‘The Swamp’
Nandi Chinna

“...suburbs fall away and we forget our urgent imperatives; our feet sink into the lake’s edge giddy with the sky’s reflection”
Westerly
Online Special Issue 1,
'Walking with the Flâneur', 2016

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Design: Chil3
Typesetting: Lasertype
Print: UniPrint, The University of Western Australia

Front cover: Image courtesy of Julian Bolleter.

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Westerly is published biannually with assistance from the State Government of WA by an investment in this project through the Department of Culture and the Arts and from the Literature Board of the Australia Council. The opinions expressed in Westerly are those of individual contributors and not of the Editors or Editorial Advisors.

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This online special issue represents a milestone for Westerly. It is the first of its kind, the first completely digital publication of the Magazine and the first in a new series of eBooks available free to access online. The digital world opens up a myriad of possibilities for the written word. Like the advent of the printing press, it has changed the nature of publishing. This issue is testament to this shifting world. But as our first endeavour in this direction, aside from the publication of single articles and reviews, this issue is meant also to illustrate what these possibilities mean to us.

For Westerly, online publication offers us the chance to showcase specifically the work which is coming out of Western Australia. To do so represents a general aim in our activities; but in the print editions, this competes with other interests, including Australian literature more generally, Indigenous writing, the Indian Ocean Region and Asian writing, and the desire to hunt out the best contemporary writing both nationally and internationally for publication. This space here, then, in digital publication, is dedicated specifically to representing the work emerging from Western Australia, new writing both scholarly and creative. In offering these issues free to access, we hope they will also be received in this spirit as a chance to discover and explore the rich literary culture emerging from our state.

This issue found its genesis in the 2015 Day of Ideas—an annual event held at the University of Western Australia. As Professor Ted Snell explains in his preface, this marvellously meandering day took as its centre the concept of the flâneur. In true flâneur style, several of these papers collected here have grown into something more—developed their own specificities and purpose from the open trajectory of their beginnings. They have also come together to say something about Western Australia as a place, about this moment in our history, in the combination of ideas within.
My thanks to the team at the Institute of Advanced Studies, particularly Associate Director Susan Takao, for their support and involvement in bringing this issue into being.

Catherine Noske, editor, April 2015.

This issue was compiled with the support of the Institute of Advanced Studies.
For our *Day of Ideas: Reviving the Flâneur* in 2015, we took a wander through busy streets and winding alleyways brimming with ideas and ripe for investigation. It was a stellar cast of flâneurs who guided us through these sites of wonder, excitement and possibility, and we gladly followed in their footsteps as we strolled, loitered and ambled through real and imagined environments in search of adventure and fulfillment.

Charles Baudelaire wandered the city in order to experience it, with the air of the detached but finely attuned aesthete, responding to the world we encountered with wit, empathy and calculated knowingness. Clarissa Ball took us back to the Place de la Concorde in Paris between 1875–77 to observe the changes taking place under Hausmann’s radical town planning. Through Edgar Degas’ eyes, we saw the changes occurring, the elements of the redesign he pictured and those he left unrecorded, and we identified the dandified flâneurs he documented at ease in their new habitat. John Docker opened up a dialogue between T.S. Eliot and Walter Benjamin to explore modernism in relation to the past. While the flâneur provides evidence of an informed observer, steeped in the past but responding to the world around him Eliot’s notion of ‘a stable transmissibility of tradition in modernity appears staid, complacent, and strangely unmodernist in contrast to Benjamin’s daring and brilliant eccentricity in thinking of ways we can attempt to explore the past in a present without tradition’, John asserted. Then we returned to Australia to wander down Bourke Street Melbourne in 1869 with Megan Brown where we encountered a flâneuse: a Waif Wander who offered her first-hand observations of life on the street in contrast to her male counterparts. Mary Fortune was ‘the only truly Bohemian lady writer who ever earned a living by her pen in Australia’ and may be one of the few candidates for a role of nineteenth-century flâneuse.
In an age of speed, simulacra and surrogate experience, the perambulating observer, pausing to pay attention and to participate thoroughly through observation as they manoeuvre their way though the superhighways of the Internet, was presented as a 21st-century reincarnation of the flâneur. Sherman Young proposed that we rethink our conception of the flânerie in a smartphone world by relocating the flâneur in the urban landscape with the assistance of the new connected technologies such as the GPS. Similarly, Ross Gibson took us into the world of Google Maps where the roving street view camera becomes a kind of ‘zombie flâneur’ and ‘before long you are lost in a dreamscape that is pretending to be a real landscape. And the Google Car just blinks and plods on.’ We also surfed the information superhighway with ‘cyberflâneur’ Sunil Badami, discovering new pathways and journeys, often finding ourselves ‘via hypertextual trains of thought, in places [we] had never imagined’. The flâneur observer remains disconnected in this world of virtual communities and social media networks, just as his nineteenth-century counterparts remained aloof despite their desire to share and attach.

The Postcolonial Flâneur entered the arena when Ned Curthoys discussed Teju Cole’s novel from 2011 *Open City*. Unsurprisingly for a Nigerian writer prowling the streets of New York, the novel’s protagonist projects ‘both utopian and dystopian possibilities that allegorise the indeterminate situation of the United States as beacon of liberal hope and declining empire’. After our perambulations through the global village, it was good to get home and reimagine the urban sprawl that is Perth with Julian Bolleter. With one of the lowest population densities in the world and a city poorly adapted to the emerging environmental and societal challenges of the twenty-first century, Julian drew back the shades and revealed the options for urban infill and the potential to create a vibrant, sustainable future. Before the final immersion in the aural worlds created by UWA School of Music students, Nandi Chinna introduced us to the methodology of ‘poepatetics’, her creative response to the challenges of living in the world humanity is inexorably modifying as she combines walking and writing.

Enthusiastic flâneurs, we happily joined in and merged with the crowd, actively participating while retaining an aloof autonomy, observing all with curious eyes and questioning ears and overlaying each new reality with our memories, associations and history. We wrote ourselves into this day and took away a rich archive of new experiences with which to shape future excursions into the labyrinthine pathways of contemporary life. Finally, after a wonderful journey we gave thanks to the Institute of
Advanced Studies team; Clarissa Ball, Audrey Barton, Claire Bowen, and offered up a special acknowledgment to my co-convenor for the Day of Ideas, IAS Associate Director Susan Takao.

Professor Ted Snell AM CitWA
Director, Cultural Precinct
University of Western Australia
Anyone who cannot cope with life while he is alive needs one hand to ward off a little his despair over his fate … but with his other hand he can jot down what he sees among the ruins, for he sees different and more things than the others; after all, he is dead in his own lifetime and the real survivor.

… just as the city [Paris] taught Benjamin flânerie, the nineteenth century’s secret style of walking and thinking, it naturally aroused in him a feeling for French literature as well, and this almost irrevocably estranged him from normal German intellectual life.

In this essay, I draw into the one uneasy and no doubt untidy conversation three intellectuals who in the early and middle part of the twentieth century wished to explore the features and historical consciousness that constitute the modern world of cities, crowds, arcades, advertising, film; who attempted to explain why the modern world is different from pre-modern worlds. I choose three figures to discuss with an eye to Chaos Theory, where the number three, held to be sacred since Mesopotamian antiquity, creates relationships that cannot be resolved into unitary meanings or binary oppositions. Ann Curthoys has applied Chaos theory, constituted as the three-body problem, to feminist theory (1991: 14–21). Here I apply the three-body problem to theorists of modernity, where Chaos is the reverse of Tradition. I bring together T.S. Eliot with Walter Benjamin via Hannah Arendt’s beautiful and passionate Introduction to Illuminations, simply entitled ‘Walter Benjamin: 1892–1940’, which included some of Benjamin’s essays from the 1920s and 1930s, and was
published in New York in 1968. Arendt, startlingly, relates Benjamin and the flâneur and flânerie to more than we expect, the stroller through Paris and its avenues and arcades, Benjamin after all being the intense admirer and translator of Baudelaire. Arendt also relates Benjamin and the flâneur to water imagery in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, and that, perhaps strangely, got me thinking of Gaudi’s Barcelona, to architecture as if in underwater light. Water imagery, in sea and river, figures in Eliot’s early poems; and water as a world passageway also connects to Hannah Arendt when with Heinrich Blücher she reached safety from Nazism in May 1941 in New York City, there renting two small, semi-furnished rooms at 317 West 95th Street (Young-Bruehl 164). I will try to draw out Eliot and Benjamin’s very different conceptions of modernity and historical consciousness in relation to the question of tradition. Yet I will also acknowledge the shared inflections of aesthetic modernism. I’ll add a personal touch here and there. Bruno Latour will make a brief appearance. Towards the end, the Holocaust looms.

I

Recall that Eliot in his 1917 essay ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’ asserts that the European literary tradition is transmitted whole to the present, while modified and slightly altered by a new work of art:

> [w]hat happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted. (15)

We can contrast Eliot’s supreme, even Panglossian, confidence, complacency, certainty here—curious in a modernist—in standing at the head of a European literary tradition conceived as a single order, with Walter Benjamin’s radical scepticism towards the notion of a continuing European tradition. I turn to Hannah Arendt for insights and helpful perspectives. In ‘The Pearl Diver’, the third section of her Introduction, Arendt quotes as an epigraph some lyrical lines from *The Tempest*. (I was pleased to see that Arendt enjoys and deploys epigraphs as much as I do; I don’t have to feel merely perverse.)
Full fathom five thy father lies,
Of his bones are coral made,
Those are pearls that were his eyes.
Nothing of him that doth fade
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange. (1:2)

Arendt argues that Benjamin felt that the break with tradition, and the loss of its authority which he believed had occurred in his lifetime, were ‘irreparable’ (38), and he decided that he had to ‘discover new ways of dealing with the past’ (41). Famously, one of those ways is that of the flâneur, who in Benjamin’s conception ‘entrusted himself to chance as a guide on his intellectual journeys of exploration’ (43). In Arendt’s view, Benjamin himself was the modernist intellectual become flâneur, aimlessly strolling through the crowds in the midst of cities, observing phenomena in passing as fragments that are quickly seen and reflected upon.

Benjamin, then, Arendt suggests, as intellectual flâneur came across ideas by chance, which could not be related to any whole; and such flânerie became for him a way of existing in the world, evident for example in his life activity as a collector, of books and quotations (43). Benjamin sought to replace what had been regarded before the twentieth century as the sure transmissibility of the past with ‘citability’, the assembling of stray quotations that disturb the present, depriving it of its peace of mind (38–40). There is in Benjamin’s thought, Arendt feels, a play of destruction and new creation. Benjamin considered that in modernity the quotation’s destructive power is that, torn out of its usual context, it fissures what was once held to be whole and continuous. At the same time, the quotation still holds out the hope of survival of features of a historical period precisely because it is torn out of usual contexts. Collecting quotations, which he arranged into a kind of ‘free-floating’ ‘surrealistic montage’, became a preoccupying activity (Arendt 45). In the 1930s, Arendt recalls, he entered quotations he came across into ‘the little notebooks with black covers which he always carried with him.’ (47)

For Arendt, Benjamin as collector is a variation of Benjamin as flâneur. As a lifelong bibliophile, Benjamin exhibited the book collector’s passion for an activity that ‘defies any systematic classification’ and hence ‘borders on the chaotic’ (43), in contrast to those who still believe in tradition as an attempt ‘systematically’ to separate ‘the positive from the negative, the orthodox from the heretical’ (Arendt 43–45). For Benjamin, then, Arendt feels, history was no longer to be perceived as an illusory continuum but as a ‘pile of debris’ (Arendt 257–258).
We can add here that it wasn’t only books that Benjamin collected. The Eiland and Jennings biography, dry, cold, distant, even condescending to its subject as it is, reminds us that in 1921 he purchased Paul Klee’s *Angelus Novus*, which Klee had painted the year before; it became his most prized possession. Eiland and Jennings refer to the *Angelus Novus* as an aquarelle (138–139). I’ve just looked up my Shorter Oxford, which defines aquarelle as a water colour, and more specifically a kind of painting or illuminating with Chinese ink and thin transparent watercolours. It is now treasured by us all, since it inspired one of Benjamin’s most memorable parables in ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History’, concerning the angel of history and ‘pile of debris’: ‘a storm is blowing from Paradise’; it irresistibly propels the angel ‘into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.’ (2007: 257–258) Arendt suggests that the *Angelus Novus*, for Benjamin in its wild grotesquerie the angel of history, is another transfiguration of the flâneur (13).

Arendt ends her Introduction on a moving, perhaps redemptive note. Referring to the passage from *The Tempest*, Arendt writes that Benjamin explores the past as would a ‘pearl diver who descends to the bottom of the sea … to pry loose the rich and the strange, the pearls and the coral in the depths, and to carry them to the surface’, for in the depths of the sea:

> into which sinks and is dissolved what once was alive, some things ‘suffer a sea-change’ and survive in new crystallized forms and shapes that remain immune to the elements, as though they waited only for the pearl diver who one day will come down to them and bring them up into the world of the living – as ‘thought fragments’, as something ‘rich and strange’… (50–51)

The flâneur as pearl diver apprehends and recovers history, modernity, ideas, as fragmentary, crystallised, shapes and forms (Arendt 41, 46, 50–51).

How different, in Arendt’s brilliant portrait, is Benjamin, in his thinking about tradition, from the comfortable assumption of aesthetic history as a continuing monumental sequence in Eliot’s ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’. Benjamin—and Arendt—are in my view so much more daring, adventurous, and far-reaching in their aesthetic and philosophical reflections and speculations, which is why for generations now readers have found their essays and books so suggestive of new possibilities.1
At this point, there is an obvious conundrum to ponder. While ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’ very much valued qualities of tradition like wholeness and order that Benjamin considered were irremediably lost, there are clear similarities between Eliot’s poetry and aspects of Benjamin’s thinking about the death of tradition. The jagged evocation of modern life as disconnected fragments, debris, ruins, death of tradition, is what struck readers in the early twentieth century about Eliot’s poems; it still does. We can immediately think of the water imagery in ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’, Prufrock reflecting on his timid, fearful life as constituted in failure, of lost hopes and dreams, of self-contempt and self-mockery crossed with despair: ‘I should have been a pair of ragged claws/Scuttling across the floors of silent seas’; and then the poem ends with those images of mermaids and drowning. We can also think of water imagery in The Waste Land, in ‘The Burial of the Dead’, Madame Sosotris espying in her tarot cards the drowned Phoenician sailor and warning, ‘Fear death by water’; the Thames flowing as river of death and indifference through ‘The Fire Sermon’; ‘Death by Water’, where a current under sea picks the bones of Phlebas the Phoenician in whispers. In the final lines of The Waste Land, there is a chaos of quotations, and a line that has always haunted me, that unbidden inhabits my mind, will not go away, insinuates itself into one’s being: ‘These fragments I have shored against my ruins’ (in Docker 247).

Eliot, then, in great poems such as ‘Prufrock’ and The Waste Land is also a flâneur, a connoisseur, of fragments. We could say that Benjamin and Eliot, this Eliot, practise Kunstchaos, which Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy define in The Literary Absolute (1988) as ‘chaos produced by art or philosophical technique’; Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy invoke a genealogy threading its way from Montaigne’s Essays through Pascal, Shaftesbury and La Rochefoucauld to the Athenaeum Fragments of Jena Romanticism (50–52, 135 n.24). Yet there is also here an obvious difference from Benjamin. Eliot’s early poems culminating in The Waste Land create modernity in landscapes and waterscapes of negation, as death, sterility, desolation. By contrast, Benjamin, as Hannah Arendt suggests, is interested in a double movement of consciousness, of destruction entwined with creation: quotations which destroy the false continuum of history yet which can survive as features of the past to be cited and pondered; the flâneur who by chance makes observations that inspire philosophical reflection; the flâneur metamorphosing into other cultural figures, such as collector, pearl diver, angel of history.
III
We come now to another difference. If Eliot's early poetry draws on theatrical scenes and vaudeville, his critical essays are staid, orderly, authoritative if in that faux-modest way of his; they proceed as if by exemplary argumentation, almost like an instruction; they form a continuum of propositions. Benjamin did not make a sharp distinction or assume an opposition between critical writing and literature; he applied Kunstchaos to critical writing itself. In her Introduction, Arendt more than once reflects that Benjamin possessed a rare gift for ‘thinking poetically’ (4, 14, 50). I take this to mean that Benjamin practised critical writing as itself writing, as art, which could work by metaphor, allegory, anecdote, aphorism, fable, parable, dream, nightmare. For Benjamin critical writing as art required the destruction of conventional literature, resonating with Eliot’s own early poetry, which as in ‘Prufrock’ and The Waste Land made such a sharp and welcome break with previous literary tradition, opening modern poetry to the everyday banal and to burlesque.

In terms of Benjamin’s writing, think of One Way Street, composed with Asja Lacis between 1925 and 1926, where in the opening fragment, ‘Filling Station’, Benjamin and Lacis propose that ‘true literary activity cannot aspire to take place within a literary framework—this is, rather, the habitual expression of its sterility’: ‘Significant literary work can only come into being’ by nurturing ‘inconspicuous forms’ such as ‘leaflets, brochures, articles, and placards’ (1979: 45). One Way Street, evoking modernity, then launches into a phantasmagoria, a surrealist montage, of thought-fragments and disconnected dream-narratives. One Way Street recalls Rimbaud in his 1873 prose poem A Season in Hell talking of the conventional poetry and painting of late nineteenth century France, Rimbaud saying that he prefers ‘idiotic pictures, decorative lintels, theatre sets, fairground backdrops, shop-signs, popular prints’ (Robb 80). For Benjamin as for Rimbaud before him, prose, or the prose poem, should be disordered, deranged. In his own contemporary context, Benjamin’s affinities are with modernist art as in dada, expressionism, cubism, surrealism. Looking ahead, Benjamin anticipated the écriture movement in French poststructuralism, most associated with Roland Barthes, dissolving the distinction between critical writing and literature.

IV
Benjamin was also interested in the disorderly and fragmentary visible in the German Baroque Age in his brilliant 1928 work The Origin of German Tragic Drama, evoking the seventeenth-century German mourning play (Trauerspiel), the subject of his Habilitation thesis. Arendt stresses how
whimsical and eccentric his choice was to focus on the baroque in German literary and intellectual history, as whimsical and eccentric as his friend Gershom Scholem’s choice to focus on Jewish mysticism in exploring the history of Judaism. For Benjamin, Arendt writes, a return to the baroque could not be seen as establishing any kind of subsequent tradition, any lasting authority, any confident realm of truth. Arendt explains:

... in the German literary and poetic tradition the Baroque has, with the exception of the great church chorales of the time, never really been alive.... Benjamin’s choice, baroque in a double sense, has an exact counterpart in Scholem’s strange decision to approach Judaism via the Cabala, that is, that part of Hebrew literature which is untransmitted and untransmissible in terms of Jewish tradition, in which it has always had the odor of something downright disreputable. Nothing showed more clearly ... that there was no such thing as a ‘return’ either to the German or the European or the Jewish tradition than the choice of these fields of study. It was an implicit admission that the past spoke directly only through things that had not been handed down, whose seeming closeness to the present was thus due precisely to their exotic character, which ruled out all claims to a binding authority. (40)

Ned Curthoys, discussing Arendt’s thinking here about Benjamin and Scholem’s choice of study as ‘downright disreputable’, is moved to see Arendt herself as deliberately making a kind of disreputable intellectual choice in her refusal to identify herself as a philosopher (72). Arendt’s own resistance to being classified can be related to her suggestion in her Introduction that Benjamin and Kafka were the ‘unclassifiable ones’, whose work ‘neither fits the existing order nor introduces a new genre that lends itself to future classification’ (3). Arendt, younger than Kafka and Benjamin, became one of the ‘unclassifiable ones’ for new generations to engage with.

V

I have to confess to being fascinated by Benjamin’s evocation of the baroque in The Origin of German Tragic Drama, the baroque as eccentric and idiosyncratic, and because eccentric and idiosyncratic becoming a positive and productive resource for the future. In Arendt’s terms, in his conceptions of the baroque, Benjamin as pearl diver brings to the surface of thought the ‘rich and the strange, the pearls and the coral in the depths’;
now visible, the rich and strange baroque can suggest new intellectual directions, for example, new ways of conceiving critical method and historiography. Such ways recall world historian Janet Abu-Lughod's view that historical writing creates new perspectives when it is inspired by a personal vision that is eccentric and idiosyncratic. Abu-Lughod here reminds us of the notion of allegory in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, allegory as both mode of interpretation and as a specific kind of textuality (Curthoys and Docker, 1991: 10). In the ‘Epistemo-Critical Prologue’, Benjamin argues that in the baroque allegory of the mourning plays can be found the basis for a new kind of history and methodology: philosophical, self-reflexive, and self-consciously figural. He tells us that the methodology of his book will draw on the treatise of the Middle Ages. It will be philosophical history of a certain kind: it may be didactic in tone but it will lack the conclusiveness of an instruction; it does not seek an uninterrupted purposeful structure; its method is representation, but representation as digression (*Darstellung als Umweg*). In pursuing different levels of meaning in an object, philosophical history has both the incentive to begin again and the justification for its irregular rhythm. Like the mosaic, it represents fragmentation into capricious particles, emphasizing the distinct and separate. What might be most valuable to investigate is the most singular, wayward and extreme of examples, the most unusual or isolated; examples to be found even in the merest fragment, the minutest thing (Curthoys and Docker, 1991: 10–11).

Benjamin relates the conception of history in the mourning plays to the baroque cult of the ruin in the iconography of allegorical emblem books such as Cesare Ripa’s sixteenth century work *Baroque and Rococo Pictorial Imagery*. History is recognized only under the sign of eternal transience; the baroque took pleasure in juxtaposing the statues of idols and the bones of the dead; history assumes the form of irresistible decay. Benjamin cryptically notes that allegory is beyond beauty, that allegories are in the realm of thoughts what ruins are in the realm of things. The baroque piles up fragments ceaselessly, without any strict idea of a goal, in the unremitting expectation of a miracle, which never comes. History—as remnants, images, metaphors, personifications—stays within ruins, which Benjamin refers to as the finest material of baroque creation: ruins that are consciously constructed. It is from fragments, unredeemed by totality or salvation, that we ceaselessly constitute and reconstitute allegorical histories (Curthoys and Docker, 1991: 13). In our *Is History Fiction?*, Ann Curthoys and I argue that Benjamin’s evocation of allegory is suggestive for historical writing, offering a kind of methodological freedom, a call to inventiveness. The historian does not always have to be connecting
phenomena, focusing on how things relate or espying causes or chains of causes from one phenomenon to another. Instead of a rhetoric and metaphors of convergence, the historian can think in terms of seeking or coming across fragments in the past, from which she or he can make separate, distinct journeys; journeys which lead where they will (Curthoys and Docker, 1991: 95).

VI
Another difference between Benjamin and Eliot. In ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’, Eliot calls for an impersonal theory of poetic creation. ‘The progress of an artist’, Eliot declares, ‘is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality’, for ‘the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates’; this ‘process of depersonalization’ may be said to ‘approach the condition of science’ (1961: 17–18). Benjamin was wary of making any such absolute distinction. He does not extinguish his own personality in writing, but subjects his personality, his fraught life, to fragmentation verging always on chaos. We can say that Benjamin muses in remarkable ways on relays between the man who suffers and the mind which creates, a conversation of self with self that recalls the Enlightenment notion of Selbsdenken, important in Lessing and Kant, that Ned Curthoys discusses in relation to Hannah Arendt (165, 181, 188, 194).

Think of ‘A Berlin Childhood’ (1932). As one would expect, Selbsdenken is for Benjamin idiosyncratic and paradoxical. Benjamin creates in ‘A Berlin Childhood’ a complex intricate artful text, far from an innocent autobiographical chronicle, Benjamin indeed declaring at one point: ‘If I write better German than most of my generation, it is thanks largely to twenty years' observance of one little rule: never use the word 'I' except in letters'. Benjamin says he is not writing autobiography if we understand autobiography to be concerned with time, that is, with sequence and an assumed continuous flow of life; rather, he is talking of ‘a space, of moments and discontinuities’. Sometimes the very syntax of ‘A Berlin Chronicle’ is quite broken. The city is translated into text calling attention to itself. The text becomes a labyrinth, of memory, space, dream, and consciousness. There is a meeting between two kinds of labyrinth. There is the modern city itself, with Ariadne, the Lady of Labyrinth, its Muse, who can possibly rescue the wanderer (child and youth), just as in myth Ariadne had rescued Theseus. But then, as we know from the mythological story, Theseus betrays Ariadne: woman is betrayed by man; and in the labyrinth of the city more generally, there will always be betrayal as well.
as neighbourhood, family relationships, school comradeship; companions who travel with one, teachers we learn from. Referring to Nietzsche’s remark that experiences keep recurring, Benjamin writes of ‘paths that lead us again and again to people who have one and the same function for us: passageways that always, in the most diverse periods of life, guide us to the friend, the betrayer, the beloved, the pupil, or the master’ (1979: 304–5, 319).

The other labyrinth that figures in ‘A Berlin Chronicle’ is indeed the I, the elusive self that might reside in the interior of the subject, its ‘enigmatic centre, ego or fate’. But the wanderer is not so much interested in finding a possible centre as in exploring the many entrances and passageways themselves. The wanderer looks for entrances that might lead into the interior of city and psyche, but realizes that he can only seek and explore the mysteries of the labyrinth by becoming lost. Becoming lost is an art of urban existence he must learn and school himself in, just as in the city café he must learn that the art of waiting is as important as any activity one engages in, in that space that offers both sociability and solitude as required. (Benjamin, 1979: 298) In ‘A Berlin Chronicle’, the city offers possibilities and locales of interaction between the labyrinths of space and inner self, yet a map is difficult to create for oneself, or, if we do happen to create a map, its guiding meanings and significance can always be lost. Benjamin sadly reports that while sitting and ‘waiting’ inside the Café des Deux Magots at St. Germain des Prés, he was struck by the idea of drawing a diagram of his life, and suddenly realized how exactly to do it. He interrogates his life, and the answers to his self-questioning write themselves as it were on a sheet of paper he fortunately has with him. But: ‘A year or two later, when I lost this sheet, I was inconsolable’. He could never recover it in memory again (1979: 318–319).

VII

In relation to Eliot’s call for an impersonal theory of poetic creation in ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’, it’s worthwhile pondering Benjamin’s attitude to the question of empathy in aesthetic criticism, for here perhaps Benjamin does come close to a depersonalized theory of reception. What mattered to Benjamin above all, Arendt tells us, ‘was to avoid anything that might be reminiscent of empathy, as though a given subject of investigation had a message in readiness which easily communicated itself, or could be communicated to the reader or spectator’ (48). Arendt then quotes from the beginning of ‘The Task of the Translator’ (1923) where Benjamin declares: ‘No poem is intended for the reader, no picture for the beholder, no symphony for the listener’ (2007: 69). Arendt adds
that this sentence could serve as a motto for all of Benjamin’s literary criticism (48).7

Benjamin’s suspicion of the desire for empathy between art work and reader, beholder, listener, and his dislike of the notion of intention, engages with a common twentieth century modernist critique of the notion of intention as that which a text expresses, or exists to express, if we think of the Russian Formalists, or the Intentional Fallacy in New Criticism and Leavisism which was codified as intrinsic criticism in Wellek and Warren’s Theory of Literature; and if we think too of poststructuralism, as in the Death of the Author proclaimed by Roland Barthes. In this shared modernist and postmodernist view, the text has to be freed from conjectures about possible intentions that bind and confine and reduce the text to a predetermined, originary, sole meaning. The text has to be freed to act for itself in the world; we have to accept its agency as something separate from our own desires.

In Moscow Diary, the record of his two-month visit to Moscow, from 6 December 1926 to the end of January 1927, to see Asja Lacis, Benjamin returns to the question of empathy. In his diary entry for 24 December, Benjamin jots down that he visited a toy museum, one of his main interests during his stay. (Such was a continuing interest; in Radio Benjamin, a record of some eighty radio broadcasts he wrote and presented from 1927 to 1933, he gave two talks in 1930, ‘Berlin Toy Tour I’ and ‘Berlin Toy Tour II’, where, interestingly, he freely uses the I-voice, directly addressing his listeners; they are a joy now to read (Rosenthal 37–49).) Benjamin—like the flâneur in Paris—then comes across by chance an art museum featuring Western art, a museum which he had heard of but till that moment had no thought of visiting. There are ‘drawings by Louis Legrand and Degas, a painting by Odilon Redon’. He is moved most by two paintings of the Paris boulevards, one by Pissarro, the other by Monet. Pissarro in particular affects him, conveying ‘the space of Paris, the line of the roofs with their thick crop of chimneys. I felt his nostalgia for this city.’ There are also paintings by Renoir and Cézanne, and one of the Cézannes especially interests him, depicting a road running through a wood, with a group of houses to one side:

As I was looking at an extraordinarily beautiful Cézanne, it suddenly occurred to me that it is even linguistically fallacious to speak of ‘empathy’. It seemed to me that to the extent that one grasps a painting, one does not in any way enter its space; rather, this space thrusts itself forward, especially in various very specific spots. It opens up to us in corners and angles in
which we believe we can localize crucial experiences of the past; there is something inexplicably familiar about these spots. (Benjamin, 1986: 42)

We might say that for Benjamin here the Cézanne painting became an actant, in Bruno Latour and Jane Bennett’s terms (Bennett; Latour 1-18). The painting performs its own adventure of being in the world, directing Benjamin as observer, as actant, to form with it a specific relationship in a specific time and place, suggesting the spots, corners, angles where he should look, ponder, remember. Benjamin, freeing himself from the ways empathy and intention attempt to own and master a text, perhaps anticipates Latour’s dislike of the way critique attempts to own and master an object or thing, in his essay ‘Why Has Critique Run out of Steam?’—‘They too act, they too do things, they too make you do things.’ (242–243)

VIII

Eliot’s studiedly impersonal critical essays always seem to reveal a secret desire, to be normative and programmatic, to steer criticism onto canonical paths; to search for wholeness, a unified sensibility, as a property of the critic, to be sharply distinguished from the immersion in fragments that grain the early poems. Eliot makes this distinction clear in his 1921 essay ‘The Metaphysical Poets’, which reverses the vision of a continuous tradition of ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’ four years before—hence coming closer to Benjamin’s view of a broken tradition. ‘The Metaphysical Poets’ proposes the famous thesis of the dissociation of sensibility between the Elizabethan and Jacobean Metaphysical poets of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, and the later history of poetry and sensibility as a fall into lesser achievement, indeed into near-nullity. We all know the argument. In ‘The Metaphysical Poets’, there is a direct sensuous apprehension of thought, or a recreation of thought into feeling; a ‘thought to Donne was an experience; it modified his sensibility’ (1961: 286–287). (We might think here of Arendt writing of Benjamin: ‘What is so hard to understand about Benjamin is that without being a poet he thought poetically and therefore was bound to regard the metaphor as the greatest gift of language.’ (14)) In the later seventeenth century, however, in the unfortunate period of Milton and Dryden, a ‘dissociation of sensibility set in, from which we have never recovered’ (Eliot, 1961: 287). From then on, through the centuries, until just before modernism arrived, and even while there was the occasional ‘struggle toward unification of sensibility’ in this or that poet such as Keats and

In this essay, Eliot yearns for a ‘unification of sensibility’ which is or should be the property of the poet, though not of the non-poet, the hapless Prufrocks of a world now fallen into ennui and failure. In the following passage, Eliot very much appears to slip into talking about his own unified sensibility in the present:

> When a poet’s mind is perfectly equipped for its work, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experience; the ordinary man’s experience is chaotic, irregular, fragmentary. The latter falls in love, or reads Spinoza, and these two experiences have nothing to do with each other, or with the noise of the typewriter or the smell of cooking; in the mind of the poet these experiences are always forming new wholes. (1961: 287)

I think it is fair to say that Eliot’s yearning for a ‘unification of sensibility’ launched in the twentieth century, in Anglo-American and Australian criticism, a thousand articles, essays, books; a plethora of repetition, a deluge of the same: the search for wholeness in someone or other’s poetry or novel.

I find Eliot’s musing here rather uncanny, for allowing ‘disparate experiences’ to remain disparate, to reveal themselves as ‘chaotic, irregular, fragmentary’, is precisely what Benjamin permitted his sensibility and critical prose as it were to open themselves to from the early 1920s onwards; Benjamin, as Arendt observed, realizing that in modernity there had occurred a definitive break with tradition, the tradition which, in Eliot’s terms, might once have guaranteed wholeness and unification of sensibility. *The Waste Land*’s fourth last line, ‘These fragments I have shored against my ruins’, is worth pondering in relation to Benjamin. Since fragments will always fail to shore up ruins, we can say that Benjamin realized that all writing must engage with modernity as chaotic, irregular, fragmentary.

**IX**

Aesthetic modernists, we might think, took a connoisseur’s interest in failure, so clear in Eliot’s ‘Prufrock’ as mood and motif. In her Introduction, Hannah Arendt relates that Benjamin revealed an intense interest in failure. Arendt tells us that Scholem thought that next to Proust, Benjamin felt the closest personal affinity with Kafka among contemporary authors. Arendt quotes from a letter dated 12 June 1938 Benjamin wrote to Scholem, reproduced in *Illuminations* as ‘Some Reflections on Kafka’:
To do justice to the figure of Kafka in its purity and its peculiar beauty one must never lose sight of one thing: it is the purity and beauty of a failure. The circumstances of this failure are manifold. One is tempted to say: once he was certain of eventual failure, everything worked out for him *en route* as in a dream. There is nothing more memorable than the fervor with which Kafka emphasized his failure. (144–145)

Arendt feels that what Benjamin says of Kafka here ‘with such unique aptness applies to himself as well’ (17). If Kafka and Benjamin regarded themselves as failures, then out of failure can emerge remarkable aesthetic and intellectual innovation.

X

Benjamin musing on failure anticipates aspects of the theory of ego-histoire put forward by the French historiographer Pierre Nora in his 2001 essay, ‘L’ego-histoire est-elle possible?’, ego-histoire as an intervention into contemporary history. Nora regrets that the Annales school in its interest in the long view made it so difficult for historians to study contemporary France. Nora turns to memory and ego-histoire as ways to ask of France fundamental questions that were born for him during World War Two, in the stupor of defeat, the exclusion of the Jews, the Resistance; and after the war, the conflict between communism and Gaullism and France’s colonial wars. Nora suggests that ego-histoire will always fail as an ordered, unified mode of writing as in conventional history, because in genre terms the ego-historian is unclassifiable—Nora being curiously drawn to the term by which Arendt describes Kafka and Benjamin. Nora takes seriously the question of his essay: ego-histoire may not be possible, it may be a failure, or half-failure. But, he asks, is failure failure? For ego-histoire to succeed as a single, unified, coherent project would be to destroy ego-histoire, to return it to conventional historical writing, which ego-histoire wishes to make strange, ‘dé-familiariser’.

I find particularly interesting Nora’s conception of the ego-historian as a distinctive intellectual personality, of an unsettled, contradictory kind. At one point Nora asks of the ego-historian, who is she or he? For Nora, the ego-historian—like Kafka, like Benjamin, like Arendt—cannot be classified, cannot be encapsulated as a single intellectual identity. Nora insists that the ego-historian is not, for example, to be identified as an autobiographer, though she or he might deploy autobiography, for autobiography might not necessarily complicate itself with other activities that constellate around the figure of the ego-historian, in
particular historiography, critical reflection, and self-reflexive memory. Furthermore, the ego-historian is not necessarily to be identified with historians, with the history profession. Nora makes it clear how much he admires, for example, the (unclassifiable) philosopher Marc Bloch, or the cultural theorist Michel de Certeau, whom he describes as a Jesuit historian interested in Lacanian psychoanalysis. Yet, he reflects, if ego-histoire represents various failed efforts in terms of identity and coherence, its failures, or half-failures, are of immense interest. Indeed, its half-failures, as he phrases it, are perhaps ego-histoire’s true success.

For Nora, the ego-historian is neither, or rather might be all of, the autobiographer, the writer, the friend, the psychoanalyst, and the confessor. The ego-historian conceives of writing as an adventure of ideas, highly personal and self-reflexive, free to mix and juxtapose genres, texts, media, modes, perspectives and narratives in ways that are unpredictable and surprising, eccentric and idiosyncratic (19–26). The ego-historian may be another transfiguration of the flâneur.

Final, perhaps failed, thoughts

I’d like to dwell a little more on Hannah Arendt relating Benjamin and the flâneur to water imagery and the figure of the pearl diver in *The Tempest*. This prompts me to odd thoughts, which are probably absurd. Since Arendt also published the Introduction to *Illuminations* as an article in *The New Yorker* (and also in *Men in Dark Times*), I’m assuming she wrote it in New York, where she lived with Heinrich Blücher and taught in the New School for Social Research. (It’s impossible not to think now of the recent film on Arendt by Margarethe von Trotta, especially their smoking!) New York is of course one of the world’s great port cities. Did such an association with water—not necessarily the-less-than inviting water surrounding Manhattan, but New York opening to a sea that leads to other seas—get her mind wondering if Benjamin’s flâneur could be transmuted into the pearl diver of *The Tempest*?

In relating Benjamin to water imagery, Arendt reminds us that Benjamin was a persistent and determined traveller, especially around the Mediterranean, that he was particularly fond of the Amalfi coast and Capri, that he wrote wonderful essays on flâneuring in ‘Naples’, also another on taking hashish in Marseille with its associated flânerie of the mind (Benjamin, 1986b: 137–145, 163–173).10 In 1931, Benjamin also gave a radio talk on Naples (Rosenthal 145–151). We know from the Eiland and Jennings biography that Benjamin visited Barcelona, also a port city, where his friend Alfred Cohn lived in the 1930s (434, 473, 485–486, 509). This has got me thinking about a visit to Barcelona some years ago with
Ann Curthoys, where we lined up with the other tourists to gaze at some Gaudi architecture in an apartment building, with from memory glass walls, as if in underwater light.

Eliot in *The Waste Land* gazed into the abyss, into chaos, and drew back, yearning for the possibility of order, turning as the 1920s went on to high Anglicanism, and the view that Europe and the United States could be stably unified around Christianity, as in his polemical 1934 book *After Strange Gods: A Primer of Modern Heresy*, based on lectures he gave at the University of Virginia in 1933. I noted earlier that Hannah Arendt contrasted Benjamin’s book collector’s passion for an activity that ‘defies any systematic classification’ and hence ‘borders on the chaotic’, to those who still believe in tradition as an attempt ‘systematically’ to separate ‘the positive from the negative, the orthodox from the heretical’ (44). *After Strange Gods* exhibits just such a belief in orthodoxy, agitatedly seeking to exclude those who might threaten and undermine Eliot’s admiration for the racial and religious uniformity and homogeneity that should structure Western society. It condemns New York’s cosmopolitan mixing of different peoples, Eliot by contrast believing Virginia has an excellent chance of realizing his ideal values because it is part of the historic south: ‘You are farther away from New York; you have been less industrialised and less invaded by foreign races ...’ (1934:16). *After Strange Gods* also thrusts forward a notorious anti-Semitic sentence, suggesting that what is necessary for the future ‘is unity of religious background; and reasons of race and religion combine to make any large number of free-thinking Jews undesirable’ (1934:19–20). There is a tough, sinewy thread linking back *After Strange Gods* to early Eliot poems such as ‘Gerontion’, ‘Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar’, and ‘Sweeney Among the Nightingales’, with their deeply unpleasant slashes of xenophobia and anti-Semitism (in these poems combined as well with misogyny).

Arendt reflects that ‘no one was more isolated than Benjamin, so utterly alone’ (5–6). Benjamin never could belong to any literary school; he could never be a follower, he could never join. And his life was dogged by bad luck; always he was shadowed by the fairy-tale hunchback, the little hunchback he had known from childhood stories told by his mother; a mischievous figure who visits misfortune and disaster upon its victims. The little hunchback, Arendt observed, singled Benjamin out for particular attention (9–10). When Hitler came to power in 1933, Benjamin was no longer able to return to Germany; his financial means, as in his radio work and literary journalism, dried up even when he used a non-Jewish pseudonym. There are detailed accounts in the Eiland and Jennings biography of Benjamin’s parlous physical condition in Ibiza.
in the Balearic Islands during 1933. In early April 1933, after a few days in Barcelona, he made his way to Ibiza and thence to the village of San Antonio, there to live the life of a ‘vagabond’: he would experience ‘the personal and intellectual isolation he would feel for much of his remaining life’. During the heat of summer, he suffered not only from inflammation on his leg but also from ‘toothache, exhaustion, and fever’. Yet, even while his diet was wretched, water was hard to get, and the place he was staying at was full of flies, he continued to write. On 6 October 1933, he arrived back in Paris seriously ill and without immediate prospects for work. He had to rely on a stipend from the Institute of Social Research in New York, a dependency which permitted Adorno and Horkheimer to treat him in an increasingly highhanded, authoritarian and censorious way, as in their crushing rejection in November 1938, conveyed in a letter from Adorno, of his essay ‘The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire’. Eiland and Jennings comment that ‘Adorno’s letter plunged him into a deep, immobilizing depression—it seems he barely stirred from his apartment for weeks’. (Adorno had now emerged for Benjamin as one of life’s Betrayers.) In June 1940, now stateless, the Gestapo having revoked his German citizenship, he fled southwards from Paris with his sister Dora Benjamin. He caught up with old friends in Marseille, including Arendt and Blücher and also Krakauer (Eiland and Jennings 395, 409, 421–423, 429, 622–625, 626, 627–629, 668–672). Nonetheless, Eiland and Jennings note, his intellectual liveliness and playfulness didn’t desert him, Benjamin making a joking reference to Flaubert’s Sentimental Education while having lunch in Marseille, the name of the café being Arnoux (671–672).

Benjamin, as we sadly know, failed to secure exile in America, dying on the 26th of September 1940, in the Spanish border town of Portbou. In 1942, as the worst of news reached Hannah Arendt and Heinrich Blücher in New York of what was happening in Nazi-occupied Europe, Arendt wrote a short three-stanza poem for her dead friend, simply entitled ‘W.B.’, its final verse:

Distant voices, sadnesses nearby.
Those are the voices and these the dead
Whom we have sent as messengers
Ahead, to lead us into slumber. (Young-Bruehl 162–163)

In 1943, Arendt wrote her memorable essay ‘We Refugees’. Ned Curthoys points out that here Arendt expressed her solidarity with the stateless and refugees who, as Ulysses-wanderers, beset by depression, confusion, and crises of identity, had become the vanguard of humanity. In 1944, Curthoys continues, she wrote an essay, ‘The Jew as Pariah’, referring
to a hidden tradition of diaspora Jewry, the conscious pariah who is
full of humanity, humour and disinterested intelligence, evident in a
lineage of Jewish poets, writers, and artists. (172–173) 11 The insouciant
Baudelairean flâneurs of nineteenth century Paris had now become
vagabonds, stateless refugees, wanderers across the earth, conscious
pariahs, with their own kind of insouciance, daring, courage.

Benjamin drew strength from the abyss, from chaos, and here he might
remind us of the Prologue to Nietzsche’s *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, where
Zarathustra declares that what characterizes the Overman is that his soul
dwells in a chaos of values: ‘I tell you,’ says Zarathustra, ‘one must have
chaos in one to give birth to a dancing star’ (Nietzsche 258–259). Walter
Benjamin: the flâneur under water; the flâneur as dancing star.

**Notes**

1 See Ned Curthoys, ‘Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Narrative’, *JNT: Journal of

2 See also John Docker, ‘Sheer Folly and Derangement: How the Crusades Disori-
ented Enlightenment Historiography’, in Alexander Cook, Ned Curthoys and Shino
Konishi (eds), *Representing Humanity in the Age of Enlightenment* (Pickering and
Chatto, London, 2013), 44.

University of Michigan Press, 2015, p. 249.

4 See also John Docker and Subhash Jaireth, ‘Introduction: Benjamin and Bakhtin—

5 See also Docker and Jaireth, ‘Introduction: Benjamin and Bakhtin—Vision and
Visuality’, 4–5

6 See also Docker and Jaireth, ‘Introduction: Benjamin and Bakhtin—Vision and
Visuality’, 5

7 For an insightful postcolonial discussion of the relationship between empathy, the
late eighteenth century novel of sentiment, and nineteenth century humanitarian-
ism, see Jane Lydon, ‘H.G. Wells and a shared humanity: Photography, humani-


9 See also Vanessa Castejon, Anna Cole, Oliver Haag and Karen Hughes (eds),
*Ngapartji Ngapartji In turn, in turn: Ego-histoire, Europe and Indigenous Australia*
est-elle possible?’ by Stephen Muecke.

10 The essay ‘Naples’ was co-authored with Asja Lacis.

Works Cited


‘Well, are you going down Bourke-street tonight?’
‘Down Bourke-street? what for?’
‘What for!’ with a wide, open stare, and the most plainly expressed disgust at my verdancy, ‘for a walk, to be sure, and to see ‘Paddy’s' Market. Why everybody goes down Bourke-street of a Saturday night.’

These are the opening lines of a piece of autobiographical journalism written by Waif Wander for the *Australian Journal* in January 1869. The *Australian Journal* had been established for just four years and was still trying to increase its readership. It was a miscellany modelled on the London Journal trying to appeal to a broad range of readers as its full title suggests (the *Australian Journal: a Weekly Record of Literature, Science and the Arts*). Not only did it try to cover a wide range of topics it tried to distinguish itself from other publications by publishing works by colonial authors. By the 1870s the *Australian Journal* used ‘Colonial Literature for Colonial Readers!' as its catch-cry. It was prepared to take risks to achieve this. By this time Mary Fortune was a regular contributor of fiction using at least three different pen names: Waif Wander, M.H.F, and W.W.

Her work was obviously popular. The *Australian Journal* advertised that she was one of their writers and she wrote a number of sensational lead serials that were featured by the journal in 1866 and 1867. The first one was ‘Bertha's Legacy', followed by ‘Dora Carleton', then ‘The Secrets of Balbrooke' which was regarded by the editor as warranting full page illustrations.
THE SECRETS OF BALBROOKE
A TALE.

BY WAIF WANDER.

Author of "My Lady Jane," "The Vedged Vagabond," "Ventriloquism," "Brooke's Legacy," "Dora Cartwright," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XLVII.

Laurence was gone long before his friend rose, carrying with him Emile's box of letters, and sadly wishing he could have spared the task, which, he feared, would cloud the happiness of the poor girl. He did not yet know Emile's secret, and he hated to advise her to retire more and more the longer he had experience of her. He found her in an early hour in the parlor of Mrs. Corbett, the lady with whom she had taken up her residence, and who was, as we are aware, the sister of Mrs. Belgrave, and, consequently, a distant relation of Captain Dusbury himself.

"How glad I am to see you, dear guardian," exclaimed Emile, running to meet him: "I have been so long to see you!"

"You are not unhappy here, I trust, Emile?" inquired the captain, anxiously.

"Oh, no; far from it! I think Mrs. Corbett and I will get on famously, and the place and neighborhood is very pleasant; only I was anxious about things at The Rock, you know."

Emile's face blushed as he laid the covered box on the table, and Emile's eye caught the stain on the wrinkled commonplace in a moment.

"Is there anything wrong, dear sir?"

"I am afraid I bring you trouble, my dear Emile, but I do not make it believe me."

"Who? At all? But is anyone ill? Are the others—"

"He is quite well, Emile. All are well, yet there is trouble."

"Speak it, my dear guardian, I am not a child; and if it is a secret or death, I am a soldier's daughter."

"God bless you, girl! but there are worse things than either. It is said I must speak of. I—" I was afraid," interposed the kind-hearted officer, "that Arthur's feelings toward you are changing."

"Changing toward me?" said Emile, impulsively, but without any of the despair Lionel had feared to see; "in what respect? Has he then found some newer face more attractive?"

"Captain Dubury drew the box toward him, and unsewed it."

"Do you know this?" he inquired.

"Certainly! I left it at The Rock, and was very uneasy about it; for there are many little things to it—of no value, as they say, to anyone but the owner."

"What are its contents?" asked Lionel, gravely.

"Letters, my dear sir, and locks of hair, and a dead rose or two, and little else."

"Dear Emile, my sister discovered this box, and sent it to Arthur. He read some of these letters, and was very angry about them."

"Read my letters, sir! How dare he or any person presume to open and read my letters?"

"They were sent to him open, Emile; and I have no doubt his attention was called to them, and that his curiosity was purposely excited with regard to their contents."

"Curiosity?" said Emile, with a contumacious curl of the lip.
My personal favourite, however, will always be ‘Clyzia the Dwarf’. It was illustrated and full of exaggerated gothic scenarios.
As well as producing romantic and sensational fiction and quite a number of poems, Fortune had just started writing what would become her most famous and long lasting work: a crime series, entitled ‘The Detective's Album’. ‘The Detective’s Album’ ran from 1868 until 1908 and was still being reprinted in the 1950s long after Fortune’s death. It is regularly anthologised in modern collections of Australian crime writing or ghost stories. She was one of the earliest female detective writers in the world.

Perhaps her most interesting articles, however, are the non-fiction ones—products of her flânerie—providing urban snapshots of Melbourne written from the point of view of an unprotected woman. This seems to be a view shared by the editors of the Australian Journal. Illustrations were a new technology and only used sparingly in each issue, but 'Down Bourke Street' was accompanied by a full-page illustration highlighting the value the editors attached to the article. This article, and the other fourteen autobiographical vignettes that Fortune wrote in this period are extraordinary. A similar and equally valuable set of articles was published in the Australian Journal’s ‘Ladies' Page’ from July 1869 to February 1870. These are, I believe, also written by Fortune under the pen name of Sylphid. They have similar themes, discuss similar issues and take up key phrases that Fortune uses in her autobiographical writing. The only difference is an increased sense of authority in the works by Sylphid probably as a result of her being commissioned to write for the ‘Ladies’ Page’ rather than merely submitting articles and stories for the editor's consideration, her usual practice.¹

In writing like this she was appropriating a male-centred style of writing described as ‘panoramic’, which was the dominant form of literary endeavour in Melbourne at the time. The panorama form comprised ‘physiologies, guide books, urban ethnographies, ethnographic journalism, and light or ephemeral journal fiction (McCann 16). Panoramic writing was a masculine, privileged gaze, epitomized by the flâneur. Flâneurs were usually males of a certain class. Flânerie was a way of engaging and making sense of the city—the flâneur was an interpreter unravelling for the reading public the labyrinth of the newly developing urban spaces. Some feminist critics like Griselda Pollock and Janet Wolff suggest that the gender divisions that existed in the 19th century render the female equivalent, the flâneuse, an impossibility. The ideology of separate spheres dictated that middle-class men inhabited the public spaces and middle-class women were banished to the domestic or private space.

The reality is of course much more complex—working-class women and prostitutes were always in the public space but middle-class women were also moving around the city, either by choice or necessity. The main
THE EASTERN MARKET, MELBOURNE.

The graphic description given in the present number, by our valued contributor "Wait 'Wander," of this well-known Saturday's mart, renders the illustration on our ninth page particularly opportune. It is true that, since the artist's sketch was taken, considerable additions have been made to the market erections in the locality, including a whole row of wooden counting-houses in the foreground; and, moreover, another church has arisen in the background. Still, the general features of the market are so happily hit off, that the article "Down Bourke-street," would be incomplete without this illustration of a scene which it so truly delineates. "You must not get bewildered, or disgusted, or stunned, and feel like flying for bare life into some dark street leading away from the noisy spot. — You must do Paddy's market from one end to the other."
problem isn't that they didn't participate but that they didn't write about their participation, no doubt trying to maintain the fiction of separate spheres and preserve their respectability. The rarity of this kind of first hand exploration of a woman negotiating modern urban life makes the writing of Waif Wander (or Mary Fortune) so important.

There are three main ways females on the streets were represented in the nineteenth century. The most common was as prostitutes. Even well-dressed respectable women found on the streets by themselves risked being mistaken for the wrong type of woman. A cartoon commonly used by scholars to highlight the problem middle-class women experienced if they moved around the city unaccompanied can be found in Lynda Nead's wonderful book *Victorian Babylon* (63). It is by C. Culliford and is a coloured lithograph circa 1865 from a private collection. It depicts a well-dressed fashionable woman standing on the footpath in front of a big sign saying 'Booking Office.' A well-dressed man in a top hat and dress jacket offers her a book with some words of advice. The text underneath the cartoon is written as a dialogue. His speaking part is noted as DIVINE and hers as LADY:

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DIVINE: May I beg you to accept this good little book. Take it home and read it attentively. I am sure it will benefit you.
LADY: Bless me, Sir, you are mistaken. I am not a social evil I am only waiting for a bus.
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This image taps into the major insecurities created by the rapid urbanisation that was taking place in the nineteenth century. Deciding who was who in the social order was no longer possible and new modes of transport like omnibuses and trains gave women more freedom. Protecting chastity and controlling women became a major preoccupation. The proliferation of conduct books around this time highlights the extent of the anxiety. The problem of assessing people's social status was exacerbated in the colony, as the historian Penny Russell points out. In Melbourne (or elsewhere in the colony), strangers were indeed strangers. They were thousands of miles from anyone who could identify or reveal the 'truth' about them and it was a minimum of six months before any request for information could be responded to (Russell 10). This mutability of identity in the colonial context preoccupies Fortune's writing and she often highlights the colonial propensity for assuming new identities. In 'The Bushranger's Autobiography', her narrator observes that he doesn't 'suppose you'll find one man out of a thousand here carrying his own proper name' (*Australian Journal*, Jan. 1872: 336). The more flexible social structure of the colonies was tempered by the anxiety that this created.
In reality, servants, factory workers, agricultural workers and other working women in the colony, as in Europe, did not have the luxury of being chaperoned about the city. It was essential that they walk alone and unaccompanied to carry out their daily lives. For David Ridgeway Knight, an American artist painting in Paris towards the end of the nineteenth century, this qualified them for flânerie. He immortalised a rustic woman as a flâneuse in his painting entitled ‘La Flâneuse’ (1893). The term flâneuse did exist but it was rarely used.

In the second half of the century the advent of plate glass, shops and arcades offered places for middle-class women to stroll and observe. This was a sanctioned version of female flânerie. Even with this development, however, the range of possibilities for women to participate in flânerie according to Victorian social standards was very limited: workers, prostitutes and shoppers. The first two categories of women were the most vulnerable and easily exploited. They were in many ways voiceless and powerless. The last category, the shopper, was more affluent and at least had some economic autonomy, but could be described as frivolous and perpetuating the stereotype of women as decorations. All three categories include women who are rarely the focus of historical surveys of the development of the modern city. Often they are not included at all. It is as if they did not exist, yet they lived in the cities, moved about the cities and participated in the daily life. They are overlooked as participants of society and this suggests (falsely) that they made no contribution to the development of the modern city.

According to art historian Lynda Nead, an urban ‘subjectivity was not already in place when men and women occupied the streets of Victorian London, but was formed through the encounters, interactions and experiences of that occupation’ (1997: 167). The city and the idea of the city became important points of exploration in Victorian life and literature. The Australian colonies were not isolated from these urban changes. Like other New World societies they were subject to ‘swift population growth, ostentatious prosperity and boundless optimism’ (Proudfoot viii). The colonial cities were so new that the street interactions were even more important in the formation of an urban identity. The fact that women were outnumbered by men meant that it was harder to make an impact. If women could not participate or more importantly articulate their participation in urban life their role in the day-to-day formation of the modern urban city could go unacknowledged.

Mary Fortune refused to be defined by any of those labels (working woman, prostitute or shopper), although all of them may have applied, and published vignettes in the periodical press about her trials and
tribulations as an unprotected woman in the modern city of Melbourne. In the first of her autobiographical vignettes, ‘Fourteen Days on the Roads’ published on 28 November 1868, she describes spending a fortnight in an ox-cart, travelling from country Victoria to Melbourne. The story is both informative and amusing as she uses sarcasm and irony to critique the male dominated world she is passing through:

Accustomed to be considered a thing of some little consequence as a sentient being of the weaker sex, it was of material benefit to me to discover that, in the eyes of the carriers and their drivers, my comfort was not of any comparative value with the due and convenient adjustment of a loose keg or angular case. (218)

And her revenge on the ‘men of the road’ is to point out at the end of the story that:

There was one other man who, when carriers were numerous, tried to boil the woman's billy, and get her tea up to her elevated roost where she waited, tired and parched with thirst—one other beside Ben, and (pull your hats a little more over your faces, men of the ‘Road’) that man was a Chinaman! (221)

Given the rampant racism that existed against the Chinese during the gold rush this was condemnation indeed.

Fortune, writing as Waif Wander, is travelling alone. This is presented as a matter of fact and there is no consideration of whether this may be unusual or improper. This journey becomes the foundation of her status as an urban observer. She establishes herself as an impecunious but respectable woman, an experienced colonist and a woman unafraid to be critical of the ruling hierarchy. She describes metropolitan Melbourne in a fresh new way.

Fortune's pseudonyms provided her with the anonymity of the flâneur—she could wander around Melbourne and blend in with the crowd but remain an independent observer. The periodical press at this time in colonial history was known for its instability and spectacular failure rate. Editors were always on the lookout for new and interesting articles that would capture the imagination of the reading public. The rapid rate of change experienced by metropolitan centres, and in particular Melbourne, during this period of time meant that the reading public wanted to read articles that reflected their own experience of the
city. They wanted to unravel the mysteries of the development of the modern city (Richards 149–50). The figure of the flâneur, originally associated particularly with Paris, was adopted by other metropolitan centres like London. Writers like Dickens, Thackeray and Augustus Sala turned flânerie into an art-form that became the basis of panoramic literature. Not surprisingly, having a population derived from European centres, it was soon a popular form of journalism in the colonies and in Melbourne in particular. Melbourne was a city paved with gold. The wealth generated by the gold rush and the resulting increase in population meant the rate of expansion of the city was extraordinary. It went from being a city marked by a few tents in 1837 to a bustling metropolis filled with grand buildings, trams and rampant capitalism in less than fifty years. The International Exhibition held in 1880 trumpeted Melbourne’s success.

So who was Mary Fortune, the woman audacious enough to think she could write about Melbourne and challenge male authors? We know quite a lot about her thanks to Lucy Sussex’s clever detective work. Her biography is more sensational than the crime fiction she specialized in. According to Sussex, she was born in Belfast in 1833. Her mother died and she emigrated to Canada with her father. In 1851 she married a Quebec surveyor named Joseph Fortune and they had one son, whom they also named Joseph. Mary Fortune’s father then emigrated to Australia in search of gold, and Mary and her son Joseph Junior joined him in 1855. There are no records of her divorcing Joseph Fortune or of his coming to Australia—he died in Quebec in 1861. Fortune gave birth to another son in the goldfields but, although she names Joseph Fortune as the father on the birth certificate, the date the child was born makes this impossible. The legitimate child of Joseph Fortune died in the goldfields but the illegitimate one survived and in an ironic twist he became a habitual petty criminal. Fortune also married a mounted policeman while living in the goldfields. If she did not divorce Joseph Fortune, as the records suggest, she must have committed bigamy. There is no record of her divorcing the mounted policeman either and he later married someone else. It is not surprising that her crime fiction was so popular. Her life experience gives it a ring of authenticity. She was, however, hardly an example of ideal womanhood, and this was probably the reason behind the multiple pen names she used. She lived a hand-to-mouth existence, was well acquainted with the police, may have spent time in gaol for drunkenness and wound up with failing eyesight and an alcohol problem. On March 25 1898 an article in Table Talk (a well known journal in Melbourne) described her as ‘the only truly Bohemian lady writer who has ever earned
a living by her pen in Australia.’ (3) This description seems particularly apt and despite considerable research we still have no idea where or when she died or where she is buried.

Trove—the National Library’s digital newspaper database—has opened up avenues of new information. We assumed that she was only known by her pseudonyms and that her identity had not been revealed while she was alive, but it seems that this was only partially true. The *Bendigo Advertiser* on January 15 1869, in a review of *The Australian Annual* published by WH Williams, discusses the story by Waif Wander with Mrs Fortune then appearing in brackets. However Henry Mitchell, described as ‘a gentleman popular in the literary world’, pointed out in an article published in the *Australian Journal* in May 1880 that her ‘very name is shrouded in mystery’, as ‘no one knows who she is or where she lives.’ (‘A Well-Known Contributor’ 487) In general, Fortune’s identity remained a mystery until the mid 1950s when an avid book collector named JK Moir partially uncovered her identity. So despite occasional links of association it seems she attempted to cling to her anonymity.

We also thought her work was mostly confined to the *Australian Journal* with a few pieces published here and there in other journals in the colony of Victoria. We now know that her stories were probably syndicated and published all over Australia, including in Western Australia. The list is by no means the complete bibliography but it gives you an idea of the range of distribution of her writing as Waif Wander:

*The Williamstown Chronicle*  
*The Inquirer and Commercial News (Perth)*  
*Kalgoorlie Miner*  
*Nepean Times*  
*Singleton Argus*  
*Gympie Times and Mary River Mining Gazette*  
*Port Adelaide News & Lefevre’s Peninsula Advertiser*  
*North Eastern Ensign Benalla*  
*Northern Territory Times & Gazette*  
*Northern Argus (SA)*  
*Border Watch Mount Gambier*  
*Warwick Argus*  
*Australian Town and Country*  
*Kapunda Herald*  
*Queensland Times & Ipswich Herald & General Advertiser*  
*Hawkesbury Chronicle & Farmers Advocate*  
*Darling Downs Gazette*
The majority of her writing, however, was written under the initials ‘W.W.’, and as you can imagine it is very difficult to search for initials in an online search engine. There must be many more of her stories published around the country that we are yet to discover. Additionally not all of the newspapers, including the *Australian Journal* are digitized on Trove. Knowing the extent of the syndication of her writing makes the poor pay and exploitation that she experienced seem even more tragic.

On a lighter note, there was a well-known racehorse named Waif Wander—which, as we know from the Mount Alexander Mail, was procured by a local Mayor for his Excellency the Governor’s mount during the trip through Harcourt and Chewton in 1890 (*Mount Alexander Mail* Thursday 9 October 1890, 2). In addition there was also a racing greyhound of the same name. Her writing was published over a broad geographical area and her name became part of the cultural landscape in ways that we could not have imagined. In fact, her poem ‘Our Wattle Blossom’ was chosen as the set piece for the West Australian Elocution Contest Recitation for boys and girls under eighteen in 1934.

Having this kind of life experience and, as her writing clearly shows, no male protection, Fortune relied on her journalism for her living. Her stories ‘My Advertisement’ and the ‘Spider and the Fly’ paint a desolate vision of the available employment options. Her amusing descriptions of the predatory spider interviewing women for the position of fly—or I should say housekeeper—and the bizarre and improper replies she gets to her advertisement offering her education or housekeeping services for hire are very revealing. One of her potential employment offers includes a gentleman wanting her to housekeep for his snakes. While this may be an embellishment for the sake of humour I’m sure that the symbolism is intended and it highlights a serious problem faced by women in the nineteenth century. Her article concludes that journalism is the lesser evil. With an eye to the market and a quirky style she sallies forth to narrate Melbourne for the readers of the *Australian Journal*.

Because the writing of a flâneur is so personal, and as Baudelaire points out, an expression of the truest self, selling it is like prostituting yourself (Wilson 55). Audacious as she may be, this tension is always apparent in Fortune’s urban anecdotes. She cannot discuss opium dens or directly describe streetwalkers, so her rewriting of Augustus Sala’s * Twice Round*
the Clock entitled ‘Key of the Street’ is written as a dream sequence and in a male voice and her criticisms of Marcus Clarke’s description of Melbourne are limited in their scope. She does maintain essential elements of flânerie, however, such as elevating the status of the lowly. In ‘What Passed’ she exhorts the people of Melbourne to do more:

Public of Melbourne. I wish I might venture to say one or two words to you about these poor strays and waifs in the world of rags and bones and bottles. If they are thieves—some of them—who made them so? (347)

According to Walter Benjamin

‘poets find the refuse of society on their street and derive their heroic subject from this very refuse. This means that a common type is, as it were, superimposed upon their illustrious type. … Ragpicker or poet—the refuse concerns both. (48)

In ‘Looking for Lodging’ Fortune takes this a step further, she is so demoralised by the process of trying to find a respectable place to live, she outrageously sits in the gutter wishing she was a zinc, iron and bottle man.

According to Baudelaire, flâneurs were driven from the private into the public and this certainly describes Fortune. Her happiest memories are those of living outside of domesticity. In her memoir ‘Twenty-six years ago; or the Diggings of 55’ she describes in detail the mobile urban centres of the goldfields. Life was lived in close range and in translucent tents that negated the idea of privacy. She describes her joy at being beyond the domestic. ‘I was never allowed to interfere with the cooking in any shape or form’ (April 1883: 447). She also relished the experiences of ‘campings out’ [sic] particularly the ‘cool and pleasant’ evenings, the ‘dewy’ nights and the ‘strange delight’ she drew from turning her back on the material comforts of city life. Life without conveniences is compensated for by the opportunity:

To lounge on rugs under the canopy of pale heaven, broken only by the spreading branches of rustling trees; to see the gleaming of creek or dark water-hole in its denser shadows of bush and bank; to hear the bullock bells ‘tinkle tinkling,’ as the grateful beasts cropped the grass for acres around our temporary shelters; and listen to the sighing or rustle of leaves above us was a pleasant thing, and every puff of sweet night air brings the remembrance to me still. (February 1882: 339)
When she arrives back in Melbourne she takes her powers of observation, her unconventional ideas and her need to escape the domestic into the burgeoning city that has changed so much since she first set foot there in 1855. Like Baudelaire's flâneur, she uses her journalistic/detective skills to discover the city anew. She applies her skills at the same time to create a convincing fictional male detective who then continues to exist for forty years.

Despite the limitations imposed by being a female journalist she still writes about the streets and clearly responds to the version of the city that the male panoramic writers attempt to create. ‘Down Bourke Street’ is a good example. The very first issue of the *Australian Journal* (2 Sept. 1865) featured ‘Our Southern Thoroughfares’, a panoramic survey of Bourke Street by Thomas Harrison (1827–97) writing as ‘Robin Goodfellow’. Bourke Street, Melbourne, became an exemplar for urban literary explorations. It was in Goodfellow's words a ‘representative thoroughfare’ enjoying ‘this character in common with but few others, either here or elsewhere’ (2 September 1865: 11); a view that Fortune reiterates: ‘I cannot at this moment recall to recollection a more noble-looking and beautiful street among the many noble and beautiful streets it has been my wandering fate to see’ (‘Down Bourke Street’ 330).

All of Fortune's urban vignettes claim a space for women in the emerging modern city regardless of their status and ‘Down Bourke Street’ celebrates that inclusion. In Clarke's panoramic exploration of Bourke Street, he sarcastically refers to it as ‘Arcadia’. He tends to ignore the beauty and colour of the market, to focus instead on the illicit relationships and the subterfuge that working girls use to walk down Bourke Street. He makes reference to a girl carrying a Bible but not attending Church. Conversely, Fortune's flâneuse narrator acknowledges and makes passing critical comments about the behaviour of some of the girls in Bourke Street but it is not her focus. They are but an aspect of an interactive street scene. While Clarke eroticises and makes sarcastic reference to sewing-girls who he knows ‘from their own lips’ are ‘models of propriety’ (Clarke, *The Peripatetic* 64), Fortune is more interested in sketching the frailties of those street preachers who condemn them. She describes one of the preachers as performing a ‘sing-song desecration of the subject on which he pretends to discourse’ and comparing him to the scandalous Lola Montez (‘Down Bourke Street’ 333). She turns Clarke's critique upside down. Bourke Street was often mentioned in the police reports published in the newspapers. Any contemporary discussion of Bourke Street would have carried with it these associations. By weaving the prostitutes matter-of-factly into the fabric of her story and framing
her reference to them into a rhetorical question, Fortune acknowledges them but comments no further: ‘Are you not overpowered by the bewildering charms of these bedizened women, and oppressed by the loud, vulgar laugh, and—the smell of stale, inferior eau de cologne?’ (331).

Fortune’s flâneuse celebrates both the energy and the transient nature of the crowd while acknowledging the fear it inspires. Fortune’s description of Paddy’s Market in Bourke Street is a glowing depiction of the bustling metropolis, with its crowds, noise and ‘brilliant spectacle’ (‘Down Bourke Street’ 330).³ While she describes the night-time markets, the architectural structure that defines the market place is also illustrated. Fortune’s flâneuse describes in detail ‘the attractive windows’ and ‘brilliant sea of plate glass’ (‘Down Bourke Street’ 330) that were symbols of the advent of the modern city in the nineteenth century. Into this very modern vision she places a wide selection of female participants, alongside an equally varied collection of males:

Little girls—growing girls—full grown girls and women—old and young. Pups of boys and fops of men—tall and short—young and old. Fat and lean; rich and poor. Flaunting in all the colours of a lighted prism, or hanging in dirty tatters of no colour; all bodies moving and talking, and all going down Bourke-street. (‘Down Bourke Street’ 330)

Even in colonial Melbourne the crowd included women of all classes, but for Fortune this was cause for celebration, not censure. The poetic rhythm that Fortune uses to reinforce the relentless flowing motion of the crowd mimics the spruikers selling their wares. She may be wary of the pickpockets, less than impressed with the potato and saveloy machine and overwhelmed at times, but like the excited advertisements encouraging shoppers to buy, Fortune’s flâneuse advertises the crowd and evokes the pleasure of being part of it.

Taking the opportunity to explore some of Fortune’s vignettes is a worthwhile endeavour. They are available in a book entitled The Fortunes of Mary Fortune, sadly now out of print. An occasional story is available on the internet and anthologies of crime or ghost fiction. Whether or not one finds them to be of great literary merit, the social and historical significance of this extraordinary flâneuse, providing a challenging female perspective on the rapidly changing colonial society, is unmistakable. Failing that, there is a wine bar in Melbourne named the Mary Fortune where the cocktails are named after her stories. It sells food she never could have afforded and alcohol she should have avoided.
Notes


2. Lola Montez was a notorious entertainer who toured the colonies in 1855 and 1856. She attracted controversy everywhere she went. When her performance of her political intrigue in Bavaria failed to impress colonial audiences, she performed her famous ‘Spider Dance.’ For more information on her remarkable life, see Michael Cannon, ‘Lola Montez (1818–1861)’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography Online*, at: http://adbonline.anu.edu.au/biogs/A050313b.htm?hilite=lola%3Bmontez.

3. Andrew McCann refers to it as ‘wonderfully hyperbolical’, *Marcus Clarke’s Bohemia*, p. 80.

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Kitchen Meeting

The fluorescent light globes
bleach our faces, insects flock
to this simulacra of moon;
beat against the fly screen
with clattering percussion.

Frogs *click* and *bonk, bonk*
adding their voices to our agenda;
fundraising, lobbying, rallies;
our plans to save the swamp.

The report claims that the highway design
will improve upon nature and we hold
our meetings week after week,
trying to comprehend
that there could be better ideas
than water and algae, and tadpoles
that can shape shift into frogs.

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At the Office of the EPA

Where we stood to throw our heads back to the sky, dark blue lines run into the ground, ancient water rises, percolates and subsides.

On a map of the future, a tannin stain spreads across pages left intentionally blank. After the assessments, appendices, the review; the ngoorlark arrives to alight upon nothing.

The table we are invited to bows under piles of reports. Inside the pages, swamp harriers scope and plunge into reed beds; quendas snuffle amongst sheoak tendrils;

bansksia cones bloom and shrivel, as we turn the pages and watch tiny specks turn into pelicans spinning in their gyres, gliding in to land like sea planes upon the lake.

We stand with our feet in the mud, as the scrub roller bites into the littoral zone breaking our carapaces open.
The Appeal

The hydrologist fears that he will lose his job so we find ourselves meeting clandestinely in an anonymous café where he uses the napkins, salt, and sugar to demonstrate how water flows through different geological formations.

We have come from our homes, from our children and our poems, and we follow the flow of ideas from his fingers to the bench, which is the Swan Coastal Plain.

The cup of coffee, moving like a chess piece between the salt and pepper, is the water table, the bottled water becomes highway pylons interrupting the flow.

We watch as the water rises spilling over notebooks, into our laps, onto the floor and out into the street, where the afternoon sun sucks it up; where the pavement hisses and burns.
Ngoorlark (Carnaby's cockatoo)

Early in the morning
a mob of ngoorlarks
have taken over Adventure World.
Having no tickets, they flap over the fence
and sit like black sentinels’
patrolling the perimeter.

They screech over Skull Rock,
following the trajectory of the SkyLift;
a portal between the Enchanted Land
of Dragons Kingdom and the Oceans of Nautica;
they hurl themselves from the FreeFall
fifty two metres into sky;
note the sensational view of the coast
before whooping and wefting through the Abyss
at high speed Gforce 1.5, complete
four inversions and an inline loop.

They hit the lagoon for a leisurely drink,
splash guano and feathers on the Luxury Cabana,
then in groups of three they take off,
spinning higher than the rusting bungee tower,
above KRAKEN the scariest slide in Australia,
to alight in flowering marri canopies,
cracking open seed pods
and insolently tossing
the empty cases to the ground.
Every Sunday

we meet at the lake;  
walk the liminal as the water levels  
rise and fall, birds arrive and depart,  
and turtles bury themselves in the thick  
black meat of the lake bed.

Never able to reach that quaking centre,  
we can only stand and gaze across  
to where the other side  
is being woven by spiders;

hatched, caught, and repurposed;  
*water mud water mud*  
reincarnated in the form of a frog  
born already singing.
The Law

So this is it:
60 or so of us standing in the road.
The riot squad are yelling MOVE, MOVE

but my feet have become stones cemented into the tarmac.
Someone grabs my hand and the police horse
staggers into my shoulder,

her sweat and fear smell like my own,
pulse galloping around the field of my body
charging and kicking at fences.

When the drilling rig enters the wetlands
surrounded by officers with tasers and guns.
the horse’s legs and chest push

into my spine causing me
to trip, stand, fall, stumble,
the swamp clicks and sighs;

the Siberian birds wade into the centre,
their beaks piercing the lake’s membrane,
their law trembling in the mud.
Offset

Outside the scout bird circles and wee-loo’s calling in the mob to roost.

The consultant’s cheeks redden, when he points out the impact area shaded in khaki. The offsets dotted in dark purple colonise the margins of the page,

a yellow paddock dusty with velt grass where our walking is stained

with pollen and mud and years. We turn the map around, rustle

uncomfortably in plastic chairs, examine the colour palette key,

the net loss and gain while on the other side of the window the sky darkens,

the black birds seek roost trees as their flight path is erased from the sky.
The Swamp

When the first rains have percolated through sand and stone, sponge and bone, and the frogs

have hatched from their tombs of mud and are singing in the sedge grass; turn to look east where the bleached limbs of melaleucas make ghosts of time;

suburbs fall away and we forget our urgent imperatives; our feet sink into the lakes edge giddy with the sky's reflection,

dugite curled up around its appetite, I can't wait to see you on the edge of winter when the earth is regurgitated as water.

Note

1 The title 'A Place of Many Skins' was created by Holly Story.
Preface

The problems of a sprawling city model

The arguments for halting outer suburban development¹ and redirecting urban development to existing urban areas are numerous and well-worn. Outer suburban commuters are faced with increasing congestion and typically long travel times (Kelly and Donegan 1). Due to a paucity of public transport options, outer suburban residents can be forced into high rates of car ownership, which in turn makes them vulnerable to
projected rises in fuel prices (Dodson and Sipe 37)—particularly given outer suburban residents tend to be blue-collar workers, often carrying substantial mortgages (Committee for Perth). Considering such issues, and Perth’s thinly spread suburban form, researchers Peter Newman, Timothy Beatley and Heather Boyer speculate that Perth’s outer suburbs could descend into suburban ghettos in a fossil fuel-constrained future (Newman, Beatley and Boyer). While such predictions can sound alarmist, it could take only a significant spike in fuel prices to make many of Perth’s outer suburbs unviable from a transport perspective alone (Dodson and Sipe). Put simply, beneath Perth’s Arcadian sprawl lie vulnerabilities—to fuel price increases and mortgage defaults as well as emerging water and basic raw material shortages (ARUP and Curtin University Sustainability Policy Institute 23)—which may in time be exposed by evolving economic, environmental or climatic challenges.

Outer suburban growth and its issues are evident in most suburban cities to various degrees, yet Perth is situated in the South West Australian biodiversity hotspot. This hotspot is an abnormally biodiverse area, which has only 7% of its original vegetation remaining (South West Australia Ecoregion Initiative 17). In the Perth metropolitan region this ongoing clearing is primarily due to suburban development (Ramalho et al. 143)—a situation which reflects the wretchedly unproductive nature of the soils, and in turn its failure to be cultivated for agriculture. As a result of this situation, between 2001 and 2009, an annual average of 851 hectares of highly biodiverse land on the urban fringe was consumed by suburban sprawl (WWF).

To mitigate such issues, the Western Australian state government in 2010 set a target that forty-seven per cent of all new residential development in Perth be urban infill development. While this is the most humble target of all Australian capital cities, Perth is currently delivering about 37% infill development, meaning that 63% of development is stretching Perth’s urban footprint. If Perth’s proclivity for space consuming outer suburban growth continues, and if Perth reaches its 2061 population projection of 6.6 million people (Australian Bureau of Statistics ‘Population Projections, Australia, 2006 to 2101’), its suburban area will balloon dramatically—a situation that could lead to calamitous societal and environmental issues.

The sale of public land

At the same time as suburban expansion is appearing unaffordable from a biodiversity and basic raw material perspective, the Western Australian
state government is also becoming increasingly debt-laden. With a plunging iron ore price and declining tax revenues symptomatic of the end of Western Australia's mining boom, the Mid-Year Economic Review in December predicted a deficit of $1.29 billion this year (in Andrew O'Connor). Reflecting this, it is predicted state debt will reach $28 billion in 2015–16, a high figure compared to the state debt of $3.6 billion in 2008—the year the current conservative government assumed power (in Andrew O'Connor). As a result of this deteriorating debt situation, in June of last year Lands Minister Terry Redman publicly welcomed unsolicited bids for publicly owned land and buildings in Western Australia (Andrew O'Connor). As he explained:

We are bringing forward an unsolicited bid process whereby someone in the private sector might be able to identify something that's crown land, or owned by government, and has an innovative or unique way of bringing that to market... If they can do that, and it meets government policy, and of course there's a broader public good outcome we can identify, then they, through a Cabinet process, might get some sort of priority access to that (Andrew O'Connor).

Much of this land hasn't previously been considered for infill development because it is considered too controversial (owing in part to its public ownership). Indeed the controversy which swirls around the development of public land can be traced back to Perth's European settlement. Governor Stirling made the decision to reserve a large open space between the city and the adjacent Swan River reflecting his intention that Perth was to be an administrative (not industrial or port) centre, a situation which was to free up Perth's foreshore for recreational pursuits. During Stirling's absence in 1834, however, this open space was subdivided by John Septimus Roe, the first surveyor general of Perth (Seddon and Ravine 99). This ultimately denied the public what would have in time become a charming river foreshore park. As a result of both this decision, and rampant land speculation occurring more generally, in 1867 Karl Marx went as far as to cite the Swan River colony as a prime example of ‘the shortcomings of capitalism' (in Davis 20).

More recent controversy around the development of public land in Perth also stems from Perth's typically suburban identity.

An affection for Perth's open, landscape quality is held dear by many residents. This sentiment is habitually expressed by travellers returning to Perth: ‘Nice to visit', they say, of Sydney or San Francisco or Florence, ‘but I wouldn't really want to live there' (Seddon and Ravine 33). As an
online commentator on a recent news article on urban infill in Perth explains: ‘When I visit those big cities I am happy to come home to our wide open spaces. Why do so many people want to live in Perth? Not for cramped concrete living condition like those cities, it’s for the parks, the open space and being able to see the sky’ (in Law). Perth’s identity, and perceived livability, is linked by many to its bountiful reserves of both private and public open space.

**Existing approaches to achieving infill in Perth**

Perhaps due to the prevalence of such views the issue of state debt, generous reserves of public land, and the pressing need to meet urban infill development targets are not generally linked in public debates around state debt or urban infill development in Perth.

Currently state government planning documents correlate medium to high-density infill development with public transport nodes (generally train stations) and commercial hubs (generally large format shopping centres) in ‘Activity Centres.’ The land within Activity Centres in Perth is generally held in fragmented private ownership. The difficulty of assembling sites has acted as a significant constraint on development—as
Rowley and Phibbs explain, ‘often it is just too difficult and costly to amalgamate a number of small, fragmented sites’ (39). Perhaps as a result, and despite Activity Centres being an official state planning policy since 2005, there has been little urban infill development in Perth’s Suburban core Activity Centres to date.4

While Activity Centres are the flagships of the state government infill strategy, a substantial percentage of urban infill development is being delivered through the ad hoc subdivision of privately owned suburban backyards. This form of infill development is referred to as ad hoc subdivision or ‘background’ infill—namely small urban infill projects yielding fewer than five semi-detached group dwellings (Department of Planning and Western Australian Planning Commission 107), typically arranged around a communal driveway. The popularity of background infill development is proved by Perth’s Urban Growth Monitor—between 2011 and 2012, background infill accounted for almost one quarter of all the infill dwellings constructed in that period (Department of Planning and Western Australian Planning Commission 113). The diffusion of background infill development results from the political structure by which infill development is delivered. In this structure, the state government sets infill targets for local government areas to ‘strive’ for, yet local councils take on the responsibility of local infill development planning (Dovey and Woodcock 68). As local governments are often ‘elected to enforce the anti-development views of their residents’, they tend to dissipate urban infill development in a form which is least antagonistic from the perspective of existing residents (i.e. in a dispersed low density fashion) (Dovey and Woodcock 68). Despite its fairly uncontentious nature, background infill has been associated with declining urban forest cover (Brunner and Cozens 232), threats to biodiversity (Brunner and Cozens 250), reduced private open space amenity, and a lack of cultural amenity to which tends to occur with higher density urban infill development.

A complementary approach for achieving infill

Given the issues of both Activity Centres and background infill, this paper offers a complementary process—which could add to the diversity of strategies being pursued to achieve urban infill development. This process comprises a systematic analysis of the non-urbanised,5 local, state or federal government owned and controlled landscapes in Perth’s Suburban core, the central region where most of Perth’s urban infill development is projected to occur (Department of Planning and Western
Fig 2: Arguably background infill, such as that pictured, delivers the worst of all worlds—being neither spacious enough to be a leafy, liveable suburb, and not dense enough to generate real cultural amenity.

Fig 3: Perth Suburban core—public land. Mapping analysis reveals that 58% of Perth’s Suburban core is in some form of public ownership (shown in black). This land has yet to be systematically considered from an urban infill development perspective.
Australian Planning Commission). Public land amounts to a surprisingly large 58% of the suburban core's total area—meaning that its potential contribution to meeting urban infill development targets could be substantial.

Extending the idea of ‘greyfield audits’ developed in the United States of America (Dunham-Jones xv), the non-urbanised public landscape types that will be audited include freeway reserves, car parks, parks, golf courses and river foreshores. Others exist, such as coastal foreshores, military land, airport land, universities, schools, and easements however they are, for the sake of brevity, outside of the scope of this paper. As part of the audit, the suburban core’s public landscapes will be mapped to determine their spatial provision per population. Following on from this will be an assessment of whether the landscape is potentially oversupplied and could form a site for future urban infill development. Finally relevant case study projects will be introduced which reveal the types of development processes and spatial form which could be deployed in these sites.

In their inaugural 1955 plan for Perth, planners Gordon Stephenson and Alistair Hepburn made a far-sighted statement about the Perth’s open space provision:

*If it is found in the future that demands have been over-estimated, it is far simpler to free areas for development than to embark on the expensive and inadequate policies forced on communities where a narrow and meaner view had been taken.*

*(Stephenson and Hepburn 89)*

While the development of public land does lessen future flexibility, as Stephenson and Hepburn correctly state, we contend that given 60 years have now elapsed we should, at least, assess whether Perth’s non-urbanised landscapes have indeed been over-estimated and could be rationalised to aid in meeting infill targets and lessening state debt. This assessment is set out in relation to two main landscape types: landscapes of transportation and landscapes of recreation.

**Landscapes of transportation**

*Carparks*

Perth has had a love affair with the car since its arrival in 1894, which has seen constant annual growth—bar two periods, the Great Depression and World War II (Forster; Australian Bureau of Statistics ‘9309.0—Motor Vehicle Census’). After World War II, car ownership increased
particularly rapidly. This was a result of widespread increases in wealth, the status of the car as a symbol of technological progress, and finally the freedom offered by the car in terms of the ability to live further from the city (McManus). This increase in popularity altered the development pattern of Perth from a star-shaped public transport city with its ‘arms’ of residential development extending along the tram and rail tracks radiating from the city centre, and transformed into a car-centric development pattern as the car became the main mode of transport in the latter half of the twentieth century (Forster). By 2014, motor vehicle registrations for Western Australia were recorded at 2,142,307 with a population of 2,573,400, equating to 0.8 vehicles per person, a high figure which is reflected in the fact that 84% of Western Australian’s use private vehicles to get to work or education facilities (Australian Bureau of Statistics ‘9309.0—Motor Vehicle Census’; Brown).

In 2009, the number of off-street parking spaces in the Perth metropolitan region comprised 2.4 million car bays, which equates to 6000 hectares of land devoted to parking, or the equivalent of a staggering 3,821 Western Australian Cricket Association (WACA) ovals. To our calculation, Perth’s suburban core has almost 2,300 hectares (1,464 WACA ovals) swathed in carparks. Not surprisingly given these figures, car parking is oversupplied in certain areas or it is only fully utilized at certain peak times. This occurs where parking has been constructed to accommodate peak use, which may be certain times of the day, weekends, or a significant event during the year (such as Christmas shopping) (Cardno).

Many of the public carparks in Perth are found in high amenity situations adjacent to river and coastal foreshores or parkland, or are well-connected to transit being near train stations.

Given this generally ideal situation, how could public carparks be partly redeveloped to provide both urban infill dwellings and rationalized car parking? There are a number of potential approaches to redeveloping public carparks. At one extreme, where a carpark is sufficiently underutilized, it be can be dispensed with and totally redeveloped for urban infill. A less drastic approach is to consolidate parking into a multi-story carpark and develop the remaining site area. This approach has been successfully pursued by the City of Perth in their Key City Workers housing project in East Perth (Mirghani). Alternatively, the air space above publicly-owned carparks can be ‘developed’. The Kyme Place project in Melbourne illustrates this approach. This project involved the construction of a 27-unit rooming house project in the air space above a City of Port Phillip car park on a single block.
Fig 4: Perth Suburban core—carparks. This map shows typically public carparks adjacent to train stations and along river/coastal foreshore.

Fig 5: The Kyme Place project in Melbourne saw the redevelopment of a City of Port Phillip public car park for a ‘rooming house’—of the original 33 car bays, 22 were able to be retained.
Despite the development yielding 22 dwellings, two-thirds of the car bays were able to be retained (City of Port Phillip). While the project was heavily opposed by members of the local community and neighbors of the site (a total of 52 objections was received by the City of Port Phillip), notably the main community concern was the type of tenants the rooming house may attract, the community feared drug users, derelicts and homeless people would be the main tenants (Spivak)—as well as some issues related to car parking provision, height, and built form.

This type of development could be undertaken in the air space above Perth’s public car parks, and could be similarly directed towards affordable housing provision which is much needed in Perth (Rowley and Phibbs). While such dwellings would not be able to provide the current state government specified car parking requirements of one bay per dwelling (West Australian Planning Commission and Department of Planning), this paucity of parking could be partly offset by access to public transport (in some cases), car share and moped parking.

Freeway reserves

Freeway reserves in Perth’s suburban core amount to 1,633 hectares in area (or an area equivalent of 1040 WACA ovals).

![Fig 6: Perth Suburban core—freeway reserves. Perth’s freeways tend to take up a lot of space because they were also originally conceived as scenic parkways that would connect major elements in Perth’s open space system.](image)
The development of freeways in Perth was partly a response to appalling road accident statistics. In 1952, twenty-eight people per 100,000 were being killed in traffic accidents, 150 per cent more than even Sydney, which has been long known for its sclerotic road system (Stephenson and Hepburn 111). Following on from the construction of an extensive motorway system in Britain, it was proposed that Perth also needed freeways if road transport was to be accomplished without ‘undue risk of accident’ (Stephenson and Hepburn 108). Cutting a freeway off from the hindrances (and dangers) of adjoining roads tended to result in large areas of leftover land on either side of the freeway. Beyond such pragmatic factors, freeways in Perth were also conceptualized as scenic parkways which would connect major elements in Perth’s open space system (Stephenson and Hepburn 99)—reflecting Gordon Stephenson’s tutelage under the Garden City planner Patrick Abercrombie.

Given the generosity of space surrounding Perth’s freeways, they hold some potential to accommodate urban infill dwellings. A mapping analysis of freeway reserves for land parcels of sufficient size and proportion reveals roughly a one-fifth of freeway reserves are feasible for development—feasibility also constituting the sites being in close proximity to amenity, such as the city centre or Swan River. The ‘distinguished’ ‘Halo on Mount’ apartments, a nine-level residential building straddling the freeway adjacent to the city which has sold well, indicates that some buyers are willing to make this trade-off between freeway living and access to amenities. Furthermore, the redevelopment of some of Perth’s freeway reserves could bring residents within walking distance of the train line which runs down the center of the Mitchell and Kwinana freeways—a train line which is otherwise marooned within a vast, uninhabited freeway reserve.

The example of the partially trenched Ronda De Dalt ‘Gran Via’ freeway section in Barcelona illustrates how a freeway can be woven into the urban fabric of the city, providing for transport (public and private), housing, amenity and recreation.

The livability of the Gran Via section of the Ronda de Dalt is enabled through the design of the transport infrastructure. The design allocates faster moving regional traffic to the inner six lanes of the road which are trenched and framed by sound walls, leaving the two outer lanes for slower moving local traffic (Waldheim 147). The slower lanes allow vehicular traffic to be reconnected to street frontages, public spaces and amenities, and to run adjacent to bike paths. The buildings that occur adjacent to the motorway are of medium to high density and provide the convenience of highway and public transport access (underground
The concentration of residential buildings alongside the Ronda de Dalt also generates the need for community facilities and amenities, which now surround the highway as a response to the increased density of dwellings in the area. These include tertiary institutions, bars, restaurants, green spaces and medical facilities.

While the example of the Ronda de Dalt is unlikely to be able to be directly applied to long sections of Perth's Suburban core freeways—given the formidable cost of re-organizing and trenching the existing freeway—the tangled freeway interchange adjacent to Perth's center hold easier won infill development opportunities which could apply the Gran Via's aspirations for greater multi-functionality.

**Landscapes of recreation**

There is a large amount of land set aside for public recreation in Perth's Suburban core, including parks, regional open space (typically bushland), golf courses, river foreshores, coastal foreshores and school grounds. This section, for the sake of brevity will discuss parks, golf courses and foreshore reserves—the land uses which have arguably the greatest role to play from an urban infill development perspective.
Parks

Owing to generous, historical standards Perth has a substantial area reserved for parks. Indeed Perth’s suburban core contains 3,181 hectares of parks (equal to 2,026 WACA ovals) or the equivalent of 40m² of park area per person.

This figure is generous when compared to other cities and the generally accepted Australian standard, which is suburban in nature, of 28m² (Searle 204). Some Local Government Areas have much more. Indeed the City of Stirling in the northern part of the Suburban core which has 75m² (City of Stirling), almost three times the ‘Australian standard’. Perhaps by virtue of this generosity, this ubiquitous element of Perth’s suburban landscape is swathed with turf, sometimes having only scattered mature trees. Reflecting this, among the parks in Perth’s Suburban core, one-quarter have no trees, only one-tenth have significant wildlife function, and only one-hundredth have wetlands (despite the prevalence of wetlands prior to European invasion). Furthermore, three-quarters of parks have a ubiquitous underlay of irrigated turf poorly adapted to Perth’s drying climate (Centre for the Built Environment and Health).10 As
a result of this barren environment, Perth’s Suburban core parks arguably are limited as to ecosystem services\textsuperscript{11} provided and at the same time consume increasingly valuable fresh water, fertiliser and energy.

![Fig 9: The typically barren Hillcrest Park in Bayswater.](image)

This typically barren environment reflects the fact that the local governments that are responsible for both equipping and maintaining parks often do not have the revenue base for the design and upkeep of more elaborate schemes—as population densities are not high enough in relation to open space areas. With a park system that is, in some instances, extremely generous and of a low standard, local government could reflect on what could be rationalised to yield infill dwellings and how the funds generated by this sale of public land could be funneled back into upgrading the parks themselves to provide world-class ecological, recreational and social function. This proposal does not represent an ideological bias against suburban open space and all the important ecosystem services it can provide to a densifying city (Bolund and Hunhammar)—just that an absolute argument which says open space (regardless of its quantity/quality) should be protected in perpetuity misses the point that for open space to function at a high level requires considerable investment.
Not surprisingly given the controversy which tends to dog such ideas, there are not that many examples of ‘superfluous’ open space being developed for urban infill and the remainder upgraded. One example is Elizabeth Quay, which saw the redevelopment of Perth’s historic foreshore recreational reserve, the Esplanade, as an urban waterfront (discussed later)—a project which in later surveys has received substantial community support. Other projects, such as Waverley Park in Melbourne, saw the redevelopment of a publicly owned sporting facility sold for private redevelopment (with the main oval and grandstand retained)—however, this project is of a different scale than most of the parks found in Perth.

The Heller St park and residences in Melbourne, designed by Six Degrees Architects and opened in 2012, provides some clues how a process of public open space rationalisation, partial development and upgrading could be enacted. The background to this project was that Moreland City Council owned some surplus, underutilized land and was under pressure from local residents to turn it into a park, but couldn’t afford the financial risk of developing the site themselves (Horrocks). Their solution was to offer one-third of the site to private residential development in a tender that stipulated two-thirds must be turned into a public park (Horrocks). The result is medium density, family friendly terrace housing addressing and adjacent to a small well-designed public park.

Fig 10: Heller St park and residences delivers a high level of amenity and sociability. Image courtesy of Patrick Rodriguez http://www.patriickrodriguez.com.au
According to project architect James Legge, the project delivers a high level of amenity and sociability. As he explains:

The three-storey townhouses are tailored for young families—each house has four bedrooms—so the park is full of kids. It is normal to find your children in another house. ‘And on Friday nights you usually find yourself sharing a glass of wine with a neighbour, which leads to a bottle …’ says Legge. (Horrocks)

With some modification this project, and process, could be replicable in Perth. The lessons to learn from such a project are that the built outcomes need to be high (for both the park and the infill housing) so as to not aggravate a community who might otherwise see sale of parks as simply ‘cashing in.’ Furthermore the way the infill housing addresses the park needs to be carefully considered so that both benefit—the park by virtue of greater activation, and the infill housing by virtue of access to a (hopefully) wonderful communal backyard. Finally, it is important that the public is able to make a direct link between the rationalisation of part of an open space area, and the upgrade of the remainder—if the open space is dispensed with completely the link (in the public imagination) with park upgrades elsewhere is likely to be tenuous, effectively killing off community support.

Golf courses

Golf in Perth originated during the gold rush period in the 1890s and the decades leading up to the World War I. Construction of golf courses remained stable up until the great depression when unexpectedly, despite the depression conditions of the times, the construction of golf courses boomed. As a result many of Perth's big metropolitan golf course were opened in the early 1930's (Stoddart). Despite the economic conditions of the time, golf as a sport was booming—in 1932 there were 65 golf clubs affiliated with the Western Australian Golf Association and 5,000 registered members, but only a year later there were 79 golf clubs and over 10,000 registered members (unknown reporter). The boom period was put on hold with the advent of the World War II in 1939 and many golf courses within Perth were shut down, had their water licenses revoked or were repurposed for military uses. Since the end of the golfing boom in the 1960s, few new metropolitan golf courses have been constructed; rising land prices have also meant contemporary golf course projects in Perth have had to locate closer to the edge of the metropolitan area. Nationally, the popularity of golf peaked in 1991 with 136,000 golf club
members. In 2003, there were 10,000 less club members and in the period between 2001-2012, there was a six per cent decline in golf participation (Hakjkowicz et al.). As nation-wide participation in organized team sports continues to decline, golf courses across Australia are having to reassess their club’s long term future and the future use of the land. The golfing boom has long gone and now the bust is coming for many golf clubs across Australia.

The land area contained in golf courses (both public and private)\(^{12}\) in Perth’s suburban core amounts to 1,153 hectares (equal to 734 WACA ovals), the equivalent of 14\(\text{m}^2\) per resident of Perth’s suburban core.

![Fig 11: Perth Suburban core—golf courses. The golfing boom has long gone and now the bust is coming for many golf clubs across Australia. These sites offer a range of opportunities for densification.](image)

This figure is roughly commensurate with the 16\(\text{m}^2\) of golf course suggested by Stephenson and Hepburn in Perth’s inaugural 1955 plan (Stephenson and Hepburn 91), and is on par with the US National Recreation and Park Association which also suggests 14\(\text{m}^2\) (Mertes and Hall). While the area of golf courses in Perth is commensurate with planning standards, the occupation and usage of golf courses tends to be very thin.
Take Mt Lawley Private Golf Club, for instance. If its 1,000 playing members were to be on the course at one time (and they were stand equidistant from each other), they would have a vast 900 m² of land each. As a result of this profligate use of space, golf courses (public and private) offer opportunities for urban infill development. What approaches have been taken as golf clubs struggle to remain viable and the pressures of land development increase?

There are many examples of golf course, full or partial, redevelopments around the world but particularly in the USA where a golf course reportedly closes down every 48 hours (Selby)—indeed during the global financial crisis, 643 courses closed from 2006 to 2013 (Warwick). Closer to home, the Eastern Golf Club redevelopment is, to date, the largest golf course relocation in Australia—the old site being sold for $99 million dollars to Mirvac for the ‘Tullamore’ project (and construction of 800 homes) and the Eastern Golf Club moving to an urban fringe location.13 Initially, residents in surrounding areas were fearful of the golf course land becoming a blanket subdivision with negative impacts on their amenity and the heritage feel of the suburb. In response the developer’s design concept focused on retaining existing topographic features and improving the quality of green open space within the site.
The topography also allowed the designers to mitigate the visual impact of higher density residential development—which is generally located away from the suburban edges of the site. The heritage buildings within the site received special zoning and were touted as a focus of the design of the open space. A benefit of the redevelopment for local residents was greater neighborhood accessibility, as access through the site had originally been restricted.

While it is yet to be constructed this development will presumably aid the local government to achieve its urban infill targets and whilst local residents have a net loss in green space, they will be compensated with better access to high quality parkland.

*River foreshores*

The charm of the upper reaches of the Swan River was principally the reason behind Perth's European settlement. British Captain Stirling was captivated by its beauty on a voyage in 1827. Stirling’s emotive descriptions of the Swan River landscape, when re-printed in English newspapers of the time, triggered ‘Swan River mania’. In this frenzied state, the desires of the aspirational classes were projected onto the apparent arcadia of the river (Whish-Wilson 26). While the Swan was scenically beautiful, the soils of the surrounding plains turned out to be wretchedly unproductive. Nonetheless, the image of the Swan River as an Arcadian escape from the city was ingrained firmly in the public imagination. Perhaps as a result of this perception of the river, planning has reserved a significant 2,068 hectares of land as public foreshores along the Swan and Canning rivers—or the equivalent of 1,317 WACA ovals.

Per person this amounts to 25 m$^2$ of foreshore reserve area per person, a comparatively high figure when compared to Melbourne’s suburban core which provides just 5 m$^2$—reflecting Melbourne’s urban vision of the Yarra River, in place since the 1980’s.

Perth’s generous foreshore parks are, however, under significant threat from the 1.1m sea level rise projected for the Swan River in 2100—indeed many of these landscapes which were historically reclaimed from the river will be themselves ‘reclaimed’ in a truer sense of the word. Given this situation, the development of just a fraction of these reserves could have the benefit providing urban infill development (set at the appropriate ground levels) as well as generating funds required to pay for the ‘extraordinary expense’ (Woodford 64) of either protecting or transplanting infrastructure in relation to sea level rise.
One case where urban density has been proposed along the Swan River is the Elizabeth Quay project, sited at the foot of Perth’s central business district. The site was originally a public foreshore reserve called the Esplanade. Due to the Esplanade’s relative underutilisation it has been subject to various development proposals over the years with the aim of reconnecting the river and city. Historically, proposals for redeveloping the Esplanade have been highly contentious. A 2008 proposal which was structured by a circular inlet surrounded by stylised urban form (and a high tower on the river’s edge) polarised community opinion and was labelled by the press as ‘Dubai on the Swan.’ With a change of state government in 2009, this scheme was cancelled and in time replaced with the current Elizabeth Quay scheme. This proposal scheme (under construction) consists of a large rectangular body of water with a continuous circuitous public promenade that is connected by two bridges which emanate from a central island. The promenade is punctuated with expanded public areas and surrounding the inlet are buildings with a notional height limit of 36 storeys (Metropolitan Redevelopment Authority 26) which gradually step down in height from the city to the river’s edge. These buildings contain a hotel, offices, apartments and ground floor shops.

Fig 13: Perth Suburban core—river foreshores. Perth has a generous 2,068 hectares of river foreshore reserves in the suburban core alone, or the equivalent area of 1,317 WACA ovals. This reflects the enduring conception of the river as an Arcadian escape from the city.
This lower scale and more conventional waterfront design has received reasonable public support, which is reflected in polls gauging support for the scheme. According to a poll conducted in 2011 by Perth’s most read newspaper, the *West Australian*, 49 per cent of people ‘agree with the new plans for the waterfront’; 14 per cent ‘don’t agree with the new plans for the waterfront’; 13 per cent ‘want it developed but consider this the wrong look’; and 24 per cent think ‘who cares, just get it done’ (Rickard). The fact that half the population actively support the project reflects the fact that people in Perth will consider the rationalisation of existing foreshore reserves, for some development, if this produces an upgraded public realm—in this case in the form of elaborately designed and (presumably) activated promenade and island ensemble.

Richard Weller, one of the designers, explains the Elizabeth Quay project has ‘broken the spell’ that saw the Swan River’s landscaped foreshores zealously protected from urban development. Indeed if Elizabeth Quay proves to be a success, there is no reason it could not be replicated at important river nodes elsewhere along the Swan and Canning rivers.

Fig 14: The barren, vacuous expanse of Langley Park.
As one commentator on a recent Perth newspaper article on urban infill proposed:

For a start, get rid of those acres and acres of barren brown couch grass on both banks of the river... Totally wasted moonscapes which should have either been fantastic parkland... or areas for the people with endless amount of attractions (and) amenities to bring life and activity to those dead zones of the city right on the river. I cannot believe that any other city in the world would turn its back so badly on such an expanse of water? Brisbane makes its people proud with it usage of what is nothing more than a muddy creek—its ferry service move [sic?] over 100,000 passengers per week while Perth water is bigger than Sydney harbor and we move 10 people per day on ours. And those wasted grassy banks have less people using them than does Karrakatta cemetery. A billion dollar worth of fine real estate only fit for jogging and walking a dog? Are you kidding city planners? (in Law).

Conclusion
Despite the relative popularity of Elizabeth Quay and isolated calls for the development of ‘moonscape’ foreshore reserves, some of the proposals for infill development in this paper will be controversial. The proposed rationalisation of the public landscapes which furnished Perth’s twentieth century ‘suburban dream’ in Perth almost inevitably will be unpopular, at least among certain demographics. The controversy, however, could be partly alleviated through the application of the following process. The potential benefits unlocked by urban infill development need to be clearly communicated to individuals, communities and (sometimes resistant) local governments. This paper illustrates how funding could be generated to upgrade some open spaces such as parks, river foreshores, gold courses and carparks if some underutilised areas were rationalised for urban infill dwellings. At a conceptual level these upgrades to parks and other open spaces should be considered with respect to how they might furnish, and further, a new twenty-first century ‘Australian dream’—this time associated with urbanity rather than sub-urbanity. In broad terms, density and liveability in Perth are often regarded as being mutually exclusive. We believe this does not need to be the case. Rather, density can give a community leverage to deliver real urban amenity which would otherwise be unaffordable. Initially communities will need to be able observe constructed pilot projects which show how these trade-offs
could be made, and what the built outcomes are—and these exemplars will need to be of a very high quality. As Kim Dovey explains, ‘the first things that roll out have to be great, not reasonable. You have to sell off that image that you are building—this is where we are going and this is putting it on the map... Getting it right in the early stages is critical in overcoming that stigma and the poor image and identity (associated with infill development)’ (Dovey and Woodcock 61).

This paper is not a manual for how this can be done. Rather, it is intended as a provocation for conversation we need to have, between state government, and local government and communities about the role of public landscapes in transforming Perth into a compact yet liveable city. This paper is directed towards this end.

Notes
1. Otherwise known pejoratively as ‘sprawl’ or by planner's as ‘greenfield’ development. In short outer suburban development is new urban development outside the city’s existing footprint.
2. By definition a biodiversity hotspot must contain at least 1,500 endemic species, and has to have lost at least 70% of its endemic vegetation to clearing.
3. Urban infill development is urban development within the existing city footprint.
4. The main exception to this being ‘Cockburn Central’ Activity Centre which (uncharacteristically) was located on public land and developed by the state land development agency Landcorp.
5. By ‘non-urbanised landscapes’ we mean open spaces without significant built structures.
6. This figure is based on 25m² per parking space.
7. The project was undertaken by the Port Phillip Housing Association (PPHA).
8. The Kwinana and Mitchell freeways constitute Perth's major north-south freeway system.
9. At least in the near future.
10. Some research suggests that there is a shortage of ovals for active recreation in Perth. We do not intend to compound this perceived shortage but suggest that strategies could be developed to make the use of existing ovals more efficient.
11. Ecosystem services are the serves provided by nature including habitat, mitigation of urban heat island effects, the cleaning and filtering of water and air, amongst others.
12. Eight of the golf courses in Perth's suburban core are on leased crown land for which most pay only a ‘peppercorn' rent.
13. While this is an example of a private golf course redevelopment many of the essential lessons remain valid for the redevelopment of public golf courses.
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Great cities are distinguished by strangeness. They are, in the words of Jane Jacobs ‘... not like towns, only larger. They are not like suburbs, only denser. They differ from towns and suburbs in basic ways, and one of these is that cities are, by definition, full of strangers.' (Jacobs 104) And not only are they full of strangers, they can be enormous, confronting metropolises—and somewhat intimidating for those who wish to forge a path through.

The flâneur has always embodied this myth: the need to seek strangeness, identify difference, engage with the other—a need that manifests itself in wandering, getting lost. That flâneur is, of course, the dandy who strolls the streets, watching, exploring, experiencing. As Edmund White suggests, he is ‘that aimless stroller who loses himself in the crowd, who has no destination and goes wherever caprice or curiosity directs his or her steps...’ (White 16). The flâneur's heritage is commonly traced to the French poet Baudelaire, who ‘extols the modern artist who immerses himself in the bath of the crowd, gathers impressions and jots them down only when he returns to his studio. For him a foray into the cityscape is always undirected, even purposeless—a passive surrender to the aleatory flux of the innumerable and surprising streets.’ (White 36)

Indeed, the flâneur is tied inextricably to nineteenth century Paris. That city remains the touchstone of flânerie, the epicentre of the flâneur's world. Despite—or perhaps because—Baudelaire's Paris was destroyed in the mid nineteenth century in a program of massive urban renewal, it is still Paris, more than any other town that is associated with the flâneur. Haussman's renovation of Paris made it difficult to engage with the rebuilt avenues, parks and squares, so Flânerie found itself bifurcated. The original wanderings of small medieval streets were
replaced by a different approach. Contemplative strolling became difficult as boulevards broadened and arcades became less personal department stores. So some notions of flânerie turned inwards—the romantic notion of the flâneur—combining intellectual explorations with the spirit of physical curiosity became a flânerie of thought; where the body became stationary, and instead the mind explored. In many ways, that flâneur continues to exist in the mind: in writing, movies and music. A trope on modernity, a writing of the urbanscape, celebrated in books, addressed on film, and informing the spirit of song—and discussed by academics at conferences.

More recently, flânerie found another home. In the late twentieth century, the internet grew from academic curio to everybody's plaything, and in the desperate search for understanding, provoked a range of metaphors—Al Gore's 'information superhighway' was one, Bill Mitchell's 'city of bits' was another. Using the city to draw parallels between the virtual realms of the new media and the actuality of the metropolis made this brave new world possible to comprehend. Indeed, some adapted the flâneur, suggesting that the internet could be conceived of as digital cities for exploration. Just as innocent forays into the city to expand his or her horizons, cyberspace might provide a similar collection of strangers with whom to interact, a parallel strange place for the 'cyberflâneur' (Goldate np). So, cyberspace became ‘an alternate geography that needed to be seen, witnessed, and experienced in order to exist. The flâneur became a metaphoric vehicle for the ‘witnessing’ of this space’ (Barnes np).

But as is often the case with new technologies, initial conceits play out differently. The idea of the cyberflâneur usurped by other tropes, and developments in different technological and cultural directions. For example, Evgeney Morozov recently dismissed that turn-of-the-century notion—arguing that the commercialisation of the internet mirrors the destruction of Baudelaire’s Paris, that the original playful avenues for exploration have given way to commodified corporate presence driven by speed and efficiency, where surfing—the online analogy to strolling—has given way to getting things done. Morozov argues that the internet has its own Baron Haussmann, in the form of Facebook:

> ‘Everything that makes cyberflânerie possible—solitude and individuality, anonymity and opacity, mystery and ambivalence, curiosity and risk-taking—is under assault by that company’ (Morozov np).

But perhaps, just as Haussmann’s urban designs turned flânerie inwards, Facebook and its ilk are turning it back to the physical city. In particular,
the ubiquitous connectivity of device and community, of virtual and physical has reinvigorated the flâneur and enabled its 2.0 version to emerge. In reconsidering the influence of new technologies, perhaps the flâneur can be rethought and reconsidered as flâneur 2.0—with all the flaws that conceit might contain, and what it might mean for our understandings of cities and strangeness in the 21st century.

We have tended to define the flâneur by the activity (the act of wandering, looking, strolling) through those Parisian streets and arcades. In doing so, we have generally paid less attention to the flâneur himself. But as a product of the Parisian age, he is traditionally wealthy, idle and educated—and male. He is the dandy who strolls to pass time, reading and understanding the city as a text its people and places consumed for his own pleasure. He is, of course, an observer of the city. But more than that, he is the writer of the city, for a city is only created in its experience, a map or photographs are mere surface representations of its life. For a city to come alive, it must be lived in; for it to be lived in, it must be explored and experienced. As Baudelaire posited the artist-flâneur, our image of the modern city springs from the meanderings of the flâneur. He has written Paris for us, creating for us its imagined reality. Thanks to flânerie, Paris is a city of a particular history, a particular time, a particular relationship with the commercial and social life it holds.

But therein lies an inherent prejudice: if a flâneur required wealth, education and time in order to wander, then those notions of modern cities, steeped in discovery and strangeness, are necessarily created by the wealthy, the educated and those who need not toil for money. In addition to social attributes, the flâneur also has a particular character. His gender and confidence provided him the ability to stroll unhindered throughout the arcades and alleys. This author of the city had to be an explorer, a pioneer—a Columbus of the city who was unafraid of the unknown, a character with a resilience, with the confidence for flânerie.

So our flâneur's imagining of Paris (one that is perhaps embedded in our broader thinking of that city) is experienced from that perspective, that politics, that culture, and that economic relationship. Arguably, the flâneur's experience of Paris is akin to opera, a high culture construction for those of a particular status that positions the other, the strangeness of the city, and observes it with a certain separateness, a certain aloofness.

Moreover, those romanticised notions of flânerie are sufficiently embedded that our cities are popularly constructed from that perspective, where the flâneur necessarily writes a specific version of the city; not necessarily a good, or bad one but a specific one that is framed in the manner of a confident, detached individual—speaking from a particular
cultural position—wandering, exploring the city, somewhat removed from its essential life.

Today, the actual physical activity of the flâneur is more closely associated with the tourist. Wealthy, idle, consuming the city—but crucially shepherded by guidebook or tour guide in lieu of local knowledge observing strangeness at an arms length, tourists are unwilling or unable to stretch beyond the paths well travelled, the roads as directed. The truth of the modern tourist is often someone prevented by a fear of confronting strangeness head-on, perhaps because of lack of language or other knowledge, perhaps because of an inability to overcome difference and to engage in a restaurant without a menu, a neighbourhood with no signs. So the Contiki tourist is not a true flâneur; rather than write the city anew, they merely retrace the steps of those who came before them.

But the well-trodden path is not a million miles from the rest of the city, any city. Ben Groundwater suggests:

Tourists tread highly predictable paths. The vast bulk of us only hang out in certain areas of a city, the popular ones, the tried and tested ones, the guidebook-approved ones. Once you find those areas, all you have to do is walk about two blocks in any direction and you’ll find yourself in the heart of the ‘real’ city, no longer surrounded by other tourists, but surrounded by the people who actually live and work there. That’s all the effort it takes. (Groundwater np)

So is the shift from tourist to flâneur a simple matter of ‘walking two blocks’? If so, can our ubiquitous digital technologies provide tourists with the courage, the ability to walk those two blocks when they otherwise would not have been able to? Are we witness to technology, as is its occasional want, empowering those who desire to be flâneurs, by providing them with access to information and thus the confidence to confront and embrace strangeness? Does this amount to the emergence of flâneur 2.0 which, as with all 2.0 memes, represents a democratising empowerment of the stranger, the foreigner, an enabling of exploration and a reconfiguring of flânerie in a way that reflects the evolution of the modern city and indeed has the potential to rewrite the modern city?

Rather than simply imagine Flâneur 2.0, this rumination is perhaps best illustrated through personal experience. So let me take you through a recent example. A morning spent in the arcades of Kyoto the ancient capital of Japan. It began innocently enough with a train to the airport from my University. Just as I arrived at Sydney’s International Terminal,
I received a notification from my bank on my phone; it had noticed my location and was just checking up on me. Of course, on that same device, my airline had already reminded me that online check-in was about to close and to get a hurry on. And of course, when I arrived in Japan, my telephone company warned me about the cost of data roaming. All gentle reminders that the technology that follows me around, literally follows me around.

I hopped on the train from Haneda airport to Shingjuku and then to Kyoto, where I took the subway to the hotel (all with the help of a global metro transport app on my phone) and found myself with hours before my room was available, and the opportunity to play flâneur. So I strolled, and emerged serendipitously outside the Paris-Kyoto cafe. I walked on, confident in the knowledge that should I get lost, I could be found—my phone knew where I was, and where I had to go. So I wandered through arcades past four-litre bottles of whisky and left-handed knives, through temples of worship and temples of amusement. I hopped on and off wifi hotspots until hunger struck and my phone suggested a great tonkatsu place up a little alley (which was legitimately great) and came by way of a recommendation from a German Foursquare user. Instead of eating by accident, my confidence was subcontracted to someone else’s experience, via my smartphone in realtime.

So was I a flâneur in the traditional sense? No, probably not. Was I a tourist in the traditional sense? No again. Instead, I was something somewhat different, wandering, strolling—two blocks away from the well-trodden paths, given confidence, courage to confront strangeness and encounters where I didn’t have the language. Perhaps not the most challenging of examples, but an experience that millions are having all around the world, using their connections to explore, encounter, engage. It’s much easier to lose oneself when you know you can be easily found. Flânerie used to be the domain of the hardy, the elite, those of a certain cultural milieu. Some may hate the idea—but now we are all flâneurs.

The most famous 2.0 meme was, of course, ‘Web 2.0’. Coined by Tim O’Reilly, it envisaged a connected media ecosystem in which production and consumption became increasingly blurred, where everyone was an author and a publisher—and in many ways that original notion of 2.0 has become a reality, through social media tools, and easy publishing platforms.

In short, Web 2.0 meant that we were the World Wide Web; that the new technologies did not merely represent a new media format for existing publishers to colonise, but were enabling and empowering for those who previously did not have the ability to publish. Of course Web 2.0 had its
detractors who, (largely driven by old-fashioned notions of quality rooted in cultural elitism), derided the possibilities of Web 2.0 and the influx of what they saw as amateurs into a professional world of creativity. So too Flâneur 2.0 will have its detractors, unimpressed by the opportunities to explore that the new technologies allow, dismayed by the image of the multitudes exploring cities, informed not just by what they see in the streets, but by what has been seen by others—and written about, or photographed, and shared on their devices. The 2.0 objection remains true—by making flânerie accessible to all, the purists will complain about experiential quality, and a cult of the amateur.

Setting those narrow-minded conceits aside, what does Flâneur 2.0 mean for our understanding of cities? As with any 2.0 development, there are opportunities and risks. The risk is that we end up with the end of strangeness, the disappearance of difference. As the world is increasingly discovered, strangeness may disappear. Those distinctive cities will become less common—as our Flâneurs 2.0 rewrite the city in their image, they are inevitably followed by the commerce and culture they bring with them. As Foursquare mayors and Yelp reviews proliferate, urbanscapes are rewritten and the image of the city becomes more commodified, more homogenised, less strange... and yet potentially more strange.

It's not unusual to find oneself (as I did recently) in a rebuilt old town (French Concession in Shanghai), sitting with Swedes, drinking Italian beer (Peroni) in a Bavarian Beer Hall (Paulauner Brauhaus), speaking English and listening to a Philipino cover-band sing the Lambada (itself a hit for the French band Kaomo) in Portugese. As Flânerie 2.0 proliferates, there is the danger that our cities will become increasingly global, increasingly less distinct. Not through any deliberate desire, but as a consequence of the inexorable flows of information, then capital. That anonymous global city in which you are everywhere, but nowhere.

But the opportunity is that just as Youtube (as an example of Web 2.0) has enabled an entirely new and surprisingly rich media ecosystem, Flânerie 2.0 will evolve into an engaging experience in its own right. There will emerge tools which make the art of flânerie even easier, more accessible—empowering everybody to stroll, explore and experience. For example, there are already apps which enable us to overlay the old Paris with the new—to walk around today's Paris, and be able to experience the pre-Haussman environment via imagery overlaid through your smartphone screen.

As well as the strolling dimension of flânerie, the opportunities for writing the city are also much expanded. Cities are being rewritten through simple social media sharing via Facebook, Instagram, Foursquare
and the like, where our newly empowered flâneurs can share their meanderings. And even more creative responses to urbanscapes are emerging. ‘Humans of New York’ is an example—a blog started by Brandon Stanton in late 2010, with the aim of gathering 10,000 portraits of New Yorkers soon evolved into a cultural presence with over 15 million Facebook followers, and a New York Times bestselling book. Simply by telling the world the stories of everyday New Yorkers and starting new conversations about what that city means.

The idea of Flâneur 2.0 encourages these conversations: it provokes us to consider our hyperconnectivity and its consequences, around privacy, strangeness, otherness, what we lose and what we gain, both personally and in our evolving urbanscapes. Technology has enabled rich new experiences, and forced us to confront the stark reality that we are already cyborgs; that our augmented selves also enable a liberality of opportunity. We should no longer cling to the old-fashioned flâneur, no longer is flânerie the domain of the brave and the hardy, the wealthy, the idle and the educated. Instead anybody with an internet connection can wander in body as well as in mind, learning from the experience of others to discover their own ways.

Now, we are all flâneurs.

Works Cited


In the opening to his story, *Honolulu* (1921), collected in an anthology of short tales inspired by his wanderings around the South Seas, Somerset Maugham reflected that:

‘The wise traveller travels only in imagination. An old Frenchman (he was really a Savoyard) once wrote a book called *Voyage autour de ma Chambre*. I have not read it and do not even know what it is about, but the title stimulates my fancy. In such a journey I could circumnavigate the globe… those are the best journeys, the journeys that you take at your own fireside, for then you lose none of your illusions’ (Maugham 205–06).

Where Maugham once did so in his imagination, can the ‘cyberflâneur’—first identified by Stephen Goldate in 1998, and evoking Adorno’s image of the flâneur promenading in his own room (1989: 41)—still do so on the World Wide Web, surfing along the alleys and avenues of the information superhighway the way their Baudelairean ancestor once strolled the arcades of *ancienne cité* Paris?

In ‘the early days of the Web… the idea of exploring cyberspace as virgin territory… was romantic; that romanticism was even reflected in the names of early browsers (“Internet Explorer,” “Netscape Navigator”)’ (Morozov np). ‘What the city and the street were to the flâneur, the internet and the superhighway [became] to the cyberflâneur’ (Goldgate). But by 2012, the cyberflâneur was declared dead.

In a widely discussed polemic, Evgeny Morozov lamented the way that, in the same way the flâneur had been driven from his natural habitat of *vieux Parisien passages* by Hausmann’s demolitions, so the cyberflâneur was killed by the colonisation and privatisation of cyberspace by governments and corporations. The Web’s early days—a democratically
free free-for-all, where anyone could publish anything, and without any Google algorithm organizing or ranking any of it, ‘surfing the web was an art, successfully practiced by the cyberflâneur, the web connoisseur who “just surfed on in” (McGarrigle 2), stumbling upon ‘online communities like GeoCities and Tripod… the true digital arcades of that period, trading in the most obscure and the most peculiar’ (Morozov np). Morozov decried how increasingly, distribution was and is concentrated in fewer and fewer hands, and in a smaller and smaller space, in which the global village is reduced to your Facebook page or Twitter feed, and much of the world’s online cultural output is produced and controlled from Silicon Valley by the internet ‘Big Four’—Apple, Google, Facebook and Amazon (McGarrigle).

‘Everything that makes cyberflânerie possible—solitude and individuality, anonymity and opacity, mystery and ambivalence, curiosity and risk-taking—is under assault,’ cried Morozov, as the Big Four hoover up competitors to appropriate innovations or stifle competition and seek to confine users to ‘proprietary ecosystems’ through hardware and operating system compatibility, application sandboxing or filtering searches via predictive text, targeted advertising or multimedia features to ensure that we are less inclined to find them elsewhere, seeing only what they think we want to see—or even what they (and their advertisers) think we should see, even as we are seen, whatever we do—and increasingly, wherever we are, constantly tracked and surveilled in a virtual (Google Streetview) panopticon.

There is much to be concerned about in Morozov’s critique, especially in regards to the homogenisation, co-option and commercialisation of the internet, and particularly with the coming into force earlier last year of the Federal Government’s contentious metadata retention laws, the loss of privacy, anonymity and serendipity, all of us reduced to data and images to be targeted and mined. Indeed, Benjamin predicted it himself, more than fifty years before the internet first appeared:

‘The press brings into play an overabundance of information, which can be all the more provocative the more it is exempt from any use. (Only the ubiquity of the reader would make possible a utilization; and so the illusion of such ubiquity is also generated.) The actual relation of this information to social existence is determined by the dependence of the information industry on financial interests and its alignment with these interests’ (Benjamin 447).

But unlike Morozov, Benjamin was not afflicted by nostalgia: as he contended, what distinguished images from the ‘essences' of
phenomenology was their historical index, which not only said that they belonged to a particular time, but in which ‘every present... is determined by the images that are synchronic with it... it is not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past’ (463).

But while previous discussions about flânerie from Goldate on have offered thought-provoking insights, they are rendered redundant by the even faster march of modernity and progress in the digital age, exposing philosophical flaws in Morozov’s argument. Firstly, while many discussions of cyberflânerie since Goldate’s groundbreaking essay first identifying the term ‘cyberflâneur’ assume that just as Maugham could travel the world without leaving his fireside, so the cyberflâneur does without leaving his settee (Bauman 155) or swivel chair (Goldate np), equating the navigation of cyberspace with a negation of the body, and suggesting that ‘we leave our bodies behind... become[ing] somewhat immaterial when we log on’ (Goldate np), as Michael Sacasas points out, just as cyberspace and physical space are only metaphorically analogous, so too are cyberflânerie and ‘brick-and-mortar’ flânerie. Like any metaphor, the analogy has its limits, especially as ‘phenomenologically, clicking on a link is not quite the same thing as turning a corner. The way each presents itself to us and acts on us is quite different’ (Sacasas np). Consider, in this case, the traditional map of the city, which offers a route (or limited routes along avenues and boulevards) between departure and destination; and a website map, which offers countless departures and destinations from any page, depending on which option is clicked—similar perhaps to Zygmunt Bauman’s ‘void with routes’ (141).

As Conor McGarrigle and Sherman Young have both noted, the internet is increasingly characterized by mobile, networked and geo-tracking devices, which have not only brought targeted advertising and frictionless sharing with social media or reviewing sites such as Yelp, Foursquare and others blurring the boundaries between public and private, cyber and physical spaces—what McGarrigle calls ‘hybrid space’ in which ‘the internet permeates all aspects of everyday life, attaching context and location-sensitive information to places’ (McGarrigle 3). Such intrusions in cyber and hybrid spaces reflect those in public space, increasingly privatised, wherein the flâneur can easily become a trespasser: policed, surveilled, controlled, evicted. It’s not just the way the arcade has turned into the Westfield shopping mall: more and more public infrastructure and services have been privatised, turning highways into toll roads, public land sold at the lowest price to the highest political donors, and public spaces—theatres, arcades, waterfronts—transformed
into closed gated, homogenous ‘exclusive executive investment opportunities’ by an increasingly small and powerful coterie of well-connected developers (Frijters & Murray) who share the appellation with their internet counterparts. And, with ubiquitous CCTV and geo-tracking on smartphones, it’s even more difficult to wander anonymously—or, as Zygmunt Bauman observed (pun slightly intended) of the master flâneur, ‘seeing without being caught looking’ (Bauman 141).

Much has been made in many recent studies (Reveley; Forest & Wood; Turkle et al) of social media’s paradoxically alienating and isolating effect, which echoes the classic flâneur, who jealously guarded his individuality and agency as he mingled with the crowd, pursuing a course which alienated him from even the possibility of a deeper inter-subjective exchange with other members of the crowd, making flânerie ‘a sociability of Ones’ (Shields 63). There is an essential alienation in flânerie, which is why it is so closely identified with the ‘long distance loneliness’ of writing. Just as Belle Epoque artists captured the essence of city life in sketches and painting, so contemporaneous writers—Baudelaire’s ‘Painters of the Modern World’—used the character of the flâneur in literary sketches and journalism to comment on the changes during the Industrial Revolution, embodied by Haussmannisation, which, like Facebook- or Google- or Amazon- or Appleisation in the Information Revolution today, evoked both fear and curiosity.

Indeed, many examples of the flâneur in modern or contemporary literature—Holden Caulfield in JD Salinger’s Catcher in the Rye (1951), Julius in Teju Cole’s Open City (2012), Paul in Tao Lin’s Taipei (2013) or U in Tom McCarthy’s recently Booker Prize-shortlisted Satin Island (2015)—are embodiments of such alienation and disconnection. Like the avatar scrolling through Second Life, the flâneur truly thrived, especially outside of his ‘real-life existence’ as a ‘literary device or philosophical motif rather than an actual historical figure’ (Hartmann 104). Like the literary narrator, the flâneur stood outside the events described, just like the writer, ‘surveying both his private self and the world at large’ (Morozov np), leaving a literary trail in his published work the way Morozov’s ailing cyberflâneur leaves their own digital trace.

As Keith Jenkins asserts, the very act of writing narrative is ‘fictionalising’ (92). If narrative is a route between particular episodes or events, no matter how digressive, then surely describing that journey—even if one (as Morozov argues a true flâneur must, and like this paper) doesn’t have any idea of the final destination or thesis—is itself a fiction. Given the flâneur's anachronic and nostalgic concerns, a kind of self-mythologising, making flânerie ‘always as much mythical as it was actual’
(Shields 62), a fantasy of male bohemianism created by Baudelaire, Balzac and Janin (Goldstein). Similarly, it’s telling that the cyberflâneur exists more as his own theoretical afterlife than an actual user type and identity position (Hartmann 141). If anything, the mythical flâneur and cyberflâneur are as virtually (pun intended) imaginary and illusory as memory or history themselves.

But Goldate's original conception of the cyberflâneur as ‘an internet lurker, a voyeur of sorts who reads newsgroup or Listserve messages without responding to them, thus remaining unnoticed’ (np) has echoes of the badaud, the unproductive, passive consumer of spectacle, seeking sensation and as dominated by sentiment as the flâneur was by curiosity; or, as Benjamin contrasted them, ‘in the flâneur, the joy of watching is triumphant. It can concentrate on observation... or it can stagnate in the gaper; then the flâneur has turned into the badaud’ (Benjamin 69). As opposed to the solitary, singular, individual flâneur, the badaud is the mob, encouraged and exploited by the rise of the commercial mass press and defined by sensations, passions, curiosity in the mid to late nineteenth century—the public as street crowd—in which, a ‘culture-debating public’ gave way to a ‘culture-consuming public’ (Shaya 50), who killed time on the boulevards, searching for something to see and to talk about, no matter how banal, vulgar or mawkish—‘a gaze of morbid curiosity and a lowest common denominator culture. Where the flâneur was detached, knowledgeable and blasé, the badaud was emotional, easily riled, simpleminded, gullible’ (Shaya 51). What is the ‘frictionless sharing’ of cat videos and retweeting meaningless memes on Facebook and Twitter, users thoughtlessly clicking likes or re-sharing others’ recycled links, the hysterical screeches of outrage and maudlin sentimentality, the credulous posting of hoaxes and celebrity gossip, the dependently narcissistic anxiety over likes and friends and followers, if not the mindless mob mentality of badauderie?

But it's ‘a thin line between an immersion that leads to an enlightened experience of the online sphere and the loss of control’ and one's self (Hartmann 142). Thus, while Morozov evokes Bauman's observation of ‘seeing without being caught looking’, as others like Hartmann note, like the writer or journalist, the cyberflâneur is dependent on others and their online presences, just as the classical flâneur was on crowds of badauds: ‘he wants to browse through whatever they provide without acknowledging his own presence, while he also needs their recognition’ (Hartmann 143). But just because Morozov cannot see the cyberflâneur doesn’t mean he isn’t there, much less dead, even as any discussion about the flâneur and his cyber avatar ‘must be understood precisely as
a critical intervention in or indeed as the inception of, the afterlife of this figure' (Gilloch 104), ‘more visible in his afterlife than in his flourishing’ (Buck-Morss 346). The flâneur is dead! Long live the cyberflâneur?

Even if reports of the flâneur and cyberflâneur's death are greatly exaggerated, it is by their extinction that they are resurrected and recast into a myriad of new forms and possibilities, positions rendered continually provisional and changing by the speed of technological—and, to a degree, the subsequent catching up of social—change. After all, ‘a flânerie which eschews the development of new approaches which evade the ubiquitous surveillance and data mining of companies such as Google and Facebook can never be anonymous, and is limited to operate within a predetermined mode of operation' (McGarrigle 3). So now, obscuring their agency ‘with the mask of the anonymous' (Shields 63) cyberflâneurs can use ad-blocking technology, virtual private networks (VPNs), the open source Onion Router (TOR) or search engines like Duck Duck Go or Kosmix to anonymously explore the vastly greater depths of the deep and dark webs in chat rooms like 4chan, and where, as more and more users congregate because one cannot be anonymous alone, and to paraphrase Benjamin, ‘the individual's traces are obliterated in the crowd' (Bauman 141; Benjamin 1999: 440).

Indeed, rather than, like Morozov, lamenting that the internet is no longer as ‘unique’ or countercultural as it once was (and cannot be, now that it is so universal and all-pervasive), perhaps it’s more pertinent to recognise that counterculture and alternative heterogeneity does exist on the internet—you just have to know where to find it, and be willing to look for it, even on the ‘surface web’, where ‘hiding among the advertising and Facebook pages could be a Web which is just as open and frolicking as it was in its early days’ (Stephen np).

Despite the narrowing of distribution networks by the Big Four there are more opportunities for those outside the mainstream commercial media to find and make some space for themselves even within these constraints, using the very tools provided by them: whether by self-publishing on Amazon or promoting their music on MySpace or SoundCloud; or, like the Geocities of the past, in blogs created with Wordpress like Australian-born Berliner James Conway's Strange Flowers, a self-described ‘alternative Who's Who, a pantheon of ill-deserved obscurity which roams the worlds of literature, art, science, aristocracy and bohemia, low life and high society,' (np) getting lost in Hermann von Pückler-Muskau's eponymous garden, Gustav Meyrink's Prague or Tenby, the obscure birthplace of the King and Queen of Fitzrovia's Bohemia, Augustus John and Nina Hamnett; Ken Knabb's copyleft Bureau
of Public Secrets, devoted to publishing the works of Debord, Rexroth and more; or The Cyberflâneur, which describes itself as a ‘leisurely strolling through the internet and archiving all kinds of things, old and new’, founded to prove Morozov wrong. Much less Flâneur Magazine, dedicated to a different street every issue, or free, collaborative open sources like Wikipedia or Reddit. Similarly, while the internet, like any other village or city, might be considered a kind of palimpsest, continually demolished and rebuilt, erased and reformatted again, unlike vieux, perdu Paris’ old avenues and arcades, which can only be seen in Eugene Atget’s elegiac photographs—and whose ‘self-enunciative authority’ (Seale) the ‘true’ flâneur would reject for his poetic memory of the city anyway—its archaeological sites can still be accessed and interacted with at the Internet Archive’s WayBack Machine, which preserves and curates the Web’s earliest pages.

If the flâneur and cyberflâneur struggle to remain vital or relevant for many critics today, it might be because they sometimes struggle to encompass the inherent tensions, contradictions, paradoxes and ambiguities in the concept of flânerie itself, caught between the ‘I and non-I’ (Baudelaire 9–10), observation and interpretation, social criticism and performance, pseudo-anonymity and recognition, mythology and reality, of being a part of the crowd and apart from it, of finding oneself in anonymity, empathy and detachment, particularly with exchange value and commodification, in which he is a virtuoso, eventually leading him to his final ambit in the department store (or, perhaps, eBay). Yet, just as the flâneur metamorphosed and was transposed from Baudelaire’s Parisian modern-world painter to the anonymous protagonist of Dostoevsky’s St Petersburg-set Notes from the Underground (1864), W. G. Sebald’s Norfolk Broads rambling namesake, or Geoff’s almost-eponymous one in Jeff in Venice, Death in Varanasi (2009) and eventually to the far reaches of the internet, perhaps there’s still life in the cyberflâneur yet, even if it’s a sort of afterlife.

Although I wouldn’t go so far as McGarrigle in calling for the flâneur to be forgotten, his and Sacasas’s suggestions for applying a synthesis of current ‘surfing’ techniques and Situationist dérive offer fascinating new possibilities for the cyberflâneur or his or her next incarnation. While superficially similar—involving observation and wandering—flânerie and dérive differ in intent and, to a degree, in potential. As Guy Debord put it, the dérive, a rapid passage through varied ambiences, involves playful-constructive behavior and awareness of psychogeographical effects, and are thus quite different from the classic notions of the flâneuristic stroll. ‘In a dérive one or more persons during a certain period drop
their relations, their work and leisure activities, and all their other usual motives for movement and action, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there. Chance is a less important factor in this activity than one might think: from a dérive point of view cities—like an increasingly homogenized, proprietary, paywalled internet—‘have psychogeographical contours, with constant currents, fixed points and vortexes that strongly discourage entry into or exit from certain zones’ (Debord 1958).

What is this? Caught on rips and currents of curiosity and hypertext from one seemingly discrete page to another on what I call a ‘Wikislide’ (Badami np), where one link leads to another link which leads to another and then another and then before you know it, you find yourself far afield from wherever you started or whatever it was you were looking for in the first place, and unsure what brought you here so quickly, suddenly realising that the morning or night, like everything else but the screen in front of you, has vanished, in the anachronous way many of us explore and navigate the internet … Might this be the new ‘space of modernity’? Reflecting the democratization of the city and its streetscape after the French revolution that gave rise to the flâneur, or the early days of the Web that encouraged the birth of the cyberflâneur, the dérive assumes an even more playful, anarchic and democratic position in its ‘enjoyment of certain amusements considered dubious’ (Debord 1958) than the somewhat aristocratic, exclusive flâneur, to which ‘written descriptions can be no more than passwords to this great game’ (Debord 1958). More than this, Debord and the Situationists believed that, in contrast to the privileged, detached idleness of the flâneur, as we are moulded by the psychogeography of the situations or places we go through, we need to construct our own situations, rather than be limited to the passive consumption and consumerism of any particular situation we find ourselves or being defined by them, we should seek to go beyond flâneuristic practices of merely observing, interpreting or describing them and attempt to transform them (Debord 2006: 29).

This might be in the manner of hacktivist groups like Anonymous or Wikileaks, actively seeking to subvert political, commercial or media hegemonies through massive service disruptions or releasing classified information in the public interest. Or instead of passive consumption, passive resistance: abandoning social media, using alternative search methods, creating our own content rather than surrendering it and our copyright to the Big Four, not acquiescing to providing our demographic information, being vigilant about our privacy in settings—simply turning the phone off when we go for a walk.
'How,' Bijan Stephen asks, ‘do we prevent creative, artistic spaces [in cyberspace] from gentrification and colonisation by the dominant culture’? (Stephen np) Well, unlike the real world, real estate is cheap on the net, as countless ‘cybersquatters’ can attest. Moreover, unlike the real world, cyberspace is, if we set sail away from the cloistered harbours and shipping lanes of the Big Four, a land without borders, ripe for exploration and wonder. As Benjamin Scammon argues, ‘The desire to wander aimlessly, to learn new things, has not gone away, and cyberflânerie has not so much died as changed to fit the webscape around it’ (np). Technology offers us immense and unprecedented opportunities for exploration and connection, both inside and outside ourselves and the real and virtual worlds: but as the figure of that detective of modernity, the flâneur, continues to attest, it's how we employ it that determines what we'll find.

Perhaps the question is not whether the cyberflâneur is dead, nor what killed him—but who she will become, and how. It's an answer I look forward to discovering, whenever, however I get there.

Works Cited


Try monitoring yourself as you work with Google Maps. Most likely you’ll start by typing a location-search. These words will give you a schematic map that you can change into a zoom-able satellite view before you might go back to the map in order to activate Street View. At this moment you get folded into a grounded vista, ‘travelling’ and narrating along perspective-lines that you select within the all-encompassing canopy of vision that is availed by your cursor-clicking within the website. Meanwhile, you know that you can float out to abstraction again at any moment, to hover at a critical distance outside the ‘total surface’\(^1\) that is always offered by the Google Map schema, as distinct from the Google Earth setting or the Google Street View trajectories. Inside, outside, inside, and so on. You are a grounded flâneur; but also a weightless one who can float and drift off one line of momentum. You can free-associate like a montagist, a poet, a dreamer.

Go travelling with Street View. You’ll see what I mean. The 360-degree Google Camera makes no subjectively nuanced selections with each of its framed and snapped images as the car trundles along; the camera just operates indiscriminately all around itself on clock-time. Each image has no particular, welded value; and therefore each image is replete with interpretability, as in a dream.

NEXT: line up that image with another from your journey. Before long you are lost in a dreamscape that is pretending to be a real landscape. And the Google Car just blinks and plods on. Vernacular parlance has dubbed the system ‘zombie-cam’. This nickname evokes well the amorality of the images. But I’d like to add ‘concussion-cam’ to the lexicon. For it’s as if the mobile camera is stunned and unfocused as it travels, thoughtless and careless, on blurry auto-pilot, nothing consciously invested. As it moves into the landscape, the Google Camera gobbles up a vast territory of future prospects. It stitches no obvious stories into its journeys, but it
lays out a plethora of settings in anticipation of future values that could be poured into them by users of the settings. You see: it's a mobile, oneiric combinator. You become *that* kind of flâneur—technologized and *oneiric*.

I've found Street View remarkably helpful when fossicking for the images I need when I'm composing landscape poetry, when I'm trying to catch the heat-hazed, reverberation that tangs my taken country. And isn't that what the flâneur does: meanders into zones where the crucial insights often come associatively and through *peripheral* vision?

Here are two poems using Street View flânerie, each poem composed in a day. The process went like this: in the morning I used Street View to wander for three hours in a chosen territory. (Respectively, the two zones were: the Stuart Highway in Central Australia; and the suburbs between Beenleigh and the Gold Coast in Queensland.) Then in the afternoon, I wrote, re-wrote, threw out and wrote again by stitching images together, images drawn from my memory of the thousands of camera-snaps that I had dawdled through during the morning. As the text thickened through the afternoon, the line-up of images found their preferred partners and seemed to tell me what they wanted to be *about*, thematically. Which prompted more re-writing. And more recruiting of more remembered images.

By tea-time, there was a poem. Some kind of flâneur-poem. Of course, at the end of many writing-days, I had nothing but exhaust-smoke, blather and wreckage. And while failure can be instructive, I'll spare you those examples.

Here are two survivors.

**Note**

1 I Borrow this term from Wislawa Szymborska’s poem ‘Map’ in *The New Yorker*, 14 April 2014, pp.46–7.
Parrots shriek your name before a crow commences moaning.


Orders come through on the two-way: ‘Take him down blood-handed’.

Blanks across your log-screens tell how much dead time has been passing and the next half-dozen months produce no clues and just drag and freakin’ seep.

Till you’re sleeping in a washaway fifty kliks outside of Alice.

Glimpses lap-dissolving:

- a dream that’s different coloured, coiled inside another dream
- his mind a curving corridor, incarnadine and glutinous
- you ride a scarlet motor-trike around a purple millpond
- you see plankton gyring slow to feed things stuck down where old time is
- you see five discontinuous past tenses presently coexisting
- you see there’s a CCTV remote-feed
- because, y’know, it’s a dream inside another one
  &
  the camera shows you YOU looking back at everything
  You #1 reviewing You #2
  You #2 finding a closely pinpointed distribution-map suggesting that the bottom-things are well disposed to social interaction
  &
there’s an infrared vision-feed that you (#1 & #2 both) can channel-switch to prove they really are biotic yes the bottom-things are living, albeit in a past tense active with some brown pulse that takes sludged decades just to register.

(There’s time enough to understand all this because, well, y’know, it’s a dream.)

You can wake now and count none of it as counsel. But don’t discount it too much either.

(Next the reader should hear music stumbling on the soundtrack. Woodblocks. They’re not clapsticks. They’re from somewhere north. In Asia.)

Sunrise cycles round again and you’re back inside the Cruiser.

A sneezing rainsquall gives one quick atmospheric paroxysm, a spritzspit on the windshield.

Red dust’s a sudden haemorrhage smeared about by wipers.

Then dry air & old heat comes back & more dust settles down.
In a close church: some cool high choral keening.

Next door: a dream home where the main thing inside waiting is warm and what you're wanting.

(Call that wheel outside a whirligig. Stick it with a ribbon.)

Emitting from the church now: a fuzzed grey Hammond organ.

Puzzled by soft sunshine: a dozen darkened station wagons are parked and purring in a cul de sac.

Zoom out to see the whole scene pressed by grapey cumuli that grow plump and belly down.

The house sends out the sound of shaved wood freshly shuffling.

And wafting down the breezeway: a whiff of camphor laurel.
In the author's preface, Julian Bolleter claims that this book will conduct a spatial audit principally of the public rather than the private lands of Perth, to establish how a further one million dwellings can be accommodated within the currently defined metropolitan footprint. The intention is to explain how existing developed areas, rather than green fields sites beyond the existing city limits where most residential development takes place, could supply the land needed to achieve such a goal and to promote better informed public conversation about such a possibility—necessary if Perth is to improve its performance against accepted sustainability measures. Further, Bolleter argues, most current debates on this topic centre around private land, but public lands also offer significant potential.

Unsurprisingly, the underlying rationale is that compactness is fundamental to greater urban sustainability. In order to generate a more compact form for Perth, a shift is required in the way its space is used. The usual way that Australian cities approach density, developing post-industrial sites, activity centres and apartment precincts, cannot alone be relied upon to accommodate the increases in overall density required here. He advocates a more nuanced approach, looking for ways that a greater variety of residential forms can be integrated with various existing typologies by ‘scavenging’, as he describes it, what can be considered ‘leftover’—land within the existing metropolitan footprint whose usefulness has not yet been optimised.

Notwithstanding the argument for a focus on public lands, the book (rather confusingly) begins its exploration by demonstrating its method of analysis by using private residential gardens, not perhaps the most politic of beginnings. Once the method is established, however, the book proceeds to review all manner of publicly-held lands as potential development typologies: car parks, railway reserves, airports, easements.
and freeways, golf courses, schools, universities, river foreshores, parks and open space along with industrial land.

While the analysis is primarily spatial, other considerations contribute to the resulting proposition, particularly an interrogation of square metres per unit of allocated use—per person, per student, per vehicle or like—in the Perth context. Where possible, Bolleter compares these with the norms nationally and internationally, but rather than accepting norms from elsewhere as automatically applicable here, the author makes carefully considered and argued judgements as to what percentage of the available open space each type might yield used for residential development in the Perth context. This is an important aspect of the work, which would otherwise risk ignoring the cultural dimension, the reality that Perth people love their space for its own sake. Indeed, this appears almost to be a defining characteristic of the city. To a non-local reader, one of the most interesting things revealed is just how much space per use is considered the norm in Perth now. Eighty-five square metres of open space per primary student; freeways reserves approaching those of Canberra? One cannot help but wonder how these can be justified. It is even more sobering to learn that with so much space remaining open across existing urban areas, its ecological and recreational functions are so poorly understood or developed.

Rather than accepting a single residential typology to make his calculations of how many homes might be accommodated in the future, Bolleter also interrogates the particular kind of development that might be suitable in each instance, suggesting dwelling types and mixes associated with schools, golf courses, foreshores, universities and the like, from low-rise one-parent dwellings and town houses to the more predictable high-rise apartments of varying scales. Each is illustrated by diagrams showing the proposed development form as a scenario, complete with maps of how these would be laid out in the audited areas. It also shows how many Ellenbrooks (a recently completed and designated ‘Liveable Neighbourhood’ completed on the urban fringe) could be saved by each in the process. As with the approach used to define developable land available, such specificity contributes the dimensions of reality to the basic research proposition and findings, and takes them beyond the realms of the theoretical.

This book makes an important contribution to the knowledge of what Perth could be in the future.

Apart from the sheer bravado of carrying out a spatial audit at the metropolitan scale, it presents a spatial proposition that challenges existing (dare one even suggest oversimplified) thinking about the city by
testing a greater variety of potential development typologies specific to actual locations. It suggests the possibility of a metropolis where density is dispersed, and where urban form develops much greater variety and richness; though even with a further one million dwellings distributed as Bolleter proposes, it would remain essentially a suburban city in overall density and function, not necessarily a bad thing given local expectations.

This takes us to the elephant in the room. Can this dispersion of density support the kind of movement system that the city requires to be considered sustainable? While Bolleter advocates better bus, cycle and pedestrian systems to parallel development and argues that more density is fundamentally more sustainable than continuous car-based expansion, current urban thinking also proposes more concentrated density to support the mass transit systems that are argued as necessary to support cities of this scale. Perhaps that is the next test his proposition should be subjected to. Just how would mass movement in a system such as the one he proposes actually work?

Compactness is an admirable goal for the 21st century Australian city, and Perth would seem to need it more than most. As the author argues, it has had a century or more of constructing free-standing homes (nearly 80% of existing stock) and nearly a century of constructing inner-ring apartments and peri-urban sprawl. The time is ripe to accommodate Perth’s version of the Australian dream another way. Bolleter shows how, without too much pain, this could be achieved. The book argues that, counter to current extravagant ways of thinking about land in Perth’s metropolitan area, all land should have a clear purpose, especially open land. Rather than the vast tracts of open grass that provide marginal and even negative environmental value, if open space is to survive in the Perth of the future, it should do so either for clearly defined environmental ends or otherwise be used for more considered and careful development of the kinds he suggests. Space for no other purpose than its own should no longer be an option.

This is brave proposition, but one worthy, as the book shows through this audit, of serious consideration. Those one million dwellings can very easily be accommodated more sustainably, so rather than why, perhaps the question should be why not?
‘I’m really elsewhere’ (1) confides the first line of Tracy Ryan’s 
*Hoard*, and from that moment on, so is the reader, spirited to the ancient wetlands 
of Ireland, plumbing the ‘banked darkness’ (13) of peat bog. Here in the 
moot archive of earth, the past, present and pre-history merge, and are 
broken down and embedded together. Accordingly, as this short collection 
accretes poem by poem, bog becomes synonymous with hoard: becomes 
accumulation and treasure, place of storage and the action of storing. It 
takes rare skill to tease such nuances to the surface without stripping 
them of their mystique and leaning too heavily on obvious metaphor, but 
as one of Australia’s finest poets, Ryan is more than equal to the task. 

This collection (Ryan’s eighth, and co-winner of the 2014 Whitmore 
Press Manuscript Prize) is essentially thirty-three ways of looking at 
a bog, and beyond that, at an intricate relationship of people to land, 
and to a primal identity. The bog is a ‘dense ledger’ (40), which is ‘only 
gathering material’ (37). It is like some great digestive tract, ‘swallowing all 
conceivable’ (29) which continually absorbs and regurgitates collective as 
well as individual secrets and memory. It signifies fuel (in the form of peat 
or turf), cache, livelihood and grave. But to whom do these uses and rights 
belong, and indeed, ‘what is right to a bog’ (31)? It yields precious artefacts:

- gorget and manchette
- torc and horn

- penannular clasp
- torn from garment (47)

Yet these seem freighted with an implication that the significance we 
place in material objects becomes more burdensome than the things 
themselves:
weight you grasp only
as wearer
heavy the way
they say crowns are (18)

For the changeling—the ‘burn & freckle’ (1) Australian descendant addressing Ireland, bog (and family forebears) in the fine opening poem—this wetland terrain is the key to a complex genealogy, a possible ‘recognition of kin’ (17), and a place of instinctive connection where

like the newborn
I must imprint’ (5)

yet also where belonging is not a given:

must I rip up my share like turf
& knowingly trespass
to get some warmth (8)

A variety of voices speak from ‘the otherworld’ (15): hoard hider, hoard finder, the quick and the dead, the just-surfaced, the long-buried, the ‘discarnate’ (44). Through all of them, the bog itself speaks:

...keeping charge

of every detail
never forgetful (27)

At once absorbent and resistant, effusive and reticent, it has ‘the gape & gaze of a Medusa’ (36), is ‘vulval and dentate’ (45) like a Sheela Na Gig, though the speaker in ‘Rhetorical’ does question the sexual politics of assigning gender, asking:

am I not complicit in a history
of dangerous conflations (34)

Ultimately, however, ‘bog is what bog does’ (41). Most of all, it endures. It

...may flinch at yielding
secrets yet recover (19)

whereas the secrets themselves are not always so resilient. Hoards get ‘damaged in transit’ and worse, ‘recast as meaningless’ (19). Yet when not misappropriated

Hoard is bog disclosure
to those who would hear (19)
And for ‘those who would hear’, Ryan’s habitual mastery with acoustics as well as language is much in evidence in this collection: even if one is unsure what an ‘inscrutable crotal’ (16) is, a surprisingly apt mental image can immediately be fashioned courtesy of the sound. She eschews punctuation in preference for perfectly judged arrangement of spacing and lineation, here mimicking the effort of breath and step on challenging ground, there expressing the topography of the landscape. An interrogation into the layers and complexities of ancestry, ownership and belonging, *Hoard* is indeed ‘more than ordinary soil’ (37), and a profoundly satisfying read.

Taking its cue from the eponymous—and mysterious—creature of the title, Western Australia-based poet Jan Napier’s debut collection *Thylacine* hymns the slippage between things lost, things sought and things not always found.

First collections are often a miscellany of themes, and *Thylacine* is no exception. Consisting of seventy (mostly one-page) poems divided into four sections, the book encompasses a wide repertoire of subject matter: place-based vignettes about home and overseas, interior journeys, personal relationships, and pocket narratives, many delivered with a subtle wash of surrealism. There can’t be many collections that span, for example, references to French tightrope walker Blondin, Babylon’s Ishtar Gate and Italian violin makers alongside poems about ageing and arthritic Pontiffs, fishnet stockings, and Frida Kahlo.

Napier establishes an evocative tone of mind (and place) in poems like ‘Lamped Streets’, the speaker ‘haunting this mystery of rain’ (7) and likewise in the first half of the six-line poem ‘Two Degrees North’. Just these three lines in fact are enough:

In a Zen garden there are no trucks entering.  
White herons fish    shadows rake gravel.  
Wind moves the moon two degrees North. (28)

‘North of Twenty-Six’ is a wry stream-of-consciousness love song to the nation’s remote north, the ‘real’ Australia, one suspects: ‘think barbies flyslap festive’, where ‘They all have dogs and wives, these blokes’ (and in that order) and the south is written off as a place that’s

...soft and pale with rain  
where drought just means lawns go brown and steak gets more expensive (12)
When she writes about specific people, Napier's poems are powerful and affecting. In ‘My Mother's Weather’, she captures the frustrations of age and failing faculties, the slow draining away of self:

She scrabbles for syllables
that won't untongue
  storms I'm not stupid.
Even the dictionaries' weary leaves
  blued with additions
are vexatious now (52)

‘Hand Made’, by contrast, shows the woman ‘mother’ used to be, in command and practical:

My mother chooses the fabric
  It is good quality, she says,
and will last. (35)

Other highlights include ‘Interim’, a threnody for a lost love, where the setting is everyday, the emotion anything but. The speaker's heart may be ‘a cindery black thing’ but it's the observation a couple of lines later that ‘His rubber boots have perished too’ (76) that really drives home the sense of desolation. Likewise, in ‘Back Home’, a whole sad history leaks from lines such as:

His absence on the verandah is a welcome estimated carefully
  as mileage, there's no place set at the table and no carnival word (42)

‘Clay’ is a fine poem, elegantly phrased:

  At times cups slump and pink lips droop.
She whisks aside what's graceless
  a dragonfly husband      looted dreams
this shivery hut      nutshells the robe around herself.
  Begins again. (75)

This poem's narrative thread is well judged throughout, leading to an unexpected and satisfying ending.

Whether dealing with things transient, things earthly, the domestic or the uncanny, Napier has a distinctive, whimsical and occasionally dry voice. She displays a broad vocabulary and is unafraid of experimenting with lineation and form. Thylacine is a commendable debut, and it will be interesting to observe how this poet's work evolves.
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