted to further the feeling of absence within these photographs. I did this by deliberately omitting any reflections of people, or of myself as the photographer within the reflective surfaces and windows of the spaces I captured. This is a small but important detail; not only does it address the absence of history and people in these spaces, but it also creates a feeling of isolation within the photograph. This was an attempt to make the viewing experience an isolating one, creating an almost experiential feeling of the lack of history contained within these spaces.

The *Joondalup Shopping Centre* works (Figures 22, 23 & 24) were again a result of my reading of the non-place but this time I was trying to shift how the shopping centre was perceived. I wanted to give an alternative view of this space; one that ran counter to the usual understanding and experiences of a shopping centre space, where it is absent of people. In order to do this, I arranged to photograph this space at night, and in doing so aimed to achieve two distinct objectives. Firstly, I aimed to capture the feeling of absence it would create: the lack of people in the centre was most notable at night when even the shop staff had left the building. This gave the feeling that the space was waiting for people, for users to return to it so it could continue to function again. I was interested in how the absence of people would seemingly leave the space without its function. Secondly, by accessing the shopping centre at night, the lighting was reduced from its normal operating luminosity, thus providing an opportunity to make the shopping centre appear strange and unfamiliar to how it is normally perceived. Working in this subdued lighting environment, the focus of the images became the details of the building's structure and the everyday furniture within the empty and darkened shopping mall space. The lighting helped to heighten the details and furniture, making them the focus through the dramatic and unconventional lighting, showing how the furniture and the entire shopping mall are waiting for people to return and give them purpose.

*In Quiet Service* (Figure 22) was the only work that alluded to the presence of a person within the space. A power cord is pulled across the floor, showing that someone is on the other end, pulling it or at least stretching it out. The simple act of having the cord moving across a floor in this manner is a sign of the absence of the normal everyday shoppers. This work highlights a specific absence, that of the daily user, and instead shows the presence of a person cleaning, which would usually be unnoticed during the normal operating hours. It was a small detail that hinted towards the presence of someone in the space, but also to the task of cleaning that is in itself unnoticed.

These two series were a departure from the spaces of the city I had previously explored. Having created work about these more traversed spaces, I returned to considering the unobserved spaces in the city, the back alleys, sidewalks and utility spaces. Thinking back over these spaces, they shared a few key aspects of non-places, namely, the feeling of isolation that they had. People tend to use these spaces for their functionality and will often pass each other with little to no interaction. Yet, despite the feeling of isolation, these spaces contain traces that give hints to the histories that have occurred there as opposed to the unused shop spaces that tell nothing of their past. This factor alone meant that it was hard to call these spaces non-places, as this was part of the definition Augé had used to define non-places. When considering the utilitarian spaces of the city again, I began to refer to them as edgelands, a term that bears similarities to non-places but differs in its acknowledgement of spaces containing hints of their past histories.

Edgelands can be defined as in-between spaces similar to non-places; however, unlike non-places, they are typically discussed as spaces where the urban meets the rural. They are spaces that are not manicured or well kept, but left to create their own aesthetic, resulting in spaces that are overlooked due to their lack of definition. In their book *Edgelands: Journeys into England's True Wilderness*, authors Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts discuss the overlooked nature of these spaces:

So much might depend on being able to see the edgelands. Giving them a name might help, because up until now they have been without signifier, an incomprehensible swathe we pass through without regarding; untranslated landscape. And edgelands, by and large, are not meant to be seen, except perhaps as a blur from a car window, or as a backdrop to our most routine and mundane activities [...] The trouble is, if we can't see edgelands, we can't imagine them, or allow them any kind of imaginative life. And so they don't really exist. The smaller identities of things in the edgelands have remained largely invisible to most of us. (Farley and Roberts 2012, 5)

Defining edgelands in this way helps to create an understanding of overlooked spaces. The term offers a framework for attaching images and experiences. Farley and Roberts expand on this further:

Everyone knows—after a sentence or two of explanation—their local version of the territories defined by this word 'edgelands'. But few people know them well, let alone appreciate them. Our book is an attempt to celebrate these places, to break out of the duality of rural and urban landscape writing, to explore these unobserved parts of our shared landscape as places of possibility, mystery, beauty. (Farley and Roberts 2012, 6)

The idea of bringing appreciation to spaces that contain rich histories yet are overlooked, is what brought my attention back to the utilitarian and functional spaces within the city. These spaces contain the traces left behind from city dwellers; they give clues to the past interactions within these spaces and become moments of interest.

I have come to understand the term edgelands to be the best definition for the spaces in this project. Edgelands contain “smaller identities of things” (Farley and Roberts 2012, 5) which I understand as being the physical traces that occur in the utilitarian spaces, the traces that show their past histories. These spaces have an identity and a presence of people within them. It is just that they are viewed and understood primarily for their functionality. As such, I understand these spaces to be edgelands, but instead of occupying large spaces on the fringe of the city, they are small pockets within the city, still functioning as intended, yet having history, mystery and possibilities as an edgeland does, through the traces of use found within them.

### 3.3 Marks and Traces; Intrigue with the City Spaces

When I look at the utilitarian spaces of the city I wonder about their history, all the moments and incidents that have occurred within these spaces. Author Italo Calvino in his book *Invisible Cities* writes:

The city, however, does not tell its past, but contains it like the lines of a hand, written in the corners of the streets, the gratings of the windows, the banisters of the steps, the antennae of the lightning rods, the poles of the flags, every segment marked in turn with scratches, indentations, scrolls (1974, 9).

The objects and spaces in the city each have a story to tell, no matter how insignificant, those stories are hinted at through the physical marks and traces found within the space and on its surfaces. Calvino expands on this idea by explaining that the city space is not just a collection of various materials and built objects, instead it is a space of interactions between those materials and the events they facilitated. He writes:

I could tell you how many steps make up the streets rising like stairways, and the degree of the arcades' curves, and what kind of zinc scales over the roofs; but I already know this would be the same as telling you nothing. The city does not consist of this, but of relationships between the measurements of its space and the events of its past: the height of a lamppost and the distance from the ground of a hanged usurper's swaying feet; the line strung from the lamppost to the railing opposite and the festoons that decorate the course of the queen's nuptial procession; the height of that railing and the leap of the adulterer who climbed over it at dawn [...] As this wave from memories flows in, the city soaks it up like a sponge and expands. (Calvino [1974] 1997, 9)

Interactions and past events layer and soak the city space with information, as Calvino suggests; by merely describing the physicality of the city, we have no understanding of the space's histories or emotional impact. Calvino's description brings about a deeper understanding of the city, filling the space with information, histories and stories.

The use of photography is a perfect medium then for capturing these spaces within the city; it presents every tiny detail in near perfect clarity, an almost faithful reproduction of the space at that exact moment, offering the space to the viewer so they have the time to observe and note the relationships, mysteries, possibilities and intrigue within the space. Sophie Howarth and Stephen McLaren describe how photographs can reveal more about a space and create intrigue: "A great street photograph must elicit more than a quick glance and moment of recognition from the viewer. A sense of mystery and intrigue should remain, and what is withheld is often as important as what is revealed" (Howarth and McLaren 2010, 10). My photographs present traces that are left behind by users of the space. These traces become the details of the photograph that build intrigue. These traces allude to but do not give the full details of the events that have occurred there; instead they offer a point of detail to consider and question how and why that trace came to be, a hint to an everyday story from the city. The photograph offers a still city space for consideration. By capturing the scene with clarity and stillness, it reveals the dense information, subtle traces of past events and the presence of people within the space.

## Chapter 4: Photographs as Objects

### 4.1 The Serendipitous Long Game

The Serendipitous Long Game is a term I use to describe my process of finding compositions within the city as well as the process of image selection and photograph pairing. The act of exploring, walking and finding within the city is the start of the Serendipitous Long Game. While exploring I find spaces within the city that contain traces and elements that are formally interesting to me. These are traces that tell of everyday occurrences that upon discovery stand out to me as key elements of a formal composition. These moments are found on walks within the city; they are not staged and are a result of the everyday within the city, for this reason I consider the finding of these traces serendipitous. I aim to capture these moments with the intention of sharing the experience of exploration and intrigue towards the traces found within these spaces that I experienced within the city.

The Serendipitous Long Game is a process of finding, creating and considering. It relies on having time in the street to find and create, but also time in the studio where it is important to consider the photographs themselves. Photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson captured fleeting moments from the city, describing his process of capturing them as the decisive moment, which he defined as follows: "There is a creative fraction of a second when you are taking a picture. Your eye must see a composition or an expression that life itself offers you, and you must know with intuition when to click the camera" (Cartier-Bresson 1952, quoted in Armstrong 2012, 708). His images showcased movement from a tiny snippet of an everyday action, immortalising a moment that can never be found again. He achieved engagement with his images from the spectacle of the event he was capturing; each image heightening a feeling of speed and movement, making each scene seem impossible; the way a man floats in mid-air, never landing. However, with today's digital technology, capturing these moments has become commonplace, as online platforms stream thousands of snapshots of various events and actions. Instead, in my practice, I explore the city, looking for moments that require time to find and craft into a composition; they are not a capturing of a fleeting moment, but instead a careful consideration of how to present a space, an act of capturing that runs in opposition to the snapshot.

The final component to the Serendipitous Long Game is the 'long game' or consideration of how the captured images pair together. As part of my studio research I have taken thousands of images from across many sites and time periods. In the process of reviewing my images I find similarities appearing; a chance moment that happened in one site over a year ago has similar elements to an image that was taken in a different city only two days ago. This is another form of serendipity that occurs from my process of capturing. It may be acknowledged that some of these similarities could be a result of my formal compositional concerns making my images look similar. However, this is not at the forefront of my mind as I capture each image. I am not thinking of past works as I capture new moments. I am engrossed in the visual moment I have just found. Instead, the similarities that occur are serendipitous, and a result of my constant interrogation of city sites. The Serendipitous Long Game becomes apparent in my images by showing similarities between chance findings that occur in any city at any time. The long game element of my process, of finding and pairing similarities between my images and the sites and time periods they capture, is where I find further excitement and intrigue within this project. These serendipitous discoveries are what drive my practice further

than a single walk in one place, and they are constitutive of the moments of discovery and impact that I have with my own work. Much in the same way that Gursky is attempting to make an “encyclopedia of life” or the Bechers are cataloguing anonymous sculptures, I am exploring cities, creating images that show everyday life within the city and how similarities can be shared between cities, giving clues about their inhabitants. Discovering these similarities drives me to capture and explore more cities, both familiar and new.



Figure 25: Lance Ward, *2pm till Late*, 2017, giclée print, three prints at 30 x 45 cm.

#### 4.2 *Between Here and Between There*



Figure 26: Lance Ward, *Between Here*, 2017, giclée print, 75 x 115 cm.



Figure 27: Lance Ward, *Between There*, 2017, giclée print, 75 x 115 cm.

*Between Here* and *Between There* were the first works I made in the city streets and functional spaces of the city following my research on non-places and edgelands. In these works I aimed to highlight the presence of people through traces that were left behind. I allowed the functional objects of these spaces to become the main focus as a way of showing the past presence of people in these spaces. All the small details of these spaces, the various objects, serve to show that these places are in fact used and functional. This is what makes these spaces intriguing to me as they contain the details of presence in their physicality. Marks on walls show past encounters and the placement of objects serve as traces to interactions that were not seen but alluded to the presence of people within these spaces and to the fact that the everyday continues to happen regardless of whether it is noticed or not.

With these works (as well as a series of images I produced before them called *2pm till Late*, [Figure 25]) I explored the idea of showing geographical clues or cultural details that might allude to where these images were created. The titles, *Between Here* and *Between There*, hint to the fact that these two images are from different places, both geographically and culturally.

These two works are my first example of the Serendipitous Long Game process and how it is used to create, pair and consider images from different cities and time periods. These two works were created independently of each other, found on different walks through different cities; as such, they were created due to the curiosity towards these spaces and the objects found there. Each work has enough compositional consideration to be viewed as an individual work, yet I have chosen to pair them together. The realisation of the similarities shared by these two pictures only came to me after I had begun my process of sorting and reviewing my photographs, with neither image having influence on the creation of the other. The similarities they shared occurred through serendipity and a rigorous observational and image creation process, which became apparent through their pairing. This highlighted the importance of considering past and present images alongside each other and the subtle changes that had occurred in my image creation process during the length of time I have created images.

The location and the time between these photographs is not directly expressed to the viewer. Instead, the ambiguity of where they are located has appeared to drive the engagement with the work, with viewers often looking for clues and hints of their location. The choice of titles for these works was to help bring about that questioning of location in a subtle manner, but the titles were also used to give these works a relation to each other without them being a single work. This is important as each photograph had been given the same amount of care and time in creating the composition, and were both born from the same intrigue regarding their visual elements. They did not need each other to be a considered composition, but by pairing them together, they made a more compelling and interesting discussion about comparisons between the spaces and the objects that resided there. The choice of 'here' and 'there' in the titles hints to both my own location in Perth, Western Australia, and another place somewhere else. This also highlighted their connectedness; the dichotomy of here and there plays with everyday phrases. The use of 'between' also relates to my reading and understanding of non-places and edgelands as being in-between places. All these factors helped in the consideration of naming these works and was a new attempt at titling the works in a way that hinted to more than just the visual elements of the work. In the past, when titling my works, I had always taken a very functional approach, stating obvious factors about the works such as *peeling green* while also prefacing each title with *untitled* as a way of giving them no location, no politics, and playing to their unobserved nature.

*Between Here* and *Between There* served as the starting point for me to look back over my past images and start to see similarities between images from different places and times. The similarities that occur are not planned. Though my formal compositional method of creating images will always produce similarities, the specifics of each image happen by chance. My process of image creation has resulted in thousands of images, with only a select few manifesting as photographs, that is, printed physical objects in the world. The Serendipitous Long Game is a process of looking over all of these past images and pairing them to create new series of work that explore similarities in traces across different cities and times.



### 4.3 The Final Works: Walking Back into the Past



Figure 28: Lance Ward, *Landscape Wall*, 2019, giclée print, 75 x 115 cm.



Figure 29: Lance Ward, *Textured View 1*, 2019, giclée print, 75 x 115 cm.



Figure 30: Lance Ward, *Textured View 2*, 2019, giclée print, 115 x 75 cm.



Figure 31: Lance Ward, *Anonymous Cultural Middle*, 2019, giclée print, 115 x 75 cm.



Figure 32: Lance Ward, *At the Edges of Observation 1*, 2019, giclée print, 75 x 115 cm.



Figure 33: Lance Ward, *At the Edges of Observation 2*, 2019, giclée print, 75 x 115 cm.



Figure 34: Lance Ward, *At the Edges of Observation 3*, 2019, giclée print, 75 x 115 cm.

The final works for this project are a result of my Serendipitous Long Game. These photographs are a combination of new images, taken towards the end of the project and paired in some cases with photographs from previous encounters with the city. These images were initially created with the intention of highlighting traces from the city, with formal composition being at the heart of how these traces are highlighted. These particular photographs, however, have also been created with consideration towards how they resemble previous works from this project. I believe these works are a culmination or an ending point for this project. They mix the various formal approaches that I had taken throughout this project. They expand on the formal composition that I initially used, mixing textured and gloss façades, stage lighting with textural lighting, landscape and portrait orientations. These images are rich in detail and information, showing the presence of people and the interactions that have occurred in the utilitarian parts of the city.

These works, rather than searching out another approach to capturing the city or trying to find other different spaces within the city, are instead about acknowledging and formalising the ideas of previous works. They culminate in a series of highly crafted and considered photographs that can easily sit alongside the previous works from this project.

*Landscape Wall* (Figure 28) explores the formal concerns of the original *Wall Works*, but instead of pulling the composition in tight, it is expanded to give a broader perspective. The landscape perspective was a key element in the *Between Here* and *Between There* works, showing the space that these objects occupied, telling of the utilitarian spaces they were a part of. In *Landscape Wall*, however, I want to expand the field of vision showing more of the scene, yet still only giving slightly more information about the position of this object within the world. This was in much the same way that Bert Danckaert showed spaces with little information, but made every element within his

composition something to be looked at and considered. By allowing the light fitting to sit in the centre of the image, it becomes the central focus. In the *Wall Works* the use of the white-walled gallery space draws the viewer to the work; however, in this work the rest of the composition is devoid of information and the light fitting becomes the focal point. Although the gallery wall still helps to draw the eye to the light fitting, the composition, through its curved lines, expansive wall plane and lighting, uses such techniques to make the overlooked light fitting the focus of the work, making the photograph an autonomous object working almost independently of the white gallery wall.

*Textured Views* (Figures 29 & 30) was a fusing of the formal elements found within the *Wall Works*, *Isolated Views* and *For Lease*. *Textured Views* uses the gloss facades to reflect the textured surfaces of the buildings around them, showing how these unobserved spaces can exist alongside the clean, well-maintained spaces of the city. The reflective surfaces of these buildings told nothing of what actually occurred on the other side of these windows, as the *Untitled (Urban Bastion)* work did; instead it highlighted the intrigue towards the spaces surrounding these buildings.

*Anonymous Cultural Middle* (Figure 31) is a response to the *2pm till Late* works, as well as the *Between Here* and *Between There* works. It depicts a scene from the city with an object, the fire hydrant, which could be found within any city, yet the hydrant is covered in stickers that have many different languages and characters all over it. The building behind it is a heavy stone building that is more common in western cities. Where *Between Here* and *Between There* sought to make an acknowledgement of the differences and similarities between two different cities and times, *Anonymous Cultural Middle* deliberately obscures the ease with which we can distinguish between different cities and instead aims to highlight how different cultures and objects permeate cities across the world. The ambiguity of this work, which occurs through the object and cultural information presented within it, offers a moment of questioning exactly which place or city this scene is from, and the lack of a definitive answer brings about further questions to ponder upon.

The series titled *At the Edges of Observation* (Figures 32, 33 & 34) is to me a culmination of my consideration and engagement with edgelands and non-places. These three photographs show spaces in the city that are fringe spaces, either in the process of changing, awaiting change, or are functional and awaiting use. Each space, however, bears a strong trace of human presence within it, be it through a painted surface (Figure 31), a discarded cone showing the importance of this space at one point in time, or how the functional space has become occupied through its lack of use. These spaces are all a part of the city but are fringe spaces occupying sites in between places, yet they are moved through as these traces clearly show.

The works *Addition* and *Subtraction* (Figures 35 & 36) take on a self-referential quality. They capture shapes and objects from the city that resemble the size, shape and formal elements of photographs I have captured from the city. *Addition* shows three windows, each slightly different, yet evenly spaced as I would place and display my own photographs. The three windows occupy the wall as if they were placed there for consideration, as are my works in the gallery space. *Subtraction* is the capture of three white boards, attached to a building wall. This image and the boards within it seemingly reference my own work, with the white boards acting as a reversal of my own work in the gallery. Where the white walled gallery draws attention to the photographs and the images on their surfaces, the textured walls of the city scene make the flat white boards strange and intriguing with

their lack of detail and texture. They could also be seen as what is left behind from when I create a composition from the city, a series of blank spaces where I had found a formal composition. The references to my own works and presentation of them within the gallery make this work particularly intriguing to me and a fitting final image to end the project on.



Figure 35: Lance Ward, *Addition*, 2019, giclée print, 75 x 115 cm.



Figure 36: Lance Ward, *Subtraction*, 2019, giclée print, 75 x 115 cm.

#### 4.4 City Art Space: Examination Exhibition



Figure 37: Lance Ward, Examination Exhibition, 2019, Documentation



Figure 38: Lance Ward, Examination Exhibition, 2019, Documentation





Figure 39: Lance Ward, Examination Exhibition, 2019, Documentation



Figure 40: Lance Ward, Examination Exhibition, 2019, Documentation

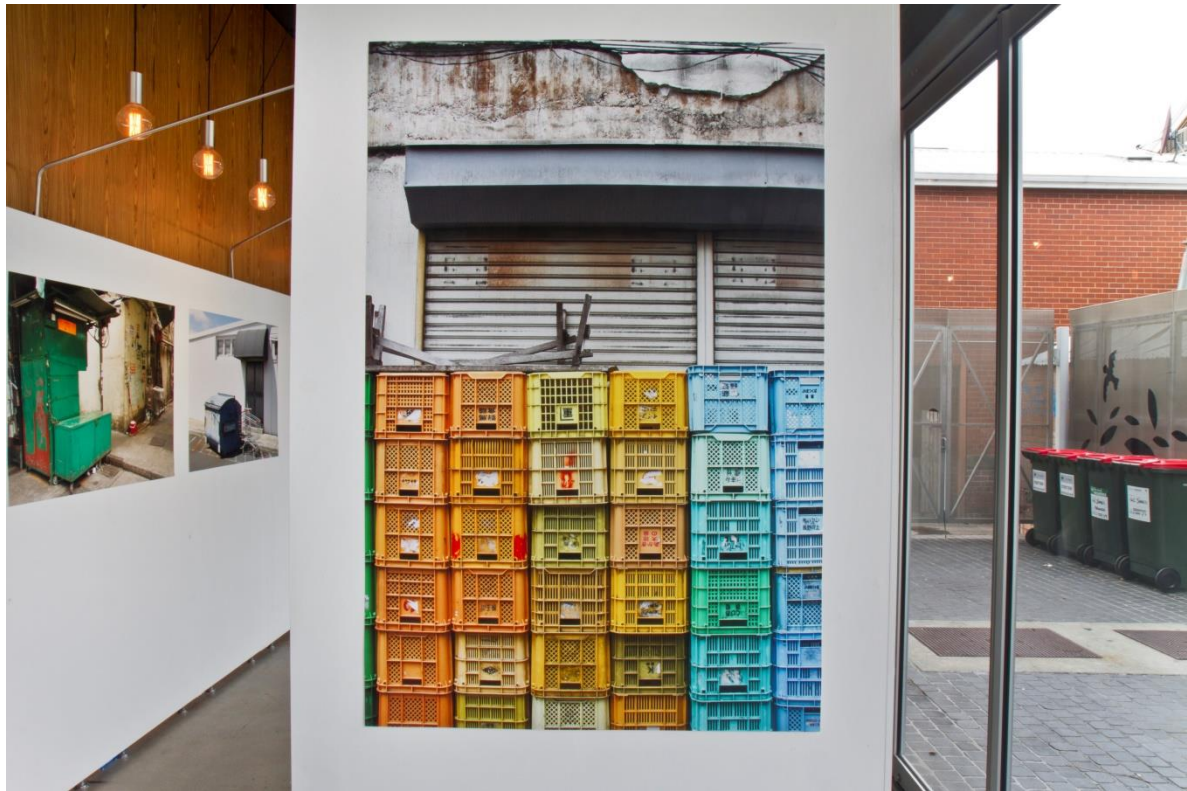


Figure 41: Lance Ward, Examination Exhibition, 2019, Documentation

The City Art Space, located in Northbridge Piazza, Western Australia, was chosen as the ideal gallery space for the examination of my works for this project. The space both supported and reflected my work; the white walls allowed the works to be the centre of attention, while the space itself contained many traces to its past use. The location of the gallery is tucked away from the main street, hidden under a large screen and in the bottom of an office building, flanking its side is a storage alley for bins and other utilities. This makes not only the traces found within the gallery ideal to the work but also its positioning within the city. Despite being situated within the city the gallery is often overlooked or passed by without being given much notice. This relationship to the work is what led me to selecting this gallery for my examination exhibition.

Viewing the works in this space added an extra layer of context to the work; the floor was covered in scratches, paint marks and other traces of its past use, while its utility spaces, such as the kitchen, and bathrooms were visible as you moved through the space. Furthering this viewing experience were the large windows that look back out onto the city. The windows allowed the viewer to see the scenes within the work and then with a simple turn, could then find a similar scene within the real world. Being situated within the city, allowed not only the ability to see the city directly in relation to the works but also allowed the sounds of people, traffic, music; all the sounds of the city street to fill the gallery and add a further layer to the viewing experience to the works. The gallery and its positioning within the city gave further context to the works and created a viewing experience that could only be achieved by standing in front of the works in this particular space.



## Conclusion

To conclude, I wish to review the journey of this project, by discussing my findings and how these findings have altered and expanded the way in which I create works.

The city has always held an intrigue for me. It is a space dense with information of all kinds; people, objects, events, interactions and social concerns. For me, and by extension this project, the focus has been on the hidden histories and stories of the city. These moments that go unnoticed, simple acts in the everyday of the city, often only leaving behind small physical traces to indicate that the act had occurred. These physical traces show the city in a constant state of flux, that it is a space which is being added to and changing all the time.

This project has been a journey through various methods of exploration, investigation and capturing the city. It has accumulated a number of different methods for exploration within the city, to find these physical traces and bring consideration and wonder to the overlooked and unseen spaces and actions of the city. Specifically, this project has combined the working methods of the flâneur, the observational intrigue of Georges Perec and the image production methods of street photography. Between these three working methods I have created a way of entering the city and exploring it, focusing on walking the city streets and using keen observation to find physical traces, and finally creating compositions from what I had found. This was the foundation upon which I would interrogate the city, using these methods to explore.

The specific spaces of the city that are interrogated within this project are the utilitarian spaces of the city, those spaces that allow the city to function. The textured surfaces of walls show the physical traces of activity by city dwellers. This project, having interrogated not only these utilitarian spaces but the clean, glossy facades of the maintained and well-worn city spaces, has found that the utilitarian spaces show the rawest examples of traces from the everyday that occurs within the city. These spaces in this project have been labelled edgelands; they show their past histories and interactions yet they lack appeal. By using this term, this project has attempted to expand the understanding of edgelands to encompass not only spaces that divide the urban and rural but to define spaces in the city that have little need for interaction. These utilitarian spaces hold the wear of time and use on their surfaces like a patina or palimpsest. Information is hidden in every nook and cranny just waiting to be discovered by anyone who wishes to spend the time to look for it.

These methods of exploration allowed me a starting point for interrogating the city, but the problem of creating appeal towards overlooked or unseen spaces and actions in the city was an issue that required resolution. This project addressed this issue by researching the field of formal compositional photography. The works of Bernd and Hilla Becher were the starting point for this investigation into the history of formal compositional photography. Their work importantly inspired a number of contemporary artists who have expanded the field, most notably Andreas Gursky who was a student of the Bechers. Yet the works of Michael Wolf and Bert Danckaert came to have the biggest impact upon this project. Their works dealt with a similar subject matter but their approaches were very different to that of Gursky or the Bechers. Wolf was seeking to show how people occupy spaces and use spaces, whereas Danckaert was interested in creating spaces that allowed the viewer to observe, consider and question. The synthesis of these two approaches supported the aims of the photographs within this project, which attempt to show how people use spaces and the physical traces this use leaves behind.

Formal compositional photography and the everyday city as a subject have become commonplace during the course of this project, and the rise of photographs of the city has been most notable on social media platforms such as Instagram. For a while this was a troubling concern to me, however this problem has ultimately served to strengthen this project. It prompted me to ask the question of how my works differed from those found on social media. The answer to this was in the intent of my works and how they were presented, experienced and viewed. What this revealed was that the works in this project were created with the intention that they are to be hung at a scale that is large by comparison to a hand-held photograph, on the gallery wall, which is a way of presenting work that is intrinsic to that of the tableau. Thus, the rebuttal to how my works differed from those of social media was that they are something that a viewer stands in the presence of; they are objects that exist in the world. This supported my understanding of the terms 'image' and 'photograph'. An image was something that existed in the digital realm; it could be manipulated, zoomed in on, liked, saved, added to an album and disregarded as quickly as it was seen. A photograph, however, is an object; it physically exists in the world and, as such, its physical properties are considered in relation to the composition printed on it. Also considered is how the photograph is presented and hung within the gallery space. This shapes how the work is experienced; it demands attention from the viewer and cannot be disregarded in an easy manner. This project has helped to uncover the points of differentiation and created the realisation that my photographs need to be experienced in person at a scale larger than hand held and ideally could not be seen via a digital screen.

The final findings of this project relate to my working methods of selecting my photographs. The project has helped to develop a working method for not only creating compositions but for uncovering a way of creating new connections between works from different time periods. The Serendipitous Long Game became a term I used to describe the method used throughout this project. The extended length of time of this project has allowed photographs from different cities and different time periods to be created and observed, finding similarities and links between times and spaces. This was only possible through creating works over a long period of time and with consistent formal compositional concerns.

The final culmination of the ideas presented in this project and the final point I wish to end this project on is *Subtraction*, the last work created for this project. This work was created like any other, by walking through the city and capturing images with formal compositional concerns. However, when I reviewed this work, it almost appeared as if the manner in which I had explored and photographed the city had somehow affected the city. This work felt almost as if the city had re-presented my own working methods back to me in the form of three blank spaces that had a striking similarity to how I would hang my works in a gallery space. The main difference being that the presented scene was almost an inverse of my presentation format. Instead of blank walls with large photographs on them, the city presented three blank rectangles with the city spaces surrounding them. They appeared almost as if these were the leftover spaces after I had extracted or cut out compositions from the city. This work, I believe, is a fitting end to this project, a chance recognition of the working methods and aims of this project, appearing in yet another trace from the unseen part of the city.

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- Figure 37: Lance Ward, Examination Exhibition. *Capturing Traces: Formal Compositional Photography and the Unseen City*, at the City Art Space Northbridge 2019. Documentation. Photograph by the artist.
- Figure 38: Lance Ward, Examination Exhibition. *Capturing Traces: Formal Compositional Photography and the Unseen City*, at the City Art Space Northbridge 2019. Documentation. Photograph by the artist.
- Figure 39: Lance Ward, Examination Exhibition. *Capturing Traces: Formal Compositional Photography and the Unseen City*, at the City Art Space Northbridge 2019. Documentation. Photograph by the artist.
- Figure 40: Lance Ward, Examination Exhibition. *Capturing Traces: Formal Compositional Photography and the Unseen City*, at the City Art Space Northbridge 2019. Documentation. Photograph by the artist.
- Figure 41: Lance Ward, Examination Exhibition. *Capturing Traces: Formal Compositional Photography and the Unseen City*, at the City Art Space Northbridge 2019. Documentation. Photograph by the artist.