

Threshold aligning (performing place)

Author:

Rice, Mollie

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Threshold aligning (performing place)

Mollie Rice

A thesis in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Art



School of Art and Design
Faculty of Art and Design

May 2018



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Chapter 1: Introduction

This practice-led research project uses performative processes of drawing sound to explore human spatiality and, in particular, shifting sensations of place in the contemporary city. It proposes to make visible and audible the ways in which place is always something performed, by investigating and drawing attention to the different scales and modes through which activity is registered. The research engages the ‘everyday’ materials of found sound and found text through the processes of walking, active listening, sounding, and drawing, and works between sites in the Sydney suburb of Botany and the artist’s studio. At the heart of this project is the intention to explore the possible aesthetic outcomes of artistic acts seeking to draw out the qualities of latency and performativity in place. The philosopher Jeff Malpas explains that:

To act is to bring things about in a purposeful and directed fashion – it involves activity or agency – and, in this respect, action is to be contrasted with what merely happens to one and which one simply observes.¹

Thus, it proposes that the *performance* of place, enhanced by artistic gestures, inflects the perception of (social) space and illuminates the fabric of place in different ways. My engagement in empirical observations (visual and auditory) at a range of sites around Botany (see Appendix 1) attending to shifting sensations of place in city space, was guided by the following research questions:

How might the process-based artwork align physical and conceptual conditions of place in the experience of the contemporary city?

And secondly,

How might the performance of place personalise public space?

Performances are made in which traces make up the field studies, these in turn are comprised of the field notes, field drawings, field maps and field journals of the project. The materials, devices, and duration employed are specific to each

¹ Malpas, J.E. *Place and Experience – A Philosophical Topography*. Cambridge University Press: England, 1999, 113.

site performance (ranging from half an hour to an hour and a half). Similarly, forms of intentionality and engagement varied from listening to sounding. Figure 1 features an extract from my notebook, indicating the constant and variable elements of the performances. From the extract, it can be seen that performances at site A require a mobile phone and a camping chair as equipment, and they involve walking to site, occur in the morning, and last approximately half an hour. These, like all performances, involve preparatory breathing and stretching exercises. Following the live works, the residual traces of the site performances remain active in themselves through translations in the artists' studio and, furthermore, in the exhibition space itself.

In Chapter 1 the project embraces the complexity of place, both physical and conceptual, drawing on the work of the philosopher Jeff Malpas and his identification of place as a complex structure within which experience is possible. The way that anyone experiences place is both public and private, it occurs both socially and individually. There may be convergences or intersections with the experience of others, but there are just as many divergences. These include specific responses to geographical features, experience of social structures and organisations, subjective circumstances and received ideas on place. Malpas' expansive definition, building up an understanding of place as portable, porous, and 'nested', resonates with the explorations of the project, emphasising Place as experienced through the multiple modalities of the human body in action: seeing, hearing, thinking, smelling, tasting, touching. It is a composite that is in a constant state of flux at different temporal registers. Malpas' topographical approach is particularly valuable as a composite way of mapping, aligning with my own composite and process-based approach to doing and thinking, making and unmaking, and also that of other artists who influence my practice, such as Bianca Hester, Morgan O'Hara, and Cameron Robbins.

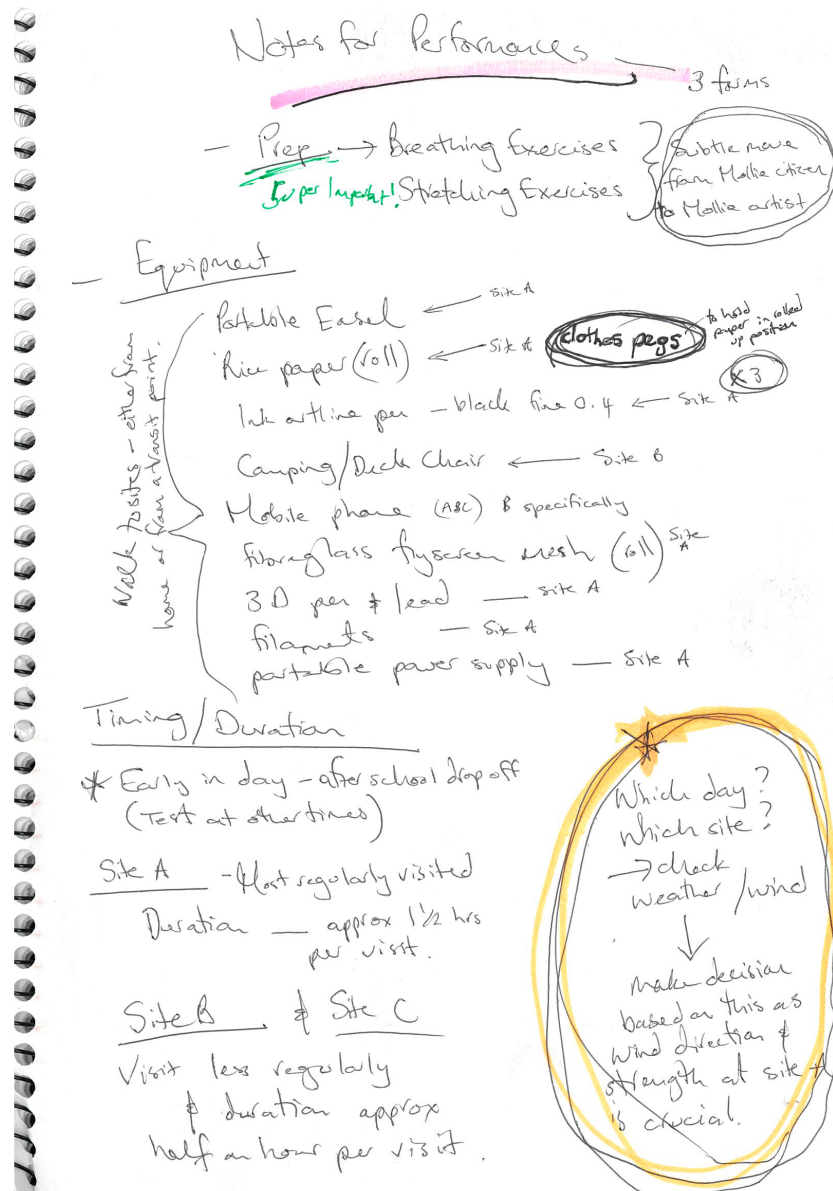


Figure 1. Mollie Rice, *Working Notes*
 Image: Mollie Rice

Malpas notes that the connection of person and place is dependent on agency, thus the remainder of Chapter 1 sets out the particular conditions by which the research uses re-mapping as a purposeful and provisional activity with threefold intent: as agency, as generative of difference, and as trace of encounter. Through a topographical approach it aims to accentuate experiences of threshold in the city; that is, associated with transition and uncertainty, and explores the reality of Botany as a literal threshold space of physical transition, poised between the high density living of inner urban Sydney and a large sea and airport.

The physical threshold sites of the research, to which repeat visits are made (Figure 2), include:

Site A: A carpark on the edge of Botany Bay. The airport is to the south. The docks are to the east. The city and main arterial roads are to the north and behind me as I work. At this site, I stand at my portable easel transposing sound.

Site B: The intersection of Botany Road and Foreshore Drive. A truck route accessing the docks, the world, the city, the airport and rural Australia. I sit on a deck chair under a tree, recording the environmental sounds and my speaking voice listing text, such as that on the sides of trucks and cars that pass me by.

Site C: Mill Pond, situated almost under the Southern Cross flyover near Botany Road. The pond is a section of Mill Stream, which is part of the wetlands. It is bordered by a busy and frequently congested arterial road leading in and out of the city of Sydney to the south.

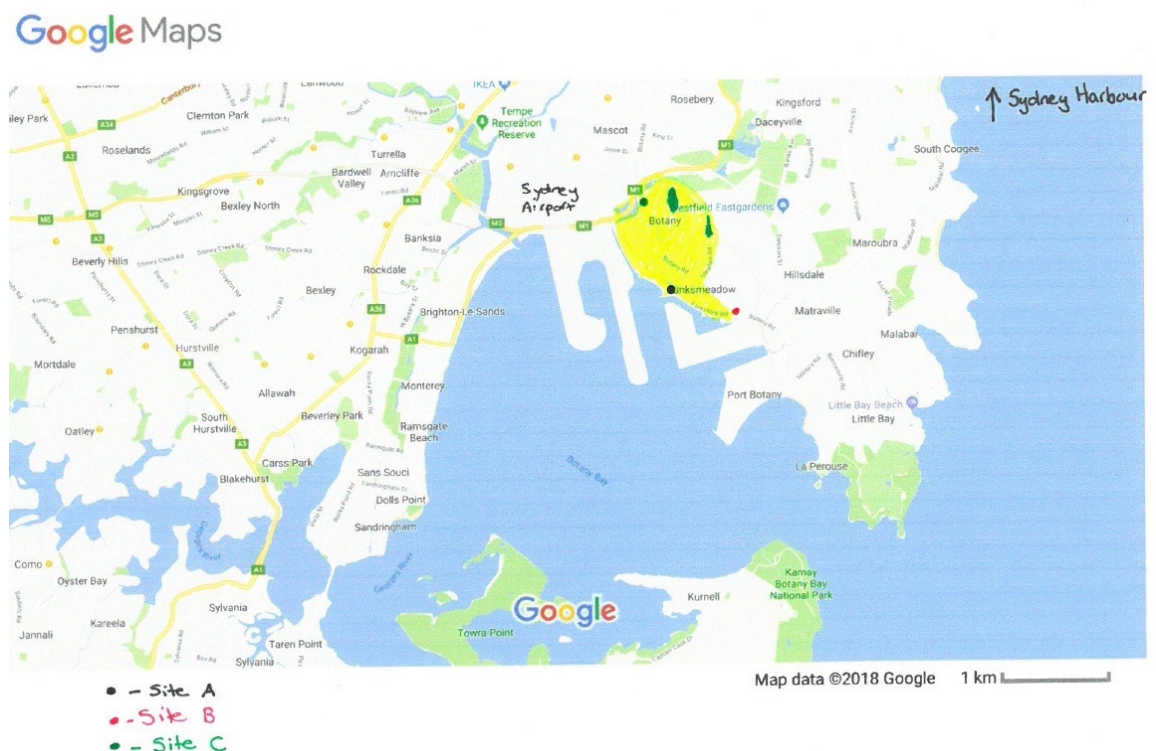


Figure 2. Map of performance sites in Botany
Map downloaded from Google Maps, with added working notes and key by Mollie Rice

The notion of the threshold is highlighted as a significant and potent space where there is possibility of movement and communication. As discussed by, and present in the work of, artist and theorist Victor Burgin, the threshold place is where a reciprocity exists. Aligning thresholds as a form of re-mapping attends with care to the way physical and symbolic boundaries are created by traditional western forms of mapping. The layering of latency in relation to the notion of the threshold includes an absence or erasure, in light of the ongoing indigenous presence of the Guriwal peoples of the land on which the research is undertaken.

Chapter 2 explores the notion that place is performed through everyday actions on different scales; that is to say, the movements of the human body, the aeroplanes, the cars and trucks, the wind, are all performances that do something to illuminate or alter place. As the main material and tool of exploration, the performing body is active participant rather than spectator, where the commitment is to avoid a distanced perspective. This involves working with the everyday, in city space, where the body is both a filter and a transmitter of place, through my presence in activating a site and also in transmission via the traces I make and show later. In this research, I am referring to the body in general rather than the female body. By walking in city space that is hostile to the pedestrian, the simple presence of a body in a space that is rarely frequented or in which types of interaction are highly codified, can appear as a quietly subversive strategy. By using areas that are present but inactive, the work reflects on the way that building developments and infrastructure impact the personalisation of public space in the contemporary city. As Martha Rosler states in her analysis of the term 'culture class,' coined by Richard Florida, 'Space, as many observers have noted, has displaced time as the operative dimension of advanced, globalizing (and post-industrial?) capitalism'.² In inhabiting these spaces I reflect on spatial hegemony and its operation in relation to the threshold.

² Rosler, Martha. 'Culture Class: Art, Creativity, Urbanism – Part 1' *E-flux*. Journal #21. December 2010. Web. Accessed July 2016, 1. The 'culture class' is a term coined by Richard Florida. <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/21/67676/culture-class-art-creativity-urbanism-part-1/>

The use of performative devices such as a portable drawing board designed specifically for the format of the performances and an artistic gesture, rather than one that is readymade, celebrates and spotlights the performing body in the processes of filtering and transmitting. This chapter specifically addresses the role performance plays in connecting person and place by exploring and seeking to open up forms of agency. This is an approach that aligns with the philosopher Rosi Braidotti's discussion of 'complex singularity', wherein the singularity is manifested by an ongoing 'renegotiation with a variety of forces'. I also deploy the practice of a sonic sensibility to the project, as proposed by artist and writer Salome Voegelin. This involves drawing out the unseen in visual information, and is fitting as I advocate against visual priority in the exploration of place, without dismissing visuals completely.

Chapter 3 details examples of field-working and the material processes of walking, active listening, sounding, and drawing. It further develops the ways in which my application of a sonic sensibility to materials and processes – from the use of charcoal and flyscreen to blind, continuous line drawing – produces traces that activate nuances, embody movement, and embed sensations of place. The research builds on the history of psychogeography and the *dérive*, a form of drifting in city space practiced by artists of the Situationist International, by introducing critical perspectives from contemporary 'nomadic theory' described by Braidotti. This involves an approach to movement that considers the whole performing body; that is, mind, legs, hands, ears, eyes, rather than one where the movement is based on the literal movement of the legs.

Chapter 4 explores the role of traces in the project as residues of encounter with the performance of place. The residues, both material or immaterial, are translated through studio-based processes of cutting, extruding and accentuating. Traces align with the 'nested' quality of place described by Malpas, in that they filter and transmit an experience of place. They make up the field studies, field drawings, field notes, and field journals of the project and operate as a resource for ongoing action rather than as static representations.

The field studies mostly feature the performances on-site, whereas the field drawings, field notes, and field journals involve degrees of translation in the studio. (Figure 3) This chapter explores the relationship between performance and its traces, as discussed by Julie Louise Bacon, and present in the work of the artists Bianca Hester and Cameron Robbins.

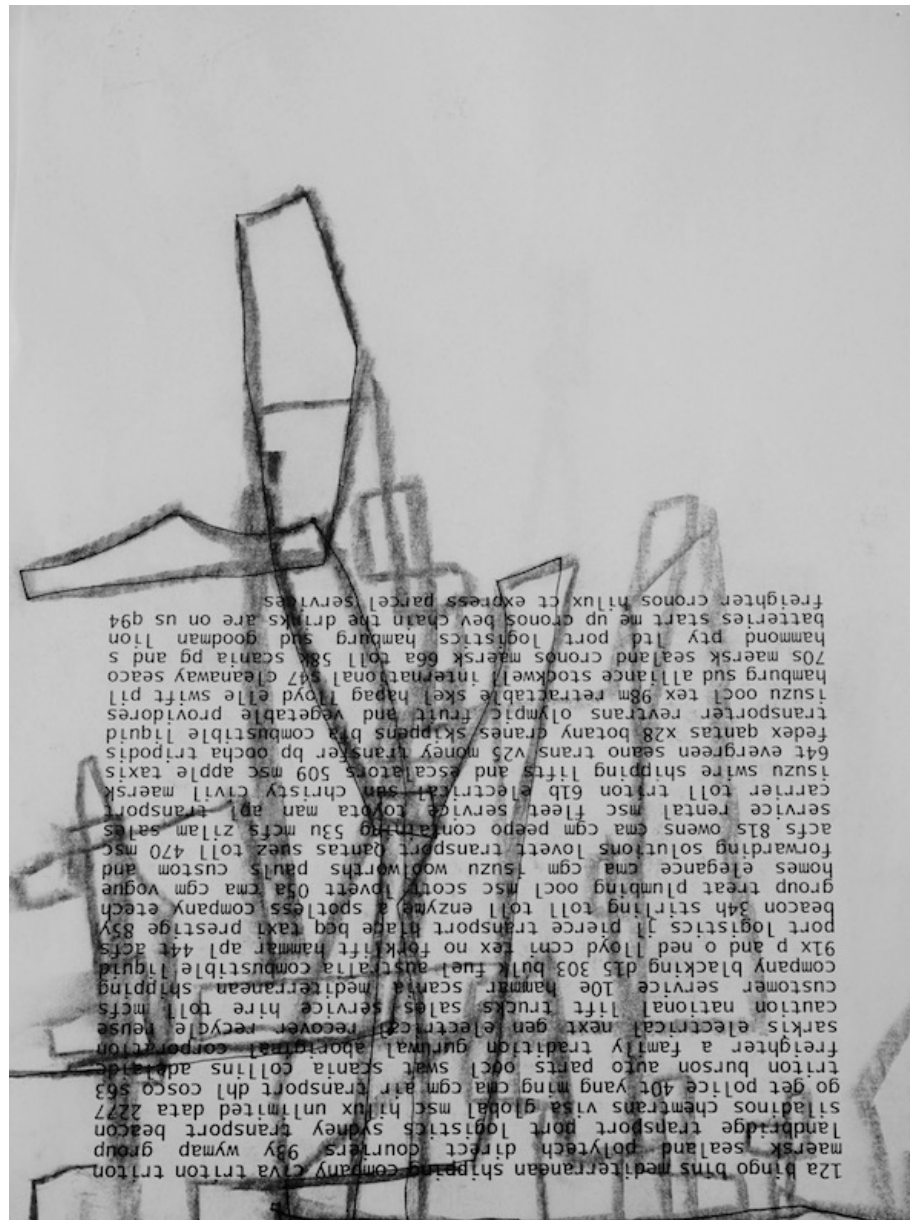


Figure 3. Mollie Rice, *Field Journal* (Botany 2017)
Ink and Charcoal in Artists Book,
Image: Mollie Rice

As a re-mapping project, this research aims to explore the capacity of the single body, with a minimal set of tools and gestures, to render place less opaque: capturing, illuminating, and opening up potential for personal connection in the city. (The progression of the research is available in the timeline offered in Appendix 1) In opening up the visible and including an exploration of the audible into the mix, the research conjures sensations of the impact of the personal in activating public space through aesthetic gestures of intent. The simple activation of place through walking, discloses the marginalisation of the living body in spaces where its presence is dominated by the built environment.

Chapter 2: Place

The complicated business of understanding place, according to the philosopher Jeff Malpas, is 'mirrored in the complex process of triangulation and traverse, by which the topographical surveyor builds up her map of the region being surveyed'.³ He advocates for a 'sighting and resighting', and a 'crossing and recrossing of land and landmark'.⁴ Crucially, Malpas notes that during the activity of traversing place, it is possible to lose sight of the area itself, and that it is only at the end of the process that 'the region as a whole can emerge in the form of the survey map'.⁵ Embracing this analogy of the topographical, and mapping as a strategy in itself, the research uses performative approaches to 'sight' and 'resight', 'cross' and 'recross'. These are directed into a remapping process whereby experiential traces, past and present, are collected.

(i) The Plasticity and Porosity of Place

Acknowledging extensive efforts to understand human life and mind within his analyses of place, Malpas' particular focus on place itself is inextricably embedded in, but not purely a derivative of space. He addresses what he sees as the marginalisation and opacity of the notion of place itself. Malpas attempts to rebalance the discourse that privileged the concepts of time and space and excluded the notion of place. He considers fellow philosopher Edward Casey's claim that 'for an entire epoch, place has been regarded as an impoverished second cousin of Time and Space, those two colossal cosmic partners that tower over modernity'.⁶ It is Malpas' identification of the distinction between the idea of emotional responsiveness, which he acknowledges as instructive, and the more complex notion of place 'that is integral to the very structure and possibility of experience', which affords place its richness and dynamism. Place, according to Malpas, is a perceptive structure and within this structure the interconnection of different elements exists. My research is informed by that

³ Malpas, Jeff. *Place and Experience – A Philosophical Topography*. Cambridge University Press: England, 1999, 41.

⁴ Malpas, Jeff. *Place and Experience*, 41.

⁵ Malpas, Jeff. *Place and Experience*, 41.

⁶ Malpas, Jeff. *Place and Experience*, 27.

critical assessment and shares Malpas' focus not on 'place as experienced but place as a structure *within which* experience is possible'.⁷

The live, the lived experience, and the experience of place are shaped by the social and the personal, or, as proposed by the philosopher Rosi Braidotti, 'A body is a portion of forces life bound to the environment that feeds it; all organisms are collective and interdependent.'⁸ Malpas states, 'understanding the way in which a particular creature has a grasp 'of space' is not a matter of delineating only one of the components, but uncovering the larger, unitary structure in which those components are embedded'.⁹ For place is a composite of both time and space, not merely a location or as a personal relation. He says 'The idea of place thus provides the framework within which the complex interconnection of notions of *both* subjective and objective spatiality can be understood'.¹⁰ The process-based artwork, therefore, has a particular role to play in this dialogue: my approach to drawing in this project, executed with both traditional materials, a three dimensional pen, and a blade, echoes the idea of a conceptual composite through material forms. The gestures of listening and drawing with three-dimensional pen, onto fibreglass flyscreen mesh onsite is then translated through gestures of cutting with a blade and accentuating by building up the dimensionality, in-studio. The process of fragmenting and rendering the materials fragile, as in Figure 4, constitutes both an intentionally dynamic and unstable approach to making.

The principal site of research is located at the edge of Botany Bay and on the edge of Sydney. Botany is a semi-industrial, semi-suburban place – a threshold space of arrivals and departures – filtering the traffic of goods and people in and out of the city. It is a place of crucial infrastructure for a contemporary global city, hosting its airport and the docks.

⁷ Malpas, Jeff. *Place and Experience*, 71.

⁸ Braidotti, Rosi. *Nomadic Theory – The Portable Rosi Braidotti*. Columbia University Press: New York, 2012, 101.

⁹ Malpas, Jeff. *Place and Experience*, 69.

¹⁰ Malpas, Jeff. *Place and Experience*, 70.

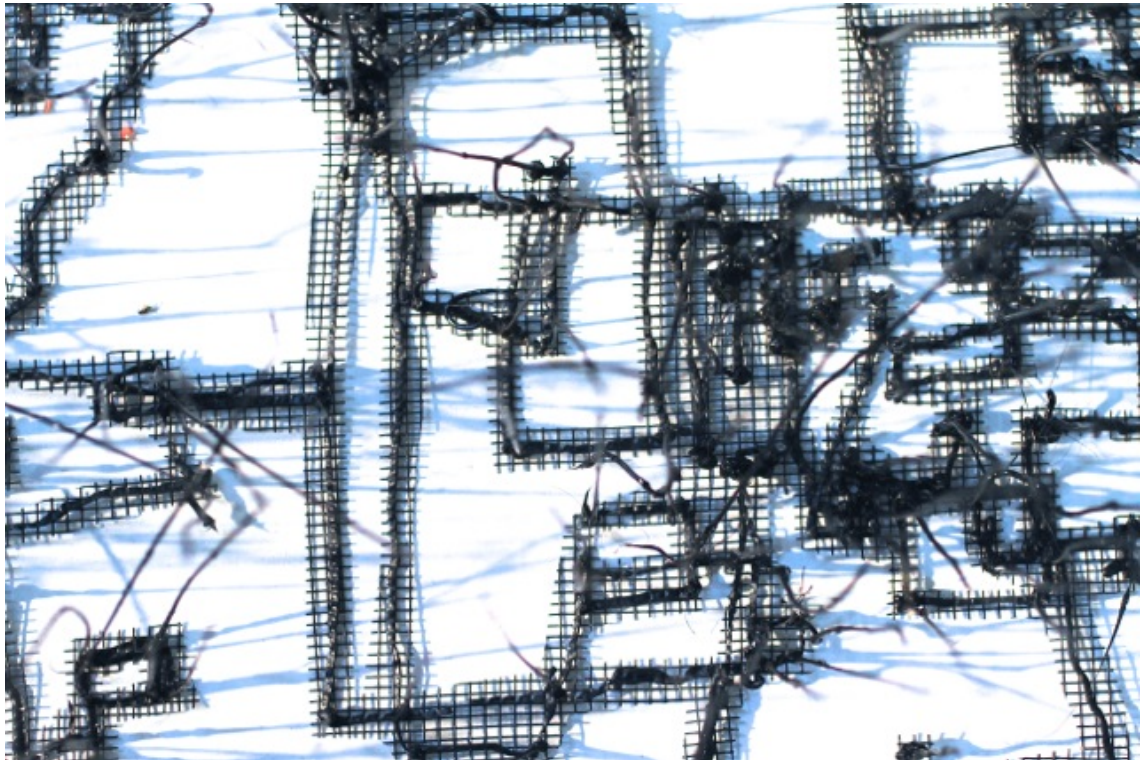


Figure 4. Mollie Rice, *Field Map* (Botany 2017). Detail. Dimensions Variable
Three-dimensional pen filament on fibreglass flyscreen mesh
Image: Mollie Rice

The suburb itself is undergoing a dramatic developmental change, about to house a significantly new and vastly increased number of the urban population.¹¹ As in other post-industrial cities, the need for more space in Sydney has forced larger numbers of people to populate this once peripheral place.

Embracing place as a ‘topographical’ structure that is comprised of numerous distinct but interrelated features, the research unpacks intimate, lived experience as construct, and an active intervention in the present as a process of constructing. The personal cannot be grasped separately from the larger structure of the social, which encompasses other human beings as well as objects and events. According to Malpas, ‘it is the ‘interplay of these elements, organised specifically in relation to the concept of agency’ that connects person

¹¹ According to the Botany Bay Planning Strategy 2031
<https://www.bayside.nsw.gov.au/services/development.../planning.../plans and strategies/>

and place.¹² This work is propelled by the possibility of establishing and maintaining a sense of agency to engage consciously in the creation of place.

(ii) Mapping and Re-Mapping – Knowing and Understanding Place

Processes of mapping are commonly employed in place-making as both action and representation; we plot, we chart, we delineate, we draw, we depict, we portray, we survey. In attempting to bring a place into being; in other words, to render it visible and knowable, traditional mapping employs practices of naming and inventing territories that serve the purpose of laying claim to particular spaces. Mapping becomes a core category in any archive. Jacques Derrida explained that in the archive, ‘the technical structure determines the structure of the archivable content even in its very coming into existence and in its relationship to the future.’¹³ The acts of mapping and naming are acts of claiming that invent, just as the ‘visible and knowable’ are the way in which place is performed. The maker (or re-maker) exists within a map, although latent, in the particular circumstances and specific purpose of the mapping as much as any geographical features. In this way, to some degree, all mapping has elements of the performative embedded within it, whether disclosed or not. *Psychogeography* draws attention to these elements of mapping and the conditions of urban society by engaging tools to subvert what is seen as the ‘homogenising effects of capitalist development’.¹⁴ These included the activity of the *derivé* and making re-mappings using collage techniques.

Mapping as approached in my research is informed by Malpas’ critical emphasis:

I grasp the map as a map, and so as a representation of space. In so far as the map is indeed grasped conceptually, and so as a representation, it is already grasped as distinct from that which it represents, and can thereby be used both in an ‘engaged’ fashion in

¹² Malpas, Jeff. *Place and Experience*, 175.

¹³ Derrida, Jacques. *Archive Fever – A Freudian Impression*. The University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1995, 17.

¹⁴ Coverly, Merlin. *Psychogeography*. Pocket Essentials: England, 2006, 82.

relation to action and in a more detached and theoretical manner also.¹⁵

Mapping is both representation of space and traces of experience of place. It is understood as having a fluidity such as that expressed viscerally in artist Judy Watson's simile: 'Mapping like skin, stretched across the bones of the land. Underneath the ground is breathing, moving, sucking, swallowing...', along with the subjectivities and objectivities that interact with it and within it.¹⁶ As with Watson's practice, my approach to mapping is generative of action, but also representative of action and traces of action. It functions as both construct and construction, as action and representation. (Figure 5) The potential of mapping is understood as lying not only in what the map contains but also in the action of mapping itself, as a process of performing place.

In his seminal work *The Road to Botany Bay*, Paul Carter proposes that the mapping of Australia, including that created in language, in the form of the written journal, entailed spatial representations of differences in intentionality. Agency was, he argued, a driver in the process of performing place. As one key instance, the map of the explorer; for example, looks for a way through; it is a map of travelling, whereas the map of a surveyor has the intentionality of settling, and is tasked with representing the land as habitable. Both examples are mappings of power relations as much as anything else, echoing Derrida's thoughts. Agency is visible and audible in the action of mapping as a performance of place in society at large, whether that be as part of a quest for a sense of internal empowerment, or the power structures of the external social world, and/or both.

¹⁵ Malpas, Jeff. *Place and Experience*, 55.

¹⁶ Watson, Judy and Louise Martin-Chew. *Judy Watson – blood language*. The Miegunyah Press: Melbourne, Australia, 2009, 13.



Figure 5. Mollie Rice, *Field Drawing #10* (Botany 2017). Detail
Digital Print with Ink and Charcoal on Cotton Rag
Image: Mollie Rice

Carter questions the impact that traces of Australia's spatial history have on the now, illuminating the processes whereby histories are overlaid in the construction of place, while noting, histories are simultaneously in the process of being constructed.

The Indigenous peoples of this land have a long oral history of 'songlines' as a mapping device that incorporates landscape knowledge and cultural values. Carter describes the tensions created in the process of inventing borders and boundaries of nineteenth century imperialism. In particular, he gives attention to the significant impact on the histories of Indigenous Peoples of Australia and their traditional lands. Although Indigenous Australians have the longest continuous cultural history in the world, it has not been without significant disruptions. Carter notes that for the Colonialists, 'in order to communicate the

act of settling' it was necessary to 'invent a boundary'.¹⁷ This action allows the settler to represent the land as 'habitable'. Once this happens, according to Carter, 'symbolic boundaries proliferate' as a means of articulating a history that presents all other histories through its lens and voice.¹⁸ I am conscious that the notion of sonic listens to and absorbs the cultural past, and of the particular significance of the indigenous life and culture of Botany in this spatial history and the ongoing implications in the present. This re-mapping project, while not dealing in detail with the broader social histories of the area, unreservedly accedes that the locale I engage with in the present is both construct and constructed of these spatial disruptions.

My research engages a caring ear for the long and enduring history of Indigenous culture and habitation. Underscoring the notion of place as complex, in this research, the caring ear to Indigenous history is informed by artist Brenda L Croft's assertion that there is not one 'specific type of indigeneity,' and thus:

History, or more to the point varied versions of it, folds in upon itself and what finally (re)surfaces does so through the filter of altered points of view, perspectives and standpoints – from the centre, all the way *out and beyond* the periphery.¹⁹

Traditional mapping, along with more contemporary forms of re-mapping, holds an allure that stems from the inevitable fluidity in attempting to capture a place in its entirety. Within any map there lies the invitation for revision. For example, each visit to site, such as where transpositions of found sound are made, results in a slightly different transposition. On certain scales there is variability, even in the familiar and the repeat. (Figure 6) This feeds into the translations that are made in the artists' studio where three versions of each set of field drawings are made, offering up material reflections on this quality. The three versions echo the triangulated approach of a traditional survey technique.

¹⁷ Carter, Paul. *The Road to Botany Bay – An Exploration of Landscape and History*. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 1987, 152.

¹⁸ Carter, Paul. *The Road to Botany Bay*, 153.

¹⁹ Croft, Brenda L. 'History Always Repeats – The Song Cycles Remain the Same' in *My Country, I Still Call Australia Home: Contemporary Art from Black Australia*. Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art: Brisbane, 2013, 78.



Figure 6. Mollie Rice, *Field Map* (Botany 2017). Detail
Three-Dimensional Pen Filament on Fibreglass Flyscreen Mesh
Image: SSB Creative Photography

As a form of spatial meaning making, many artists have embraced the process of map making. Tom McCarthy, describes the strategy of re-mapping, as applied by artists such as the Surrealists and the Situationist International, as playing ‘a role in the armoury of the oppressed,’ where, ‘far from fixing reality’ they become a ‘wild proliferation of alternative ones, of possible worlds each one as faulty and fantastic as the next’.²⁰ Malpas recognises in his own process of mapping the complexity of place that ‘much of the interest and romance of the fictional map lies precisely in this juxtaposition of the imagined with the real – in the subtle blurring of boundaries between the two’.²¹ The ‘fictional’ map thus enmeshes boundaries of physical space with boundaries of the imagination and subjectivity. Engaging in mapping, whether plotting, drawing, delineating, or charting, is crucial to the connection of person and place through the degree to which any one person has agency in these processes.

²⁰ McCarthy, Tom. ‘Introduction’ in *Mapping It Out – An Alternative Atlas of Contemporary Cartographies*. Thames and Hudson: London, 2014, 9.

²¹ Jeff Malpas. *Place and Experience*, 58.

The intention of re-mapping within this research project is not one of describing or 'fixing' a reality, or of claiming to provide a truth. Rather, I look to re-mapping as a process that is ongoing. It is a purposeful, provisional and speculative activity that has threefold intent: as agency, as generative of difference, and as trace of encounter. The re-mapping is a commitment to capturing the variability of place.

The notion of mapping, released from static demarcation of boundaries and categorisation, and functioning as provisional, gives way to a spatial activity that is rich, diverse, and full of potential for knowledge based on unknowing. By this, I mean the potential for knowledge that may arise from uncertainty and the unlearning of social, cultural, and political assumptions. To re-map is to move beyond cartography to something deeply personal; that is, the way we navigate the world and, for that matter, our daily routines. In this respect, re-mapping is a mode of spatial production that contributes instinct, personality, and subjectivity to the complex notion of place.

(iii) Activating Thresholds – A Field-Working Approach

The re-mapping strategy within this project emphasises the physical and conceptual conditions of thresholds in the experience of place in the contemporary city. Thresholds are associated with movement. They are the blurry space in between demarcated zones where there is the possibility of coalescence. Thresholds are spaces where the expectation is of movement, they are gateways inviting a crossing. They are bridges between, and in this respect, they are unlike the static demarcations associated with notions of boundaries or borders. Creating separation, borders and boundaries are embedded with tensions that are not absent from thresholds either, and this makes them significant. The threshold is where the presence of tensions may be best illuminated, and where one's proximity demands an acknowledgement, with the possibility of altering expectations. Re-mapping in my research aims to amplify the threshold as a valuable space of possibility where movement between one symbolic boundary and another can be speculated on.

Thus, thresholds are understood as holding potential to be generative and generous spaces. They exist 'at the interface of what is outside and what is inside' where, according to artist and theorist Victor Burgin, a certain reciprocity exists.²² In an interview in 2015, Burgin refers to his understanding of such a reciprocity as 'between'. 'In a sense' he says, when discussing the relationship between his work and the audience, 'the object is not just the object in the gallery, on the wall, the real object is the object that they (the audience) build, that they create, somewhere between their own experience and their experience of the world.'²³ When it is thought of in this way, this in-between space is likely where most of us live, most of the time.

In order to activate thresholds, the project engages field-working as a form of re-mapping. Field-working is a process of searching for and collecting information using a model that isn't rigid or overly prescriptive. This flexibility and openness to particularities make field-working an approach that is favoured by, and applicable to, many discipline areas. In this project field-working has an affinity with the rich and diverse approach of triangulation and traverse that Malpas advocates for in his topographical analysis of place. Malpas asserts that place is an 'open yet bounded realm within which the things of the world can appear and within which events can take place'.²⁴ Artists working with multiple temporalities and spatialities inform this work, notably Morgan O'Hara who approaches drawing within a structure.²⁵ Her focus is on movement, she works 'blind', and her materials are specifically chosen. This is coupled by an openness that comes with the fact that O'Hara's focus is on the movement of another human being and it is this, with all of its unfamiliarity that she attempts to capture in her '*Live Transmissions*'. Similarly, Cameron Robbins has created a structure for his drawing practice central to which is his personal creation of mechanical devices that act as stand-ins for his own hand in the drawing process. This is coupled with an openness in his approach to what is captured

²² Burgin, Victor. Web. Accessed May 2017.

www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/video/tateshots-victor-burgin

²³ Kanopy, *Victor Burgin: An Interview*. Kanopy Streaming: San Francisco, USA, 2015.

²⁴ Malpas, Jeff. *Place and Experience*, 33.

²⁵ www.morganohara.com

in his drawings for which the natural elements, such as sun and wind, propel the drawing device.

Importantly, Malpas' explanation also forms the basis of personal 'open and yet bounded' *thinking* that links to an 'open yet bounded' *making* directing my research. I am referring both to unmaking and making, to a whole-body experience, and a moving thinking experience, to a sounding experience and also sometimes to a silencing. The performances and traces are approached as provisional, and consider the ideas on portability of Braidotti, who claims, 'if the only constant in the third millennium is change, then the challenge lies in how to think about processes rather than concepts'.²⁶ In this way, my field-working that involves both live encounters with place and the ongoing re-translation of residues in the studio, where the possibility of portability is embraced, is appropriate to the possibility for agency in threshold aligning. In Figure 7, I am sitting at an intersection of two main arterial roads, for a duration of half an hour my voice is recorded, listing the text on the front, back, and sides of vehicles as they pass me by. These recordings are translated into visual form in the studio, through processes of re-listening, where the words become sonic material freed from the constraints or expectations of language. Rather than a fixed model of either/or, field-working is able to traverse boundaries, providing a certain freedom that opens up provisional conditions where agency may be applied, and thus, it can be immensely valuable in the connection of person and place.

²⁶ Braidotti, Rosi. *Nomadic Theory*, 15.



Figure 7. Mollie Rice, *Field Notes – Images* (Botany 2017)
 Photographic Image in Artists Book
 Image: SSB Creative Photography

(iv) Keeping it Local

My approach to the local involves maintaining a proximity to my ‘everyday’ and present experience of place, both physically and conceptually. This reflects a commitment to the experience of place that rejects a distanced or removed perspective, without advocating for insularity. By keeping it local I aim to situate empirical investigations in city space; that is, the subjective and the quotidian, and this simultaneously has an outward-looking orientation. It aims to be both inside and outside, central and periphery, above, below, and throughout. This approach to performing location draws on architect and artist Kathy Waghorn’s tactic of ‘Becoming Ultra-Local’ in which she works between the two positions of ‘insider’ and ‘outsider.’ This position, according to Waghorn, is where ‘Ultra local knowledge comes from noticing a place at scales between the micro (the minutiae of the everyday) and the macro (how the place is connected to a

myriad of other places)'.²⁷ Botany is local to me; through my daily rituals I have an intimacy with the suburb, it is my home.

Botany today sits on earlier versions of Botany, these include: Botany Bay as site of the first landing of Europeans, Botany as Stingray Bay, Botany as rejected harbour for settlement, Botany as better alternative to Sydney Cove for the convict population, Botany as site of the first Australian woollen mill, Botany as place of sporting and leisure facilities.²⁸ These versions are, as Croft reminds us, those of the histories of the Colonial Settlers as mapped, journaled, bounded and named, they are the 'known historical records'.²⁹ These versions of Botany are particularly audible and visible, because of their chronicling.

Other versions of Botany, although less visible in historical records, are also present. These include heard histories through indigenous oral storytelling/song/art and unheard histories where; for example, the processes of silencing that are activated by misunderstanding and misrepresentation 'have until recent times denied Indigenous peoples' very existence'.³⁰ Particular to this project are those of the Guriwal clan, the traditional custodians and occupants of the areas north of Botany Bay.³¹ In today's version of the suburb there is a silencing, referred to by Croft as '(perpetrated and) perpetuated',³² rendering inaudible these histories and demonstrating the impact colonisation, the state and the church have had on the community over many generations. Indeed, simultaneous presence and absence was resonant in Croft's work *Still in my Mind: Gurindji location, experience and visibility* at UNSW Galleries in 2017.³³

²⁷ Waghorn, Kathy. *The Practice of Feeling for Place: A Compendium for an Expanded Architecture*. Thesis for the Award of PhD: RMIT University, 2017, 74.

²⁸ Carter, Paul. *The Road to Botany Bay*. This information is gathered from many parts of the book.

²⁹ Croft, Brenda L. 'History Always Repeats', 78.

³⁰ Croft, Brenda L. 'History Always Repeats', 78.

³¹ Ginns, Alan and Pamela Fletcher. *Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Study and Plan for The City of Botany Bay*. Gondwana Consulting: Sydney, Australia, 2011, 18. The Guriwal clan are part of the larger Dharug language group.

³² Croft, Brenda L. 'History Always Repeats', 77.

³³ Croft, Brenda L. Curator. *Still in my Mind: Gurindji location, experience and visibility*. UNSW Galleries, Sydney, Australia. 5th May – 29 July 2017. <https://www.artdesign.unsw.edu.au/unsw-galleries/still-my-mind-gurindji-location-experience-visibility/>

The presence and absence of the histories of Botany are considered in the performances and traces of my project through an attention to latency.

Botany and Malpas' notion of *place*, as an interwoven structure, also align with a certain porosity and entanglement of 'supermodernity' as proposed by the anthropologist Marc Augé. Given 'the spread of urbanization', Augé states that in this, as yet not fully recognised era of 'supermodernity', 'big cities are defined firstly by their capacity to import and export people, products, images, and messages. Spatially, their importance can be measured by the quality and scale of the highway and rail networks linking them with their airports'.³⁴ In view of this insight, the suburb of Botany, with its crucial infrastructure, is more central to the contemporary city than its periphery status has traditionally allowed and thus the notion that my fieldwork has a more centripetal dynamic than initially proposed.

The idea of 'keeping it local' is applied to the research in order to reject emotional detachment that often comes from a distanced perspective, thus challenging dislocated notions of place. Although Augé identifies 'supermodernity' as a feature of our time, he reiterates the supposed periphery-ness of spaces like Botany when he describes their predominant features as 'non-places'. These, he argues, in a somewhat dramatic manner, are 'air, rail and motorway routes, the mobile cabins called 'means of transport' (aircraft, trains, road vehicles), hotel chains, leisure parks, large retail outlets, and finally the complex skein of cable and wireless networks that mobilize extra-terrestrial space for the purpose of communication so peculiar that it often puts the individual in contact only with another image of himself'.³⁵ Distanced as it is from my own lived experience, Augé's comments add to the discursive space around the multiple meanings of place for different communities, while reflecting the ambivalence created by distanced perspectives.

³⁴ Augé, Marc. *Non-Places – An Introduction to Supermodernity*. Verso: London, 2008, 1.

³⁵ Augé, Marc. *Non-Places*, 64.

My critical thoughts on place in this project, influenced by the work of Malpas, are echoed through the sites selected for performance in Botany. Making repeat visits to these sites as a re-mapping strategy, the research aims to open up the notion of the threshold as a significant space of potential for movement in the way person and place are connected.

Chapter 3: Performing Place

The complex structure of place with all of its interacting possibilities and probabilities would seem to constitute a living organism or, as Claire Doherty proposes, it may be referred to as 'an event-in-progress'.³⁶ Place, not static, not passive, is an active process; it is *performed*. Similar to the intention of Gordon Matta-Clark when he says, 'I see the work as a special stage in perpetual metamorphosis, a model for people's constant action on space as much as in the space that surrounds them',³⁷ my own work does not critique building developments or organisation of infrastructure. Rather, it elucidates a reflection on how these impact the personalisation of place in the city.

Participating actively in place, as opposed to being removed from it, helps make visible and audible the proposition that the performance of place does something to place. Empirical observations and empirical activations through material processes of field-working are both active participations in the performance of place; they work on different scales and in different modalities, aiming not only to illuminate place, but also to act as speculative propositions that subtly alter place.

The notion of agency reflects the practice of American writer, feminist, and social activist bell hooks, who emphasises a strategy of 'occupying the margin'.³⁸ Her extraordinary spatial explorations are identified by the geographer Edward Soja as journeying into the 'trialectics of space-power-knowledge'; he identifies hooks as someone who performs place by laying claim to her 'lived spaces' (real and imagined) on the margins.³⁹ Soja notes that

³⁶ Doherty, Claire. Ed. 'Introduction' in *Situation – Whitechapel Gallery Documents of Contemporary Art*. MIT Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2009, 13.

³⁷ Stiles, Kristine, and Peter Howard Selz. "GORDON MATTA-CLARK Building Dissections: Interview with Donald Wall (1976)" in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writing*. Berkley: University of California Press, c.1996, 658.

³⁸ Soja, Edward, W. "In Thirdspace with bell hooks" *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*. University of California Press: USA, 1996, 96. Soja explores bell hooks book *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*, 1990, describing the politics of location she engages as a space of radical openness.

³⁹ Soja, Edward, W. *Thirdspace*, 122.

'Hooks finds her place, positions herself, first of all as an African American woman and then by the simultaneously political and geographical act of choosing marginality'.⁴⁰ This strategy is one which Soja identifies as 'critical thirding' which he associates with hooks.⁴¹ 'Critical thirding' has particular value as a strategy because of the follow-on effect of a 'disordering of difference' which has the potential to lead to an open and yet bounded realm as identified by Malpas, and nomadic thought as identified by Rosi Braidotti.⁴² The performance of place as explored in my research, proposes that the potent process of examining the threshold, in which a constant becoming is opened up, allows for precisely such a shifting and increasing diversity in the personalisation of public space. My gestures in transposing found sound (Figure 8) embody Braidotti's sense that 'we are subjected to, as well as being subjects of, forces that cut across us, splitting us open, but also – and by the same gesture – connecting us in powerful and often obscure ways'.⁴³

(i) Action – The Performative Body

The body as the primary material and tool and 'a portion of forces life-bound to the environment that feeds it' is a filter and transmitter of place.⁴⁴ In Figure 9 the performative body as a whole is engaged. I stand – on my feet. I listen – with my ears. I make connections – with my mind. I look straight ahead – with my eyes. I breathe – through my nose and mouth. I transpose – with my hands. Multiple modalities are simultaneously engaged in the gathering of sensations of place.

⁴⁰ Soja, Edward, W. *Thirdspace*, 97.

⁴¹ Soja, Edward, W. *Thirdspace*, 5. Soja identifies critical thirding as a strategy whereby "the original binary choice is not dismissed entirely but is subjected to a creative process of restructuring." This is what he refers to as a "both/ and also logic". When applying a critical thirding, Soja identifies a 'polyvocal postmodernism' that 'empowers a multiplicity of resistances' and thereby 'reconstitutes difference' as a space of potential strength.

⁴² Braidotti, Rosi. *Nomadic Theory*, 92. The philosopher Rosi Braidotti's discourse states 'Being single and multiple, independent and interconnected, Nomadic Subjects and Nomadic Theory form a complex singularity or a nondualistic assemblage'. (p. 1) She goes on to express nomadic thought as 'about tracing lines of flight and zigzagging patterns that undo dominant representations'. (p. 2)

⁴³ Braidotti, Rosi. *Nomadic Theory*, 130.

⁴⁴ Braidotti, Rosi. *Nomadic Theory*, 101.



Figure 8. Mollie Rice, *Field Study* (Botany 2016)
Image: SSB Creative Photography



Figure 9. Mollie Rice, *Field Notes – Images* (Botany 2017)
 Photographic Image in Artists Book
 Image: SSB Creative Photography

As my hands move across the paper, one with a pen in my fingers, I am seeking out Braidotti's emphasis on that which is 'embodied and embedded, unified in a materialism of the flesh'; my conscious brain occupied in the act of listening, releases the rest of my active body to receive information in the way of *Nomadic Thought*.⁴⁵ By working performatively, both outdoors (such as onsite) and inside (such as in the studio), I incorporate the live and translate traces of encounter with place (Figure 10 and 11) without prioritising. Priority is not given to liveness, to site(s), or to objects but instead all are embraced in the field-working approach. At site A in Figure 10, the live performance interacts with elements, such as wind, and competing sounds. Juxtaposed with this is Figure 11, where in-studio translations see materials more contained and environmental sounds are less intrusive.

⁴⁵ Braidotti, Rosi. *Nomadic Theory*, 2.



Figure 10. Mollie Rice, *Field Notes – Images* (Botany 2017)
Photographic Image in Artists Book
Image: SSB Creative Photography

My approach to working with life outside the studio or the gallery space develops the Situationist International artists' interest in turning to the living fabric of the city. It shares an interest in challenging a perceived increase in the imposition of social, cultural, and political limits being imposed on individuals within the organisation of the urban environment. Like them, I engage the body, mine and others, through actions such as the *dérive*.⁴⁶ I seek out unforeseeable encounters within city space, the hidden codification and messages buried within urban design.

⁴⁶ Coverly, Merlin. *Psychogeography*. Pocket Essentials: England, 2006, 93.



Figure 11. Mollie Rice, *Field Notes – Images* (Artist's Studio)
Photographic Image in Artists' Book
Image: Mollie Rice

My practice, like the work of the contemporary artist Bianca Hester, engages performance and material processes and, specifically, the performative body as an activator of thresholds. My process of field-working shares features with

Hester's attempt at aligning thresholds of inside and outside, introducing a discursive space around the possibility of porosity and fluidity of exhibition, artwork, and process. Like Matta-Clark before her, Hester simultaneously incorporates a 'stagedness' and an unpredictability that is also evident in my field-working approach, which works with action and materiality as composite or 'assemblage'.

(ii) Devices – Extensions of the Performative Body

Portable devices occupy a significant role in my research project by conferring with and extending the performative body of the artist: in live works, and through the exhibition audience in their access to sound files with a personal portable device, exemplifying the relationship between live and staged. Devices in the project play particular interactive roles in the facilitation of the performance of place, both as functional objects and as conceptual signifiers. Those employed are a 3D drawing implement (pen), a portable easel, and sound recording and listening devices (Figure 12). The devices reflect the performative qualities inherent in place through the acts of walking, listening, sounding, and drawing.

Both constructed and purchased, the devices, handheld or carried by the body, 'record' and transmit performative action. For example, the portable easel not only renders visible the performance of the walking body in urban space, but the trace of the drawing processes executed on it is simultaneously recorded onto the easel's surface itself (Figures 13 and 14). Also, the portable easel renders audible the performative walking body, as it 'clack clacks' against my back. The rhythm is attended to and my active listening attaches it to the rhythm of my heartbeat in the sound ecology. Similarly, handheld audio guides included in the exhibition make audible the performance of my sounding body interacting with the urban fabric at sites of field-working, adding a subtle difference to the general use of this tool as a provider of sonic information. The devices also perform place through making visible an audience member's personalisation of the public space of the gallery, by making visible the very personal act of

listening, a difference to the standard idea of audience interaction that involves an amplification of the public.



Figure 12. Example of Devices – Three-Dimensional Pen and Mobile Phone
Image: Mollie Rice

The construction of the easel required a material resourcefulness aligned to the artistic practice of Robbins. However, rather than acting as extensions of the body, Robbins's devices perform instead as stand-ins for the body. For instance, the structural device created for *Shadow Phase* and exhibited at Hazelhurst Regional Gallery in 2017 (Figure 15), is a solar powered motor driven drawing arm.⁴⁷ In making visible the forces of the physical world in action, Robbins's devices are performers of place, thereby asserting the intention of the research to reveal the complexity of the way place is performed in the quotidian experience of the contemporary city.

⁴⁷ Kibbler, Carrie. Curator. 'Cameron Robbins – Shadow Phase' *Dream Machines* (Hazelhurst Regional Gallery, 2017).



Figure 13. Mollie Rice, *Field Notes – Images* (Botany 2017)
 Photographic Image in Artists Book
 Image: SSB Creative Photography



Figure 14. Mollie Rice, *Field Notes – Images* (Botany 2017)
 Photographic Image in Artists Book
 Image: SSB Creative Photography

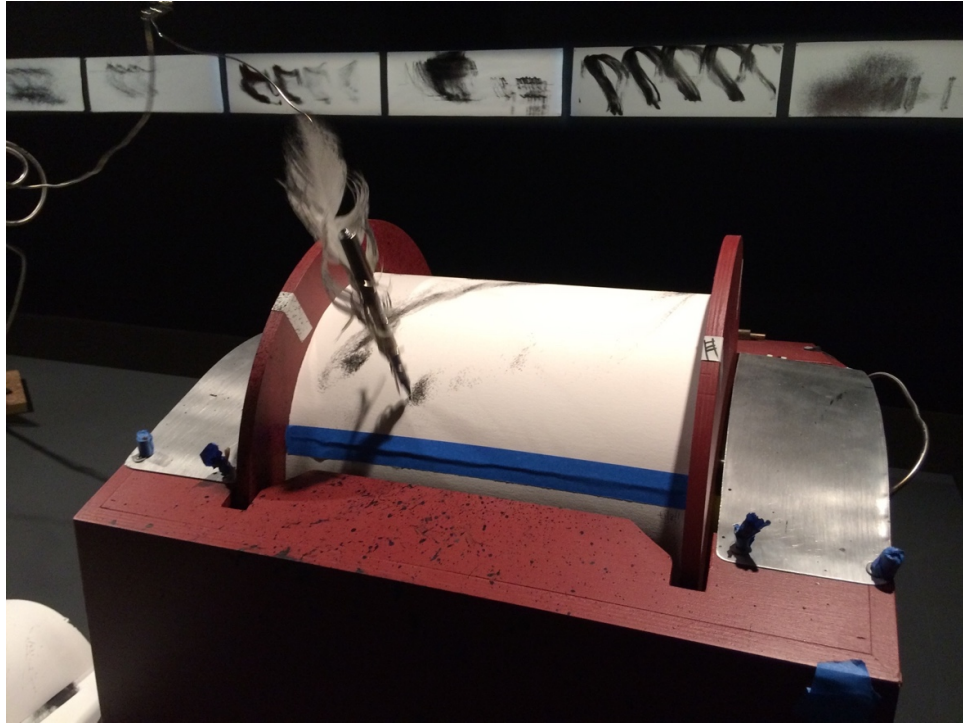


Figure 15. Cameron Robbins, *Shadow Phase*, 2017
 Solar Powered Motor Driven Drawing Arm
 Image: Mollie Rice

By contrast, my portable easel, constructed specifically for undertaking live drawing in public space, takes into consideration the physical properties of the artist's performing body, such as size and strength. Strapped to my back horizontally, it allows easy movement of the legs while walking to site. Ergonomically constructed to be a comfortable height at which to stand and draw, it is an enabler of the performative, but is also performative in itself, amplifying, as it does, the performance and materiality inherent in the environments it is carried into. Its simplicity resonates with a do-it-yourself ethic and the poetic economy of materials speaks of accessibility. The other devices of the research perform similarly, conferring with the performative body as both facilitators of performance and performers of place themselves.

Engaging devices as extensions of the performing body opens up a fluidity between on-site situations, and studio and exhibition space, allowing the devices to perform as facilitators and as objects. For example, in the exhibition of *Aligning Thresholds*, held at AD Space UNSW Art and Design in 2017, the portable easel was partially erected as a sculptural form (Figure 16). It displays

traces of ink on its surface from previous live drawing performances onsite in Botany and in the artist's studio. During performative action in the suburb of Botany, the easel is functional, carried on the artists back it simply serves as a structure to draw on; however, it is also in itself a sound-maker, and is a subtle signifier of the standard activity of the locale as contrasted with that of the artist. When taken into the field the easel is active, and when exhibited in the gallery it functions as a static object. The easel is treated with a fluidity and openness, similar to other devices. It is used and re-used, reflecting the approach of the practice as a whole.



Figure 16. Mollie Rice, *Aligning Thresholds*, 2017
Installation UNSW Art and Design AD Space
Portable Easel, Three-Dimensional Pen on Fibreglass Fly Screen Mesh, Ink on Rice Paper
Image: Mollie Rice

In *Fashioning Discontinuities, the Hoop Performances*, Hester uses the sonic and visual interaction of materials to activate urban space; therefore, illuminating the performance of place (Figure 17).⁴⁸ Spinning a number of metal

⁴⁸ www.biancahester.net/

hoops on surfaces such as concrete, Hester ‘focuses and amplifies aesthetic issues of experience, identity, materiality, as well as the relationship between the subject and the object of perception.’⁴⁹ In the exhibition *Please Leave These Windows Open Overnight to Enable the Fans to Draw in Cool Air During the Early Hours of the Morning*, at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, the hoops rest against the wall as static objects. The emphasis on what is an everyday object (a child’s toy hoop), altered slightly (made of metal), in these projects reflects my approach to the portable easel. Unlike my own site performance that may be observed by an incidental audience, Hester has chosen her site not only for the purposes of materiality, but also to gain attention.



Figure 17. Bianca Hester, *Fashioning Discontinuities – Hoop Performances*, 2013–14
19th Biennale of Sydney
Image: Sebastian Kriete

(iii) Participating in Place

I approach the subjective material and tool of the performative body as a ‘complex singularity’. Braidotti refers to a ‘complex singularity’ as one where:

⁴⁹ Voegelin, Salomé. *Listening to Noise and Silence – Towards a Philosophy of Sound Art*. Continuum Publishing: New York, 2010, 24.

Nomadic subjects combine qualitative shifts with a firm rejection of liberal individualism and connect a distinct sense of singularity with respect for complexities and interconnections. This is a collectively oriented, externally bound, multiple subject whose singularity is the result of constant renegotiations with a variety of forces.⁵⁰

The conditions of a complex singularity have a distinct relationship to Malpas' notion of place as 'nested'.⁵¹ Malpas uses the term 'nested' to describe how places 'always open up to disclose other places within them, while from within any particular place one can always look outwards to find oneself within some much larger expanse'.⁵² This is created in the aesthetic impression of the work, where the exhibition becomes a staged portal to the site.

(iv) Engaging a Sonic Sensibility

Salomé Voegelin's conceptualisation of a sonic sensibility is a key aspect of her thought-provoking search for a philosophy of sound art.⁵³ According to Voegelin, 'sonic sensibility makes thinkable complex connections and trajectories in time and space'.⁵⁴ It 'illuminates the unseen aspects of visuality, augmenting rather than opposing a visual philosophy'. By combining this with the topographical I am able to pay layered attention to shifting sensations of place in the contemporary city.

Crucially, the understanding of sound as applied in my research is that proposed by Douglas Kahn *Noise Water Meat – A History of Sound in the Arts* as:

sounds, voices and aurality – all that might fall within or touch on auditive phenomena, whether this involves actual sonic or auditive events or ideas

⁵⁰ Braidotti, Rosi. *Nomadic Theory*, 79.

⁵¹ Malpas, Jeff. *Place and Experience – A Philosophical Topography*. Cambridge University Press: England, 1999, 34.

⁵² Malpas, Jeff. *Place and Experience*, 170

⁵³ Voegelin, Salomé. *Listening to Noise and Silence*, xiii.

⁵⁴ Voegelin, Salomé. *Listening to Noise and Silence*, xvi.

about sound or listening; sounds actually heard or heard in myth, idea, or implication; sounds heard by everyone or imagined by one person alone.⁵⁵

Within this expansive definition of sound includes 'found text', and with it 'subtext', as heard sound. Furthermore, my use of the expansive definition of sound in this research includes received ideas of place, or the sort of social, cultural, or political constructs that Rosi Braidotti might term 'social imaginaries'.⁵⁶

With place understood as active, the performative body and its extensions are engaged with purpose. As the main material and tool of exploration, with its focus in applying a sonic sensibility, the performative body is both a receiver and a transmitter of place. Understanding the potential for creative agency opens up a speculative space where the boundaries that separate can be complicated and potential for movement is illuminated.

⁵⁵ Kahn, Douglas. *Noise Water Meat – A History of Sound in the Arts*. MIT Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2001, Intro.

⁵⁶ Braidotti, Rosi. *Nomadic Thought*, 78.

Chapter 4: Field-Working – Rendering Place Visible and Audible

My field-working focuses on the complex mix of subjectivities that constitute place. It is a form of re-mapping where the performing body is directly engaged in navigating physical and conceptual notions of the threshold. By applying a sonic sensibility to the material processes of walking, active listening, sounding, and drawing, the project aligns with the practices of field-workers as described by Stephen Daniels in the *Journal of Performance Research* (2010), who

probe underworlds, and overworlds, of air, and water, and their mixtures and surfaces, in the edges and encounters between the body and the environment. They chart fields of vision as well as physical sites and spaces and the place of seeing and representation in the repertoire of experiencing, knowing, imagining landscape and environment.⁵⁷

The material processes of field-working do not operate in isolation, rather they function individually, collectively, and in various combinations. As activity *and* representation, they constitute a sense of agency in what Jacques Derrida would call an ‘archive of its own happening’.⁵⁸ Like the topographical explorations of place undertaken by Malpas, the field-working approach aims to avoid over-simplification of how the notion of place is understood and represented. For example, both intentional and upon reflection the field drawing in Figure 18 (made in the artists’ studio) reflects:

- paths of passage to sites,
- the pooling of ink that occurs when the hand stops moving momentarily while transposing found sound,
- the shape and form of the lily pads present on visits to Mill Pond.

⁵⁷ Daniels, Stephen et al, ed. ‘Editorial – Fieldworks’ in *The Journal of Performance Research*, Vol.15, Issue 4, 2010.

⁵⁸ Stout, Katharine. *Contemporary Drawing from the 1960s to Now*. London: Tate Publishing, 2014, 55.



Figure 18. Mollie Rice, *Field Drawing #7* (Botany 2018)
Charcoal and Acrylic Paint on Stonehenge. 474 mm x 615 mm
Image: Mollie Rice

(i) Active Listening – Found Sound

‘Focused listening is radical as it makes us ‘see’ a different world.’⁵⁹

The attentive listening of this project is built upon the act of listening in general. Similar to contemporary critical dialogue around the practice of seeing, the research project attends to the *activity* of listening and hearing. John Berger wrote: ‘It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world: we explain that world with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it.’⁶⁰ The same could be said of the relationship between place and experience, and listening and hearing.

⁵⁹ Voegelin, Salomé. *Listening to Noise and Silence*, 36.

⁶⁰ Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. Penguin Books: London, 1972, 7.

Active listening, as Voegelin notes, involves a conscious focusing on heard sound as intrinsic to listening with a new attention to the sounds underneath the sounds heard and the sounds that stretch the process of listening out, to a point where it is no longer possible to think in language about what it is that is heard. It includes attending to the presence of sounds unheard, silence, and the act of silencing. Active listening is not an activity isolated to the ears, instead it is realised in the performing body as a whole. In Figure 19, I am positioned at the edge of a carpark on the edge of Botany Bay, standing at my portable easel; at this site I consciously engage in the process of active listening. Looking straight ahead, not down at the rice paper or at the pen held in my hand, I listen, and I transpose sound as it enters my ears, takes up space in my body and travels with my hand, my mind, and my breath. This concentrated and attentive openness introduces an altered temporal scale into the performing body and into this site of arrivals and departures.

The performing body is central to the field-working of the project. Listening, according to the sound artist and writer Salome Voegelin, 'necessitates an involved participation rather than enables a detached viewing position'.⁶¹ As a participator in place, the action of listening is made manifest in the transpositions of sound rendered through the action of blind continuous line drawing. By 'blind' I mean a process of drawing where the eyes are not moving up and down between what is being viewed and the substrate being drawn on. Instead, the eyes focus on the 'view' without looking down to monitor the movements and markings being made by the hand.

The work of artist John Cage has given significant attention to the notion of *all sound* or *always sound*.⁶² This notion that sound is always present, even if it is unheard, informs my research. Braidotti states: 'Of all the technologies we inhabit, the musical, acoustic, or sound ones are the most pervasive and

⁶¹ Voegelin, Salomé. *Listening to Noise and Silence*, xii.

⁶² Kahn, Douglas. *Noise Water Meat*, 158.



Figure 19. Mollie Rice, *Field Notes* (Botany 2017)
Photographic Image in Artists Book. 200 mm x 130 mm
Image: SSB Creative Photography

intimate, yet also the most collective.’⁶³ Similarly, the artist and writer Salome Voegelin argues that the activity of listening is ‘intersubjective in that it produces the work and the self in the interaction between the subject listening and the object heard.’⁶⁴ Engaging in empirical observations in city space, active listening is positioned as a significant material process of the field-working approach. It provokes questions of the individual, social, political, cultural, and spatial significance of sound – including the role of noise, or silence – in the personalisation of place in the contemporary city.

Noise is how one refers to sound that irritates, for one reason or another. Through the application of a sonic sensibility, the process of active listening exposes the significance of sound that is called noise, and also its close relationship to silence. Botany resonates with the significance of both noise and silence. The traffic and industry of the present, in many cases, shouting down earlier versions of the suburb, and by extension the broader histories of Australia. Voegelin articulates this phenomenon thus:

... noise amplifies social relations and tracks the struggle for identity and space within the tight architectural and demographic organization of a city. In this sense, noise is a social signifier: determining unseen boundaries and waging invisible wars.⁶⁵

In his expansive exploration of sound, Kahn deconstructs the sociology of noise ‘informed by the sounds, languages, and social position of others. It is only because certain types of people are outside any representation of social harmony that their speech and other sound associated with them are considered to be noise.’⁶⁶ This definition, when applied to the understanding of place in this research, amplifies the corresponding significance of silence, and the act of silencing, as directly correlating to the classification of noise. According to Voegelin, silence is about a form of listening that is a whole body experience, thus aligning it with the process of active listening embraced in my research, and ‘noise crashes those barriers of obliging politeness and hears

⁶³ Braidotti, Rosi. *Nomadic Theory*, 106.

⁶⁴ Voegelin, Salomé. *Listening to Noise and Silence*, 28.

⁶⁵ Voegelin, Salomé. *Listening to Noise and Silence*, 45.

⁶⁶ Kahn. *Noise Water Meat*, 47.

what cannot be seen.’⁶⁷ In this way, the correlation between noise and silence illuminates that it is agency in relation to either which dictates their importance in relation to place. For example, active listening in this project has a resonance with the way Hetti Perkins describes an indigenous understanding of silence:

The present-day communication mores of reciprocity when visiting other peoples’ country has its origins in practices that are embedded in our society – such as silence, the use of sign language and ceremonial performance.⁶⁸

In this respect, active listening is understood as an engaged, respectful, open, generous, and generative activity that hears beneath the political muffling that is noise. The results of this combined approach are a sense of being an active participator in place, on-site, and in-studio, generating, transmitting and filtering.

The contemporary artist Morgan O’Hara, uses a similar process of blind performative drawing, whereby she transposes the movements of another as they are engaged in activity. Our approaches share an interest in exploring the ways in which the activity of drawing might make visible human experience that does not subscribe to visual priority. For O’Hara, both the other subject’s activity and her own activity coexist in her drawings. An example of this is in Figure 20, where noodles are formed into balls and wrapped in newspaper. The activities O’Hara records often relate to a person’s occupation, and as such, the performance of the quotidian for the ‘sitter’, is unfamiliar for the artist herself. In my practice (Figure 21), the performing body filters and transmits sound through the performance of active listening coupled with drawing. In this way, the material process of active listening ‘is an engagement with the world rather than in its perception’ and, as stated by Voegelin, it is in this process that ‘the world and myself in it are constituted’.⁶⁹

Active listening in my own work is both a productive and a generative activity. The performance of this project has an emphasis on the landscape, a relatively

⁶⁷ Voegelin, Salomé. *Listening to Noise and Silence*, 60.

⁶⁸ Perkins, Hetti. ‘My Country’ in *My Country, I Still Call Australia Home: Contemporary Art from Black Australia*. Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art: Brisbane, 2013, 26.

⁶⁹ Voegelin, Salomé. *Listening to Noise and Silence*, 3.

impersonal approach in that I have no interaction with people. O'Hara works in a staged way, where there is accessibility to her performances; mine are more withdrawn for two reasons:

- To place the emphasis on the dynamics of the built environment,
- To be singular, without the language or gestures of others inflecting on my impressions.

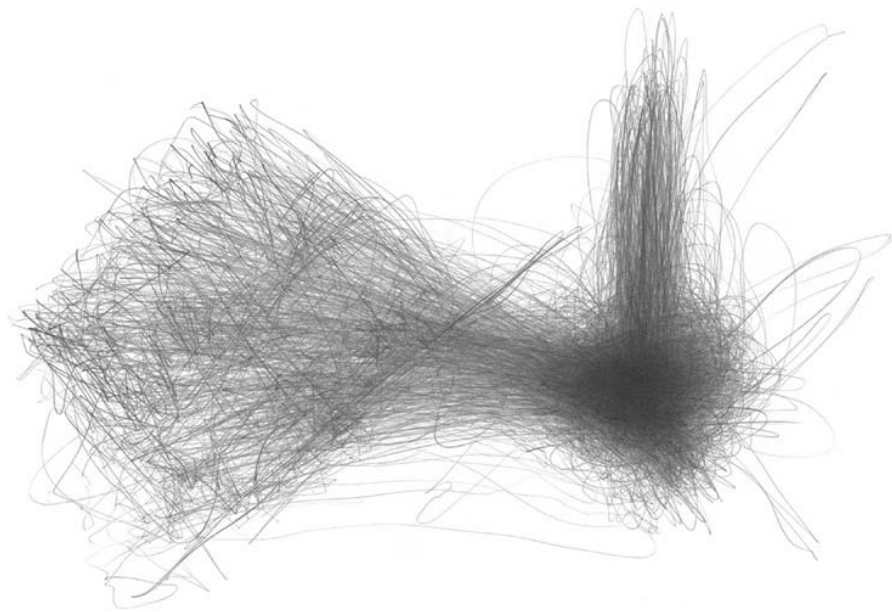


Figure 20. Morgan O'Hara, *LIVE TRANSMISSION: movement of the hands of FONG BIN CHAI forming balls of noodles and wrapping them in newspaper*
VA HENG noodle production, Macau, China, 30 January 2002
Graphite on Paper. 43 cm x 49 cm
Image: morganohara.com

The process of field-working by active listening at Mill Pond in Botany had unexpected results. The pond is part of the significant freshwater wetlands of Sydney (Figure 22), and it is here that I encountered resonances of the various histories of place more than at other sites. Sitting on a bench seat provided by Council, at the edge of the pond, the airport is to the front and right of me and a

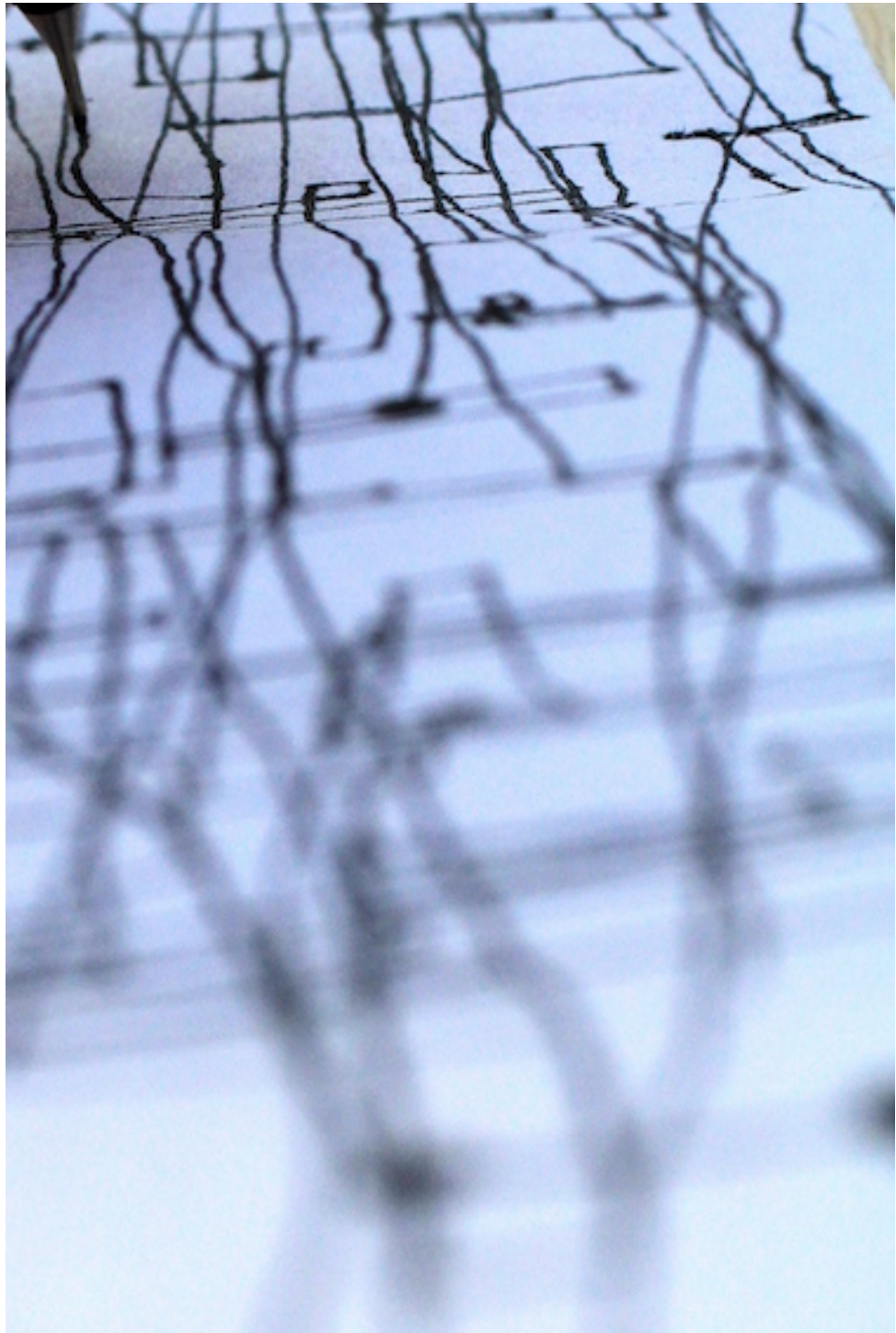


Figure 21. Mollie Rice, *Field Studies* (Botany 2016)
Ink on Rice Paper
Image: SSB Creative Photography

number of main arterial roads that lead in and out of the city to the south and left. At this site, I practiced an awareness of silence. In repeat visits to this site, which presented itself to me as active without my intervention, I became aware

of what I can only call an audible silence. A silence that felt substantial and encompassing, at times, it seemed even to shout. Salome Voegelin states, 'in the quiet sounds of silence the listener becomes audible to himself.'⁷⁰ The quieting that occurs at the pond, for me, generates an audible awareness of a presence that is silence. This developed my conceptual awareness of the *activity* of silencing. From the outside, the performing body at this site in Botany had the appearance of repose (Figure 23). The more time I spent at this location, the more I understood that my repose was in fact active, and that the silence had a substance. This understanding filtered through into the project as a whole.



Figure 22. Mollie Rice, *Field Notes* (Mill Pond, Botany 2017)
Photographic Image in Artists Book. 200 mm x 130 mm
Image: Mollie Rice

⁷⁰ Voegelin, Salomé. *Listening to Noise and Silence*, 79.



Figure 23. Mollie Rice, *Field Notes* (Mill Pond, Botany 2017)
 Photographic Image in Artists Book. 200 mm x 130 mm
 Image: Mollie Rice

(ii) Sounding – Found Text as Heard Sound

In contrast to the previous performances where sound was ambient, at Site B (Figure 24) I focused on found text in a process of sounding as a material process. The spoken text is recorded into the voice memo of a mobile phone. This found text is understood as material, both in textual form and as heard sound. Like strategies used by The Situationist International, sounding is a tool of committed and engaged practice with my urban surroundings.



Figure 24. Mollie Rice, *Field Notes – Images* (Botany 2017)
 Photographic Image in Artists Book
 Image: SSB Creative Photography

Repeat visits to all sites were made throughout the project. This resulted in a collection of sound files that had been recorded onsite, as well as handwritten transcripts that were transcribed in-studio. Unlike the found text that this sounding process works from, the handwritten and the spoken hold the idiosyncratic inflections of the performing body. Found text, especially the quotidian, or every day, in the contemporary city, occupies a threshold space in visual and sonic communication and therefore often goes overlooked. The sheer volume of it, however, demands some spatial attention. Interestingly, sound is often said to dissipate. When it is recorded in written language or repeated in spoken language, the apparent ephemerality is altered. The artist Joseph Grigely invited audiences to:

Imagine if every word we spoke became palpable and dropped from our lips as we spoke. Think of what would happen, and the places we would find the residue of our words. Imagine scraps of language lying on countertops. Drawers full of sentences. Peelings of words in the sink. Imagine the dashboard of our cars covered with everyday conversations.⁷¹

⁷¹ Stout, Katherine. *Contemporary Drawing from the 1960s to Now*, 103.

When we read, words reconfigure in the performing body into heard sound. In this way, not only is the found text altered by the body but it also occupies space inside the body. Giving voice to that which is read silently brings something from outside the body – a fragment – into it. Inside, the body makes an alteration to the materiality of the found text, and filters it back through the body and out into the world again as a mixture of individual *and* world. Speaking found text is, therefore, a feedback loop of filtering and transmitting. It is this sense of process, or an ‘unfolding’ quality, as expressed by Voegelin, that aligns sound to the understanding of place as performative in my project.⁷² Sounding, like the process of active listening, is an activity of participating, not merely observing place.

In the process of sounding, there is no attempt to overlay the landscape with a personal narrative; however, by engaging in the performative activity, multiple inherent narratives of place may become enmeshed. Using sounding to explore physical and conceptual notions of the threshold, including that between my body and the world, as well as between the optical and the sonic, opens up complex understandings of how the material of text might impact human spatiality and the personalisation of place in the contemporary city. Speaking the text of signs aloud reintroduces a human voice into an urban landscape, and insists upon the acknowledgement of personal subjective expression and experience, while also revealing latent codifications of place that would usually be hidden.

⁷² Voegelin, Salomé. *Listening to Noise and Silence*, 7.

(iii) Walking – A Contemporary Psychogeography

‘All is present within walking distance: the past, the present, the future.’⁷³

In Braidotti’s contemporary incarnation of the concept of *psychogeography*

... nomadic thought stresses the idea of embodiment and the embodied and embedded material structure of what we commonly call thinking. It is a materialism of the flesh that unifies mind and body in a new approach that blurs all boundaries.⁷⁴

The *psychogeography* of my project lies in the practice itself which amplifies action as a producer of sense and, works alongside the idea of knowledge as something acquired or apprehended.

The notion of *psychogeography* has undergone a form of *dérive* itself. Constant movement and reshaping of the definition and boundaries applied to the term by its practitioners is pivotal in its attachment to this research project. The nomadic quality, provisional and potent, resonates with the understanding of place and the process of re-mapping applied. In Figure 25, I am walking to Site B with a camping chair under my arm in this discrete and yet subversive form of field-working, where the intentionality is to show up the proximity of vehicle(s) and performing body in their shared use of space.

The process-based artwork as fieldwork, and as a form of contemporary *psychogeography*, incorporates, in its interwoven and enmeshed topographical approach, all site-based and studio-based work, and includes thinking and writing. Whether in the city or in the studio, there is an emphasis on presence. The qualities of nomadic presence onsite contrast the highly visible relationship between the sedentary and motion that in studio is subtle. The art historian Terry Smith describes the conditions of contemporaneity as involving ‘multiple ways of being in and out of time.’⁷⁵ Such a description of temporal experience

⁷³ Soja, Edward, W. *Thirdspace*, 18.

⁷⁴ Braidotti, Rosi. *Nomadic Theory*, 2.

⁷⁵ Smith, Terry. *What is Contemporary Art?* University of Chicago Press: USA, 2009, 195.

echoes Malpas' assessment of place. According to Smith, these conditions are



Figure 25. Mollie Rice, *Field Notes – Images* (Botany 2017)
Photographic Image in Artists Book
Image: SSB Creative Photography

a result of the ‘aftermath of modernity and the passing of the postmodern’, and are dominated by immediacy that is not purely focused on the passing present. Instead it has a ‘fullness’, which Smith describes as a ‘pregnant present’, where the inside and outside of a moment, where the complexity and simplicity of *now*, and where the actuality and potentiality of the provisional, all reside.⁷⁶ The field-working of this project constitutes a form of *dérive* in light of contemporaneity, the continuing compulsion of the human body to move and be autonomous, despite the ever increasing directions and restrictions.

Smith’s explorations of contemporaneity are reflected by Voegelin when she states:

In silence I comprehend, physically, the idea of intersubjective listening: I am in the soundscape through my listening to it and in turn the soundscape is what I listen to, perpetually in the present.⁷⁷

Through applying Voegelin’s approach to re-mapping place, alternatives are opened up for the personal in public space, whereby provisional syntheses, pauses and processes are illuminated. The decision to sit and listen to silence at Site C as a means of engagement is one such instance of this. The personal agency provided also leaves a trace on the landscape that has the potential to make an alteration, however slight, on received ideas of place. Therefore, not only is the fluidity of place emphasised, but its implications for the social map. This may include incidental viewing by a passer-by, or reinforced codifications of the traditional mapped reality by those in authority.

⁷⁶ Smith, Terry et, al. eds. *Antinomies of Art and Culture – Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity*. Duke University Press: London, 2008, 6.

⁷⁷ Voegelin, Salomé. *Listening to Noise and Silence*, 83.

(iv) Drawing – Inscribing Abstract Narratives of Place

William Kentridge describes the process of drawing as a ‘meeting point, but also a threshold where the outside world meets us’.⁷⁸ Thus, the indexical mark made by the performing body is as much a thought as it is an action. Drawing is both that which is in us, and outside us. It is a deeply personal way of projecting ourselves, our ways of seeing and understanding, back onto the world.

Similar to mapping, drawing is both action and representation. It is approached here as a process of both filtering and transmitting place. Berger wrote of his own practice of drawing: ‘Maybe the four are not proper drawings but simply sketch maps of an encounter. Maps that may make it less likely to get lost. A question of hope.’⁷⁹ As a material process of field-working, drawing builds up landscapes of place. For example, in the *activity* of drawing, field studies are rendered when found sound is transposed onto rolls of rice paper with an ink pen (Figure 26). As a form, the scroll here presents a scribed visual language rather than the ancient scrolls of writing, opening up rather than encapsulating what is to be interpreted. This *representation* of the sound, and the activity of listening, as a field study may also be understood as the materiality of the archive in the re-mapping process.

Drawing in the project is an activity of the performing body. It is understood as bearing a direct indexical mark of its making, while also eliciting resonances and sensations that may form ideas. That is to say, the performing body creates traces of its action, which are both external to it and within the performing body itself. Amplifying drawing as an action of the performing body as a whole enables an understanding of it as a means of exploration and investigation, of transcribing the world and the individual together.

⁷⁸ Kentridge, William. *Six Drawing Lessons*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge Massachusetts, 2014, 18.

⁷⁹ Berger, John. *Bento’s Sketchbook – How Does the Impulse to Draw Something Begin?* Pantheon Books: New York, 2011, 10.



Figure 26. Mollie Rice, *Field Study #3* (Botany 2017)
Ink on Rice Paper. Dimensions Variable
Image: SSB Creative Photography

Similarly, in her performative drawing practice, the contemporary artist Morgan O'Hara engages with the action of the performing body as a means of exploration and investigation (Figure 27). The activity of drawing for O'Hara is one of attentiveness.⁸⁰ In an attempt to capture the movements of others, she positions herself directly across from her 'sitter'. O'Hara holds a number of very sharp graphite pencils in both hands. Then intensely concentrating on their movements, she renders the subject's performative activity. What becomes represented in the individual works of O'Hara, and in the archive of her individual works, is the enmeshing of the artist's movements with those of another. Although very different from my own remoteness in working, both O'Hara and my work exist in a vortex of time, attention, and energy. O'Hara registers the latent in individual workplace practices and social interactions. Juxtaposed to this, I register latent codifications of landscape and infrastructure.

⁸⁰ www.morganohara.com/



Figure 27. Photographic Image of Live Performance
Morgan O'Hara
Image: livetransmissiondrawing.wordpress.com

The performing body, as both a tool and material of drawing exploration, has its lineage in works such as Richard Long's *A Line Made by Walking* (Figure 28). However, in this research, the performing body as a tool and material combines with other traditional and more contemporary materials of drawing, such as ink, paper, and charcoal, three-dimensional pen and blade (Figure 29). These materials and tools are chosen for their relationship to varying temporal scales. As a technology of the moment, the three-dimensional pen has time captured within it, or to put it another way, is intrinsically *about* time; in the dust that attaches itself to the three-dimensional sculptural relief, and in the time taken to execute it. Other chosen drawing media, such as charcoal and ink, have a historical temporal scale. They are employed iteratively over time to build up the field drawings. The physicality required by the body to execute the large scale charcoal drawings is reflected in the physicality of the material of charcoal itself.



Figure 28. This image has been removed due to copyright restrictions

This layered temporality is in evidence in many of the drawings of this project. In Figure 30, using the cut outs of flyscreen as the basis for drawing, a conscious choice is perhaps resonant and hidden within the process and materiality of the final drawing. Similarly, in Figure 31, a fragment of a field study has been isolated and enlarged; it is digitally reproduced onto archival paper. Through a repeat process of ruling lines onto the reproduction with ink pen, and then a further repeat act of scraping and tearing away at the ink lines with a blade, the drawing is both built up and undone simultaneously, the activity and the representation both resonant of presence and absence. In this way, the simplicity and uniqueness of the drawing is both amplified and undercut. But perhaps most importantly, this indirection seems indicative of Smith's 'pregnant present,' and its provisional state of 'actuality and potentiality'.⁸¹ In the move between site and studio, the focus and intentionality becomes more about materials and formal approaches than immersion. A conversation opens up where material behaviour informs material choices that are able to express latent qualities of the performances.

⁸¹ Smith, Terry et al. eds. *Antinomies of Art and Culture*, 6.



Figure 29. The artist using a blade as a drawing implement to create line and form through scraping, cutting, and tearing

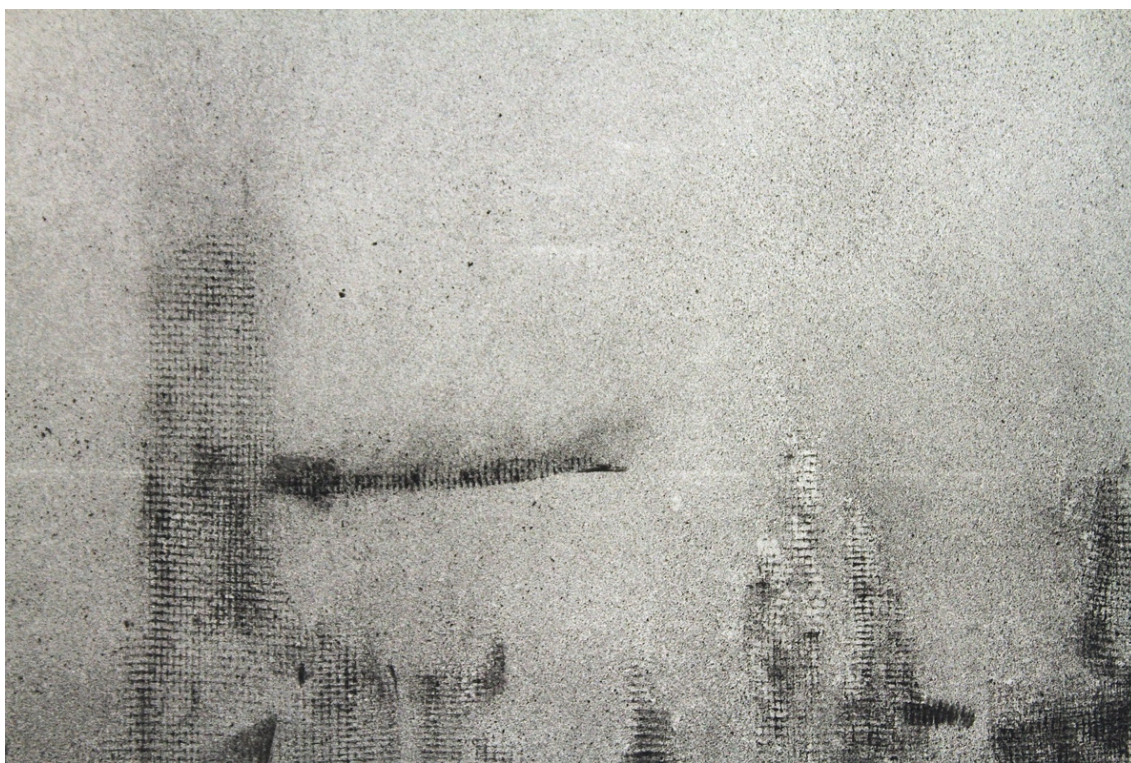


Figure 30. Mollie Rice, *Field Drawing #4* (Botany 2017). Detail
Charcoal on Stonehenge
Image: SSB Creative Photography

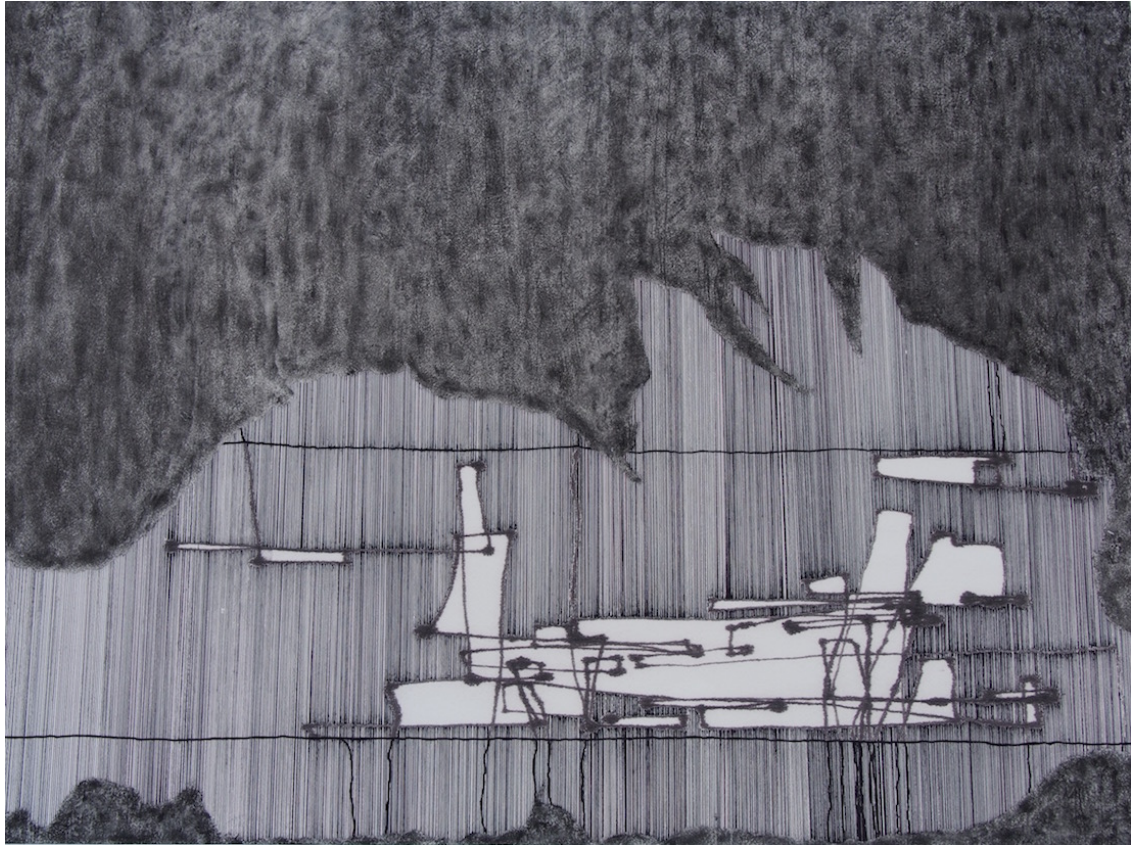


Figure 31. Mollie Rice, *Field Drawing #10* (Botany 2017)
 Digital Print with Ink and Charcoal on Cotton Rag. 592 mm x 840 mm
 Image: Mollie Rice

Drawing is often associated with the provisional: in the materials used or in the traditional status of the process itself. The action of drawing, the materials used and the renderings of that which have been drawn, all align with the transitional quality of place emphasised in the project. It is the provisional qualities of drawing that I share with Kentridge and O'Hara, and find particularly attractive. Kentridge said, 'drawing for me is about fluidity ... so drawing is a testing of ideas; a slow motion version of thought'.⁸² For example, when found sound is transposed onto fibreglass flyscreen mesh with a three-dimensional pen (Figure 32), the act of transposing is amplified *and* the representation 'shouts' the particularities of its material language. Shifting the emphasis from the body to the built environment, the work functions in relation to architectural form; in other words, the material of fibreglass flyscreen mesh suggests architecture and, in particular, the architecture of suburbia. It is a threshold material occupying a very different physical and conceptual space to the architecture

⁸² Stout, Katherine. *Contemporary Drawing from the 1960s to Now*, 71.

suggested by the modernist window. The architectural historian Beatriz Colomina identifies LeCorbusier's horizontal window; for example, as exposing the presence of significant shifts in place, a time where 'modernity coincides with the publicity of the private'.⁸³ In her analysis, Colomina identifies the introduction of the horizontal window into the private home as altering completely the demarcations that had existed between inside and outside, private and public. Unlike the frame for viewing and being viewed that the modernist horizontal window represents, flyscreen is a material that distorts a clear view and is permeable to environmental conditions, such as sound, wind, and smell. Also, my work with the flyscreen is a radical departure from the geometrics of the modernist window in its rhizomatic messiness.

Activating the flyscreen mesh through the three-dimensional pen drawing, executed by hand, renders a variable mesh that takes hold amongst the highly ordered structure of the substrate.

As activity and representation, the drawing in my research is both strategic and instinctual. Rendered 'live' at sites in Botany, and in the artist's studio, the drawings celebrate the hand-drawn line that evokes the trace of the body.

⁸³ Colomina, Beatriz. *Privacy and Publicity – Modern Architecture as Mass Media*. MIT Press: Cambridge Massachusetts, 1994, 9.



Figure 32. Mollie Rice, *Field Map* (Botany 2017). Detail
Three-Dimensional Pen Filament on Fiberglass Fly Screen Mesh. Dimensions Variable
Image: Mollie Rice

Figure 33 demonstrates this dynamic and reflects the transposition of found sound in the field through ink on rice paper. Listening, and drawing 'blind' with a continuous line, the particular receptiveness of the rice paper towards the ink, and also to the registration of the performing body shows up in the variability. For example, the pressure of the line is lighter and more fragile when the sound present was louder, persistent, or more engulfing. Conversely, small sounds, where the act of listening requires the performing body to apply more physical focus, results in a line that bleeds out the ink, bolder, stronger, more insistent. The small pauses that indicate the body readjusting itself in listening, such as in Figure 34, manifest in blots of ink, patches, where the lines of trajectory meet.

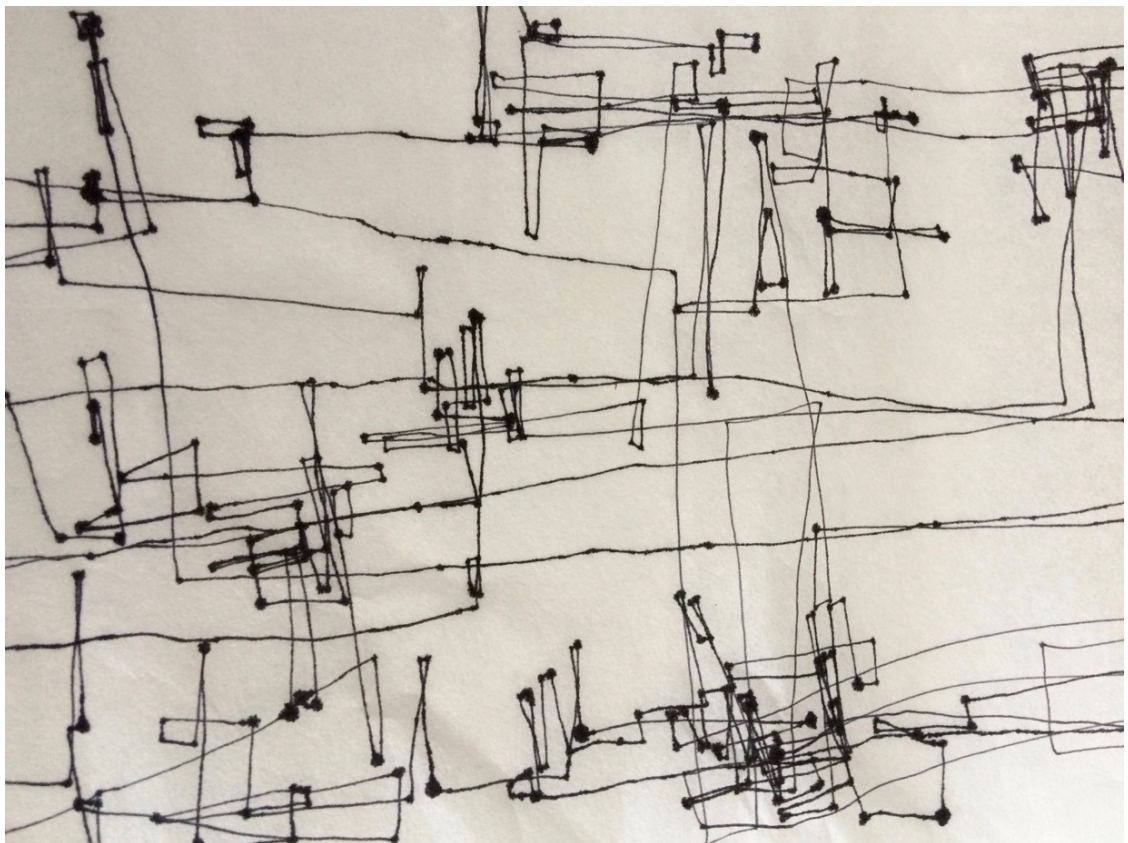


Figure 33. Mollie Rice, *Field Study #2* (Botany 2017). Detail
Ink on Rice Paper. Dimensions Variable
Image: Mollie Rice

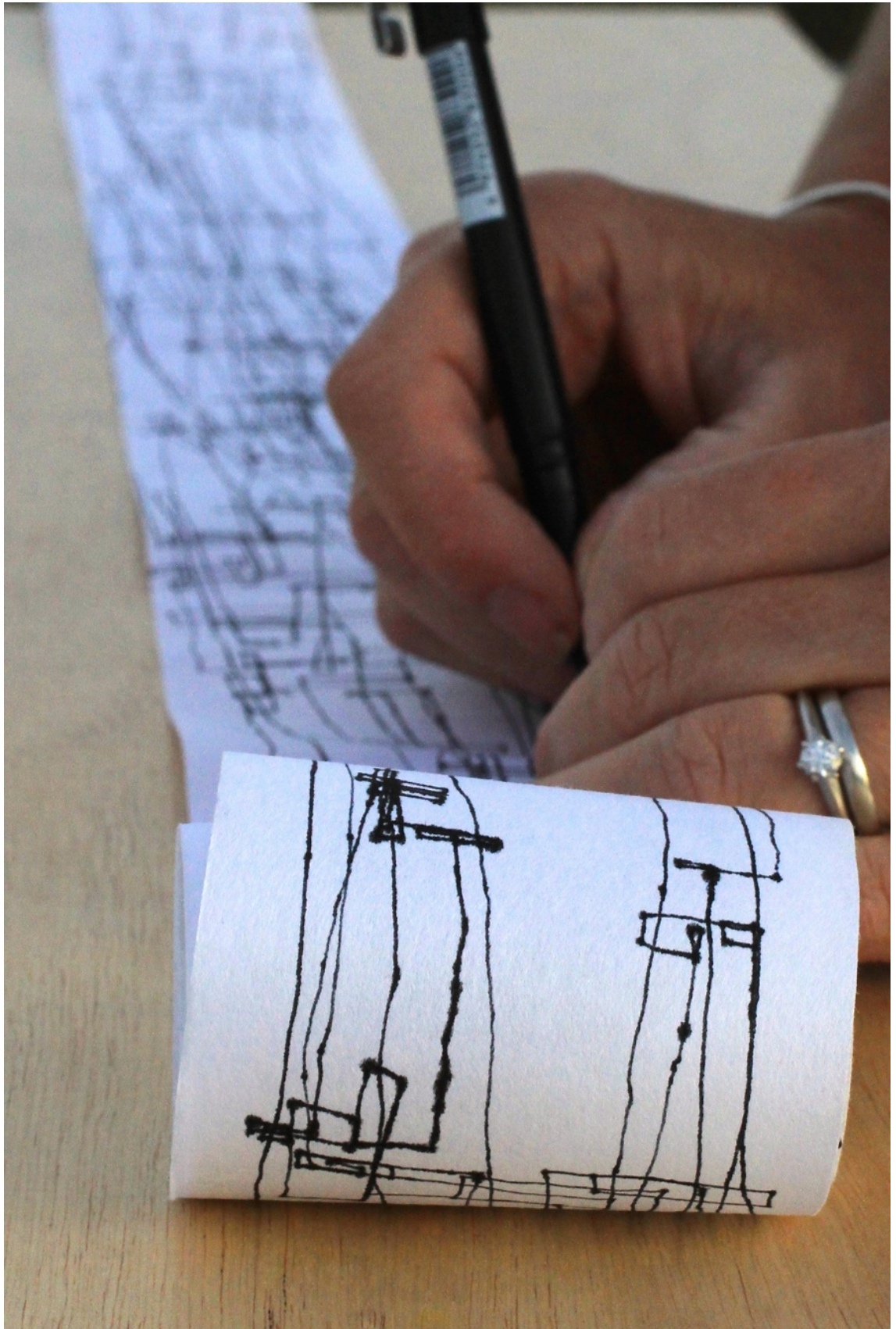


Figure 34. Mollie Rice, *Field Study #3* (Botany 2017). Detail
Ink on Rice Paper. Dimensions Variable
Image: SSB Creative Photography

The indexical mark is also evident in Figure 35 where cut-outs of flyscreen mesh have been repeatedly rubbed over with charcoal. Removed from the 3D pen transpositions, the cut-outs are not discarded. Instead, they are acknowledged as conceptual signifiers of the parts of the *Field Map* where sounds were unheard. In the process of rubbing with charcoal, the cut outs or the unheard elements are amplified. My breath is then used to move the excess charcoal dust over the paper, extending its trace further than the initial imprints. The rendered landscape is one built of the unheard sounds, activating them to become visually visceral.

The research drawings include those rendered in the studio that engage with traces, tangible and intangible, of live encounters of place. Field-working is a non-discipline specific re-mapping of place. This form of mapping allows for a variability in the way both site performances and the in-studio work are approached and remain active in translation. Gathering traces in this way, such as the cut-outs of flyscreen mesh described above, and also including the aural, conscious thoughts and deeply embedded and embodied responses, is a dynamic process whereby the uncertainty is productive of difference and connections, simultaneously.



Figure 35. Mollie Rice, *Field Drawing #4* (Botany 2017)
Charcoal on Stonehenge. 1270 mm x 1510 mm
Image: Mollie Rice

Chapter 5: Traces of Encounter with Place – Residues and Translations

Trace concerns the relationship between time, action and materiality. It concerns layers of absence and presence and relates to differing degrees of visibility. Voegelin questions the role of traces if the visual is not augmented with the auditory:

The ideology of a pragmatic visuality is the desire for the whole: to achieve the convenience of comprehension and knowledge through the distance and stability of the object. Such a visuality provides us with maps, traces, borders and certainties, whose consequence are communication and a sense of objectivity. The auditory engagement however, when it is not in the service of simply furnishing the pragmatic visual object, pursues a different engagement. Left in the dark, I need to explore what I hear. Listening discovers and generates the heard.⁸⁴

The research understands performance and its traces, as in relationship, summarised in the anthology *Performing Archives/Archives of Performance*.⁸⁵ A flexible interaction between the two is established through engaging a field-working approach that includes field studies, field notes, field drawings, field maps, and field diaries. The flexible interaction includes onsite, in-studio, and the exhibition space itself. I define trace as encounters with place, which are experienced as either latent in mental space, immaterial, or as material residues or translations. Trace is both produced and amplified in the performance of place, with residues operating as a foregrounding of site, and translations operating as a foregrounding of my relationship with it.

The project aligns with recent art history's discursive space, challenging boundaries separating performance and trace, and present in Trace Gallery in Cardiff, Wales. Described by artist and scholar Julie Louise Bacon in a text written on the occasion of its fifth anniversary as resonant with absence and presence, Bacon argues that Trace gallery provides a dynamic residue when

⁸⁴ Voegelin, Salomé. *Listening to Noise and Silence*, 4.

⁸⁵ Borggreen, Gunhild and Rune Gade, eds. *Performing Archives / Archives of Performance*. Museum Tusculanum Press: Copenhagen, 2013.

she describes its emphasis 'as much by what is less there, uncertain, and changing, as by the realm of the known.'⁸⁶

Traces in this research are residues of previous action, thoughts, or movements, 'nested' in the performing body, and include sensations and atmospheres, as well as remembrances that may or may not be consciously constructed. It is understood that 'immediate encounters carry our aspirations, foster our memories and are shot through with our histories', Bacon suggests.⁸⁷ These apparently free-form thoughts, sensations, or physical responses seem to be independent of the present moment, and yet it is precisely the present moment that has triggered them. Traces are also residues and translations that include drawings, written documents, audio files, photographic images, video footage, constructed and purchased devices for walking, drawing, listening and sounding, and material offcuts.

Central to this notion is the understanding of the performing body as 'absorbing and constituting the environment', where there is a simultaneous immediacy and embeddedness. As such performance is understood as not limited to site, and traces are understood as not isolated to studio-based practice, this dynamic of folding and unfolding emphasises the mobility that is at the very heart of this project.

Traces are thus invested with the 'high stakes' suggested by Amelia Jones, echoing Derrida when she says, 'histories that get told, and the ways in which they get told, determine what we remember and how we construct and view ourselves today'.⁸⁸ By this, I mean that when a residue is revealed in my work, it generates its relationship to the present, opening it up in an active way. The quality of latency, like engaging a sonic sensibility, reveals 'the invisible mobility

⁸⁶ Bacon, Julie. *Beyond Histories: Trace and the Re-Makings of the Present*, 145.

⁸⁷ Bacon, Julie. *Beyond Histories: Trace and the Re-Makings of the Present*, 144.

⁸⁸ Jones, Amelia. 'Unpredictable Temporalities: The Body and Performance in (Art) History' in *Performing Archives/Archives of Performance*. Museum Tusculanum Press: Copenhagen, 2013, 54.

below the surface of a visual world ... challenging its certain position.'⁸⁹ Similar to the way sound operates in my work is the process by which residues operate, activating presence and absence as simultaneous forces.

My research project invites reflection on place as an ongoing articulation where trace is folded back into the live event. For example, performative devices such as hand-held audio guides, when employed in my work, function to fold traces of sound recorded during site visits in Botany back into the experience of listening and viewing for the audience in the exhibition space. They also function as a signpost, identifying the performing body engaged in the activity of listening (Figure 36). These portable devices, which I regard as relatives of the devices that I have engaged in field-working, allow for a personal, temporal, visual, and sonic experience in the public space of the gallery, although one that is significantly mediated. The material renderings of the artist's experience engage with that of the audience in a process of personalisation of place in public space. In this way, the audio guides are devices that activate the approach to traces advocated for in this project, they blur the boundaries between my performance and audience activation.

⁸⁹ Voegelin, Salome. *Sonic Possible Worlds: Hearing the Continuum of Sound*. Bloomsbury: New York, 2014, 3.



Figure 36. Personal Audio Guides to be used by the audience in the exhibition space.

The approach echoes strategies employed in Bianca Hester's practice. In her 2010 exhibition at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, active performative participation with specific apparatuses in the gallery was staged (Figure 37). Described as a 'field of encounter' the exhibition offered the audience a chance to experience the unexpected 'first-hand'.⁹⁰ Hester's work involves complicating where the boundaries of the performance begin and end. In some ways my work aligns with that of Hester, who questions the boundaries between site and exhibition work, and between the temporal parameters of the exhibition, by incorporating found-text specific to the exhibition site in the exhibition title, and explanatory text in the exhibition itself. Similarly, cameras that record the 'performance' of the exhibition act as documentation device, and as object and performative object.

⁹⁰ Engberg, Juliana and Charlotte Day. Curators. *Bianca Hester – Actions Will Occur Intermittently*. ACCA. 2010. Publication: Helen Macpherson Commission 2010, 5.



Figure 37. Bianca Hester, *Please Lave These Windows Open Overnight to Enable the Fans to Draw in Cool Air During the Early Hours of the Morning*
Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, 2010.
Image: Andrew Curtis

While my approach to field-working has a working taxonomy, due to its nature, and that of the project as a whole, it involves a certain portability and porosity that allows for cross overs and integration. This framework allows me to 'emphasize a mutual response between doing and knowing in the scholarly process' and, as such, both the aesthetic composition and the processes employed have a direct relationship to the simultaneous forces of presence and absence.⁹¹

⁹¹ Borggreen, Gunhild and Rune Gade, eds. 'Introduction: The Archive in Performance Studies' in *Performing Archives / Archives of Performance*. Museum Tusculanum Press: Copenhagen, 2013, 12. Referencing Baz Kershaw *Performance as Research: Live Events and Documents* 2008.

I have developed four strategic approaches to performance onsite and the development of traces that result from these works:

(i) Field Studies

Field Studies are material and immaterial residues of experience of place through performance. They are time-based, directed by full attention to the sonic and to the performative, and include recordings and transpositions of found sound and found text.

(ii) Field Drawings

These are drawings made in-studio in response to field studies. The attention in these translations shifts to formal strategies of material, compositional and aesthetic decision making and experimentation that are not possible, or desired, while giving full attention on-site. In-studio processes of translation include isolating, fragmenting, erasing, amplifying, and accumulating.

Figure 38 demonstrates this and shows the sounding recorded live into the voice memo of my mobile phone in Botany, is listened to again in-studio, on headphones. Once again blind continuous line drawing is engaged while listening to the sound of my own voice speaking text aloud. This time the sound is reinterpreted through my subjective hearing of it. The words and language of the text that passed me by at a main intersection in Botany are stripped back to the intimacy of an invented narrative. When listening, the language for me becomes syllabic, deconstructed, non-narrative, and non-linear. It is sound as material. I find the lyrical in the heard-sound, and engaging concentrated and active listening, I then respond by employing graphite, ink and charcoal, layered on top of one another and then washed over with a layer of gesso. Building on art historical explorations in drawing, whereby text is organised and rationalised pictorially, this working process similarly takes text and reconfigures it. This strategy is one of occupying the threshold space between sets of conditions that structure and order words as language or sounds as music. Here the heard

sound is instead embraced as an active and open field of possibility. The duration of the sound recording is strictly adhered to, with the same duration applied to both the ink and the charcoal layers of the drawing in an effort to apply the same care towards honouring the complexities of place as is applied to 'live' explorations. Processes of active listening and drawing coalesce in the transposing of the artist's voice into visual form.



Figure 38. Mollie Rice, *Field Drawing #1* (Botany 2017)
Ink, Charcoal and Gesso on Stonehenge. 760 mm x 560 mm
Image: Mollie Rice

Similarly, in-studio translations (of the transpositions of found sound made onto fibreglass flyscreen mesh) take the incised negative spaces (the offcuts) and approach them as the 'positives,' rubbing over the fibreglass mesh with charcoal. The offcuts now provide the material structure for a series of three large drawings, in which charcoal, pushed through the mesh structure, is propelled across the paper with the force of my own breath. The material of charcoal itself intrinsically evokes the notions of trace and the transitory, easily removable and yet vulnerable to unexpected dispersal, the use of charcoal facilitates the direct connection between the performing body and the medium.

(iii) Field Map

The *Field-Map* (Figure 39) is made of fused fibreglass flyscreen mesh and plastic filament from a three-dimensional pen. Within the taxonomy it is the most fluid, as it is both a residue of 'live' blind continuous line drawing onsite, while also being the translation of this in-studio, where I incised and removed the negative spaces from the transposition and then at each of the intersecting lines the pen filament is built up, adding the three-dimensional quality to the transpositions. Seemingly opposing materials of suburbia and new technology are brought into proximity with each other and coupled with the traditional process of drawing by hand. The *Field Map*, made up of the transpositions of found sound, form a tangible visible mass, incorporating that which is resolutely there but invisible, highlighting a subterranean quality to the experience of place, excavating deeper than the surface of the visual world.



Figure 39. Mollie Rice, *Field Map* (Botany 2017). Detail
Three-Dimensional Pen Filament on Fibreglass Fly Screen Mesh. Dimensions Variable
Image: Mollie Rice

(iv) Field Notes

Consisting of the photographic documentation of the performances and their traces, the field notes are open to translation either in-studio or in the exhibition space. They may be approached as material to draw on, to draw from, or may be presented with other documentation, photographic or otherwise, in artist book format.

(v) Field Journals

Consisting of the written transpositions of found text, as an index, which are executed in-studio while re-listening to the audio soundings, the field notes are also open to translation either in-studio or in the exhibition space. They may also be presented in artist book format or the text may be approached as material for drawing experiments.

Traces in this project are understood as closely related to performance, both material and immaterial, operating dynamically with the potential for translation such as that expressed by Bacon as 'the temporary re-collecting of fragments'.⁹² In this way, traces are treated with an immediacy that re-sounds with that which has come before and yet is not beholden to it.

The taxonomy, created as a guide for performance and traces, includes the presentation of the research project in the exhibition space by dividing up the works into series that are titled accordingly. The act of developing a taxonomy for mapping place has illuminated the potential for creative agency in framing my working across site and studio, and also in opening up my understanding of the potential role of aesthetic practice to reflect on the codification of place at different scales.

⁹² Bacon, Julie. *Beyond Histories: Trace and the Re-Makings of the Present*, 149.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

We are a thinking and feeling people as well an ocular one. The visual is often dominant in discussions of human experience, and yet all of us are aware that the visual intersects with many other factors of influence, such as listening, feeling, and thinking. Propelled by an interest in human spatiality and, in particular, shifting sensations of place in the contemporary city, the aim of my research has been to capture sensations by manifesting the intersections between the visible and audible at different levels of literalness and abstraction. I aim to open up an alternative portrait of a landscape of place through a form of paying attention that both fixes and makes fluid. I have aimed to capture something of human experience beyond the visual, as Morgan O'Hara does in her attentive, empathetic, and quiet recording of human movement through performative drawing.

It speaks of man [sic] in his manifestation most vital and dynamic: movement, with the possibility that the work reveals characteristics unknown or kept hidden which escape human control and are caught by the drawing.⁹³

As with O'Hara's practice, my research in focus attends to the actions of the everyday performative body as a filter and transmitter of individual, spatial, political, and social conditions. Thus, place is performed on various temporal scales from the historical to the immediate.

The understanding of place in my project aligns with that proposed by the philosopher Jeff Malpas, as a nested and fluid structure within which experience is inevitable. It brings experiments with an aesthetic and material dimension to his philosophical reflection. Encompassing both time and space, Malpas' definition proposes that the connection of person and place is crucial to the possibility of any experience:

It is not merely that one must stand in relation to things in the right way if one is to be successful in bringing something about, but even to be able to act at all, whether successfully or unsuccessfully, one

⁹³ Belloni, Cesare. 'Traces' in *Discussion of Work*. Web. 2006. Accessed November 2017. www.morganohara.com

needs to be able to grasp oneself as standing in a position with respect to things that fits with the intentions with which one acts.⁹⁴

If place is always performed, and necessarily complex, I have sought to explore how durational and contrasting approaches to 'sounding it out' can augment experience in a way that opens up avenues for agency in the connection of person and place.

Voegelin's concept of a 'sonic sensibility' has been crucial and revelatory to this project and my practice as a whole. While not a sound artist in the disciplinary sense, the expanded relationship with sound and listening has been key in aligning with my composite methods of making that reverberate with a simultaneous absence and presence. My attention, in the months of working onsite in Botany, to the sonic and the auditory proved a vital illuminator of the ways in which power relations are encoded in space, giving pause for thought about the way sound operates in the experience of place in the contemporary city. By honing my listening skills, attention and reflection was given to *how it is* that one *listens*. Through attending to sound, notions of absence and presence became apparent in ways that confirm the impact of this core dynamic on contemporary city life. I have sought to explore the value structure behind this through the investment of time onsite and in studio reflections. This included the possibility that sounds are present but not heard, that noise and silence may be personal, social, political, and spatial strategies that are activated according to agency, and thus may determine how one listens, and also what it is that is heard.

The process of working this way, and the material outcomes, expose the potential within thresholds: they are not fixed but rather have the possibility of being altered through everyday action as performances of place, and that this can occur in different modalities and on different temporal scales. This builds on valuable scholarship about visual perspective and the notion that alterations or alignments are possible by participating in observation that is active, and which

⁹⁴ Malpas, Jeff. *Place and Experience*, 94.

challenges habitual patterns. It is this revelation, with its potential for impacting on the connection of person and place, that is particularly exciting.

My research has confirmed that a considered approach to listening, often seen as a passive activity, enables a more comprehensive grasp of place than is possible when the focus is dominated by the visual. Sound, often disregarded in understandings of how people and place are connected, offers signs of the significations latent in place.

The value of these revelations in the stories we tell ourselves about shifting sensations of place in the contemporary city have provided the heartbeat for my investigations. The potential for performative action to generate agency, connecting a person with place has impacted and increased my personal sensitivity to Botany as my home. More importantly it has augmented my professional understanding of my agency as an artist working in city space, and across city space and studio. In particular, my non-interventionist and quiet approach that is both generative of difference and connections, I now understand as presenting a form of visual poetry that is potent in a space where messages compete and where there is sensory overload. Malpas states, 'a difference in bodily and environmental awareness or in the capacity to act in ways that are guided by such awareness will correlate with a difference in the grasp of subjective space.'⁹⁵ With increasingly tighter regulations applied to the management of public space in contemporary cities, through both overt and covert means, this research begins a process of drawing out the intangibles of these regulations. It raises a small thread of enquiry that directs me towards exploration of processes of de-colonisation that will provide direction for further enquiry in the future. In particular, I intend to develop my exploration of the value of the performance of the quotidian, and time, in future works in the city.

My application of a flexible and non-disciplinary-bound format of field-working to activate physical and conceptual thresholds is based on the topographical approach to mapping advocated for by Malpas. The creative agency gained by

⁹⁵ Malpas, Jeff. *Place and Experience*, 52.

engaging the performative body; that is to say, 'me' in processes of walking, active listening, sounding, and drawing increased a commitment to the activation of threshold place. The channelling of this agency is in evidence in the aesthetic features of my work that are analogous to movement and alignment. Beyond this project, I aim to build on my strategies of translating these aspects of fluidity and resonance for the audience in further exhibitions.

The practice of performing place through the process of field-working has revealed the capacity to not only illuminate, but possibly *alter* place, by making visible and audible the power structures encoded in space, and in so doing to speculate on the possibilities for repeat gestures of the quotidian to impact them. There is potential to apply these methods and findings to enquiry into other threshold spaces in Sydney and other cities around Australia, contributing to the conversation around art and its relationship with the urban.

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Appendix – Timeline

