CAR-TOGRAPHIES:

A CRITICAL VISUAL ANALYSIS OF THREE MELBOURNE AUTOSCAPES

Ashley Peter Perry
B Comm (Media) (Hons)
RMIT University

An exegesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

October 2013

Design and Social Context Portfolio
School of Media and Communication
RMIT University
DECLARATION

I certify that except where due acknowledgment has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the exegesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; and any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

Signed: ____________________________

Date: ____________________________
This research project documents and critically reflects upon the ‘autoscapes’ of three major road corridors, Springvale Road, the Metropolitan and Western Ring Road and the EastLink Tollway, spanning suburban and outer suburban Melbourne. It examines site-specific temporalities, spatialities and physical characteristics associated with the landscapes of these motorways when encountered through a visually oriented mode of analysis.

The research employs a creative practice-based methodology, the outcomes of which are expressed in a collection of specifically image-based artefacts, including a digital poster series, a digital photography book and a non-narrative documentary film. These artefacts incorporate a range of traditional and hybrid visual approaches (graphic, photographic and videographic), which depict and interrogate their subject, the topographies and environmental aesthetics of three exemplary Melbourne roads, at various speeds and from different mobile and static perspectives. Individually and collectively, the three artefacts produced by the research investigation work to document moments of complexity, speed and duration associated with travelling by car along an original and embodied major suburban arterial; reveal the hidden, uncelebrated and hybrid terrain of a road corridor embedded within the ‘edgelands’ of Melbourne’s urban fringe; and depict the experience of travel through a featureless and flattened topography, within a temporally endless and spatially antiseptic, semi-privatised motorway.

The accompanying exegesis contextualises these visual expressions of those Melbourne autoscapes through its account of relevant critical approaches to automobility and landscapes of the car, both academic and/or artistic, which have analysed the processes by which contemporary road networks have become integral components of early twenty-first century suburbanity. The fragmented and repetitious articulations of time, space and landscape, captured and examined here through a critical visual approach, work to extend and contribute new understandings of automobility beyond key existing social and cultural analyses of the topic.

The research finds that automobility dynamically frames perceptions and experiences of the suburban and outer suburban landscape of contemporary Melbourne. The affordances of creative visual-based methods of inquiry, within a sociological and historically infused research project, help to render moments of insight and detail in relation to the simultaneous specificity and ‘anywhere-ness’ of Melbourne automotive environments.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many people and organisations have provided invaluable assistance and support over the period that I have undertaken my research project.

To begin with, I would like to acknowledge the friendship and camaraderie of the postgraduate students from within the School of Media and Communication. Additionally, I would like to thank Laurene Vaughn and the members of the Media, Communications and Design (MCD) Studio for their advice and guidance over the years.

I must also thank the staff members from within the School of Media Communication. In particular, I would like to mention Peter Kemp, Lisa French, Adrian Miles, Terry Johal, Stephen Gaunson, Lucy Morieson and Chris Hudson for their friendship, academic support and collegiality. I would also like to thank Kristen Sharp from the School of Art for her meaningful professional guidance and friendship.

I owe a huge debt of thanks to Michael Dunbar for his willingness to be a sounding board in relation to many of the creative ideas that have found their way into my research. I also have to thank him for his design expertise and his friendship, which I value highly. Many thanks must also go to Evan Butson for his peerless technical advice, driving ability and for his willingness to share on a regular basis a ‘pot-n-parma’ with me on a Thursday night. I would like to acknowledge the professionalism of Diane Cook and thank her for completing a detailed proofread of the exegesis.

Financial support during the completion of my research project came from an Australian Postgraduate Award (APA) and additional financial support from the School of Graduate Research, of which I am grateful. Aspects of my exegesis appear in the journal article, ‘City Artery: The Visual Interrogation of Melbourne’s Regime of Automobility’, published in the inaugural volume of *Spaces and Flows: An*

Significant acknowledgment must be expressed for the unerring guidance, critical rigour, forbearance and good humour that I have received from my senior supervisor Brian Morris. I deeply value his influence upon my research. I have also appreciated the critical insights and timely comments as well as the ongoing professional support from Adrian Danks in his capacity as my second supervisor.

I could not have been able to complete my research without the love and support of my parents, Max and Marie Perry, and from the members of my immediate family, Felicity, Evan, Keira and Bridget. I also deeply appreciate the love, support and help of Mignon (an eagle-eyed research assistant), and Katherine, over the period of this research and beyond. Finally, the love and companionship I have received from Sophie – at a time of great happiness for us with the arrival of our son Eleas - has allowed me to complete my research in the most supportive of environments.

In memory of
Winifred Mary BRIGGS, 1915 – 2012

&
Konstantinos Alexios ALEXIADIS, 1947 – 2014
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## LIST OF ARTEFACTS

| 88 |

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

| 89 |

## PREFACE

| xi |

## INTRODUCTION

| 1 |

1. Mapping the Autoscapes of Melbourne 1
2. The City and the Car 4
3. Visualities of Automobility 9
4. Driving Research Through Creative Practice 12
5. The Exegesis Roadmap 15

## 1. URBAN HIGHWAY

Designing a Suburban Autoscape

| 18 |

Introduction: Springvale Road 18

1. The Geography of a Suburban Arterial: a brief history 21
3. Critical Reflections: a glance in the rear view mirror 31
4. Artefact I: Urban Highway digital poster series 33

Conclusion 36

## 2. RING ROAD

Photographing the Material Geographies of a Road Corridor

| 38 |

Introduction: The Metropolitan and Western Ring Road 38

1. Exploring Melbourne’s edgelands 41
2. Photographing the Metropolitan and Western Ring Road corridor 43
3. Artefact II: Ring Road digital photography book 48

Conclusion 51

## 3. TOLLWAY

Filming the Driving Spaces of a Motorway

| 54 |

Introduction: The EastLink Tollway 54

1. Travelling the semi-privatised geographies of a tollway 58
2. Filming the spaces of the EastLink Tollway 62
LIST OF ARTEFACTS

Artefact I.  *Urban Highway* (2011)
Four digital posters – colour
A0-size Portrait (1189mm x 841mm)

Artefact II.  *Ring Road* (2008 – 2011)
135 digital photographs – black and white
A4-size Landscape (297mm x 210mm)

Artefact III.  *Tollway* (2011)
High-definition video – colour
BD (66 minutes)
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

All unacknowledged photographs are my own.

Fig. 1 Metropolitan Melbourne (2013)
Map
© Google – Mountain View, California, United States of America.

Fig. 2 Have you seen it? (2008)
Postcard (10.5 x 14.8cm)
© Rochus Hinkel – RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia

Fig. 3 Four Approaches to the City (2008)
4 channel high-definition DVD (50mins)
Video Still

Fig. 4 Springvale Road, Melbourne (2013)
Map
© Google – Mountain View, California, United States of America

Fig. 5 Golden Fleece Petrol Station, Bulleen (1969)
Photograph
© Museum Victoria – Melbourne, Australia

Fig. 6 Oakleigh Motel (1957)
Photograph
© Pictures Collection – State Library of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia

Fig. 7 Subdivision (1954)
Painting (55 x 75.2 cm)
John Brack
© TarraWarra Museum of Art Collection – Healesville, Victoria, Australia
Fig. 8  What is Automobility? (2008)
Poster (59.4 x 42cm)
© Michael Dunbar & Ashley Perry – RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia

Fig. 9  Occident (1877)
Photograph
Eadweard Muybridge
© Library of Congress – Washington DC, United States of America

Fig. 10  Ring Road, Melbourne (2013)
Map
© Google – Mountain View, California, United States of America

Fig. 11  Untitled (1980 - 1983)
Photograph
Joachim Brohm
© Steidl – Göttingen, Germany

Fig. 12  EastLink Tollway, Melbourne (2013)
Map
© Google – Mountain View, California, United States of America

Fig. 13  Hotel (2008)
Site-specific art installation (2000 x 1200 x 500cm)
© Callum Morton – Melbourne, Australia

Fig. 14  Heat (1995)
Film Still
Michael Mann
© Warner Bros. Pictures – Los Angeles, California, United States of America
PREFACE

The personal genesis for this research project is located in a childhood and adolescence that encountered, and on many occasions experienced, the spaces and places of a large metropolitan city from the windows of a motorcar. Growing up in a small country town four hundred kilometers from Melbourne, my family and I regularly travelled to the city to visit our extended family. These long road trips commenced with the familiar sights of wheat fields, bushland, mountain ranges and small country towns, before contact with the less familiar and for me much more thrilling scenes of ports, freeways, bridges, factories and skyscrapers. City views from the car were assembled in an evocative manner – painterly and magical – through variations in time, speed and movement. These distinct and transient visions of Melbourne were supplemented with a program of films and television shows – most notably American police procedurals – accompanying and infiltrating my often mobile and residual encounters with the city. With an imagination fired by the dystopian terror of George Miller’s Mad Max, the police operations of Adam-12, the streetwise detectives from Starsky and Hutch, the motorcycle cops of CHiPs, and the undercover police officers of Miami Vice, as well as the artificially intelligent and near-indestructible crime-fighting car of Knight Rider, I had a similar experience to that described by architectural historian Mitchell Schwarzer (2004), who also observed the city in terms of ‘architecture flash[ing] by in snippets, pared down like memories, and every bit as enchanting’ (9). My early interaction with Melbourne was via multiple screens, and mediated through multiple technologies, of vehicular travel and cinematic/televisual representation. It was framed in a never-ending collection of linear and fragmented sequences – equally wondrous, ordinary, estranging and banal – which continue to underpin my perception, comprehension and appreciation for the contemporary suburban and outer suburban landscape of the city within which I live, Melbourne.

A more recent influence upon this research project is the critical analysis I completed for my Honours degree thesis during 2006, on the representation of Los Angeles (LA) in Michael Mann’s crime film Collateral. In a narrative that takes place
over the course of a single evening a taxi driver named Max (Jaime Foxx) transports a hired killer, Vincent (Tom Cruise), to a series of locations across the city. For much of the film Mann elects to depict a great deal of the cityscape from the alternating perspectives of the car-driver and rear-seat passenger. His approach is to actively defamiliarise the viewer’s perspective by adopting a ‘pronounced tendency towards spatial abstraction’ (Lobato 2008), while delineating the narrative trajectory of the film through a specific temporality. *Collateral* features a series of nondescript, semi-or post-industrial sites, including freeways and the dark, oppressive, non-human spaces beneath them, a multitude of car parks and truck stops, as well as petrol stations and roadside café’s, that Mann depicts in a visual strategy encompassing designed moments of ‘enchantment and defacement’ (Lobato 2008). As the taxi of *Collateral* passes through a range of built environments across LA by night, it encounters instances of ‘magical urbanism’ (Davis 2001), as in the moment a coyote runs across a suburban intersection as Max waits for traffic lights to change, or equally, a graphic case of violence when Vincent executes two opportunist thieves in an inner-city laneway. Through a precise and sophisticated visual style, refined over a collection of films set in various urban, suburban and outer suburban settings including *Thief* (1981), *Manhunter* (1986), *Heat* (1995), and the influential television series *Miami Vice* (1984 – 1989), Mann deliberately and persuasively elevates the atmospheres of various metropolitan microclimates, creating moments of fantasy which strategically produce a heightened sense of space and place that feeds into the viewer’s understanding of character, narrative paths and story thematics. A collection of recurring visual tropes – the view through a car windscreen, aerial perspectives of the city, and spectral qualities of streetlights reflecting across the surface of wet roads at night – establish and reinforce the spatial expressiveness, organisation and popular ocular perspective retained by the contemporary American city.

Influenced by Mann’s capacity to render urban space and place in such a way as to reveal hidden, dormant, vacant and surplus (im)materialties and affects, this creative research investigation embarks upon a critical visual depiction of the topography seen and unseen by the inhabitants of Melbourne who travel by car. The simultaneous sense of sameness and difference that exists between contemporary representations of LA and Melbourne has its roots in a historical, social and cultural process identified by Graeme Davison in *Car Wars* (2004), as the ‘Americanisation of
the Australian city’ (78). For Davison, American influence took hold after World War Two; visible in the expanding suburban and outer suburban road networks and developing roadside amenities needed to accommodate increasing car usage, such as ‘… the interstate highway, the roadside diner, the garage and carport, the parking meter and the multi-level parking station, the motel, the drive-in theatre, the service station, the automobile-based shopping centre, and the mobile home’ (2004: 78).

The urbanist Pierre Filion (2013) characterises the rapid development of the suburban vision and configuration in these terms:

The car-dependent North American suburban form was pieced together in the fifteen years or so following the Second World War. In a climate of robust economic growth, accelerated demographic expansion, pent-up demand for consumer goods and forceful lobbying from the car and oil industry, the different aspects of the suburb were devised over this period (80).

Many of these post-World War Two economic and political factors and forces influenced the rapid expansion and increased decentralisation of the Australian city’s urban form. The rising popularity of and dependency on the car for private mobility and movement, and its capacity to provide accessibility to increasingly dispersed suburbs, has over many decades established a legacy of ceaseless planning, development, construction and reconfiguration of the road network across suburban and outer suburban Melbourne. A highlight of this endless, car-orientated spatiality, is the ‘creativity in tailoring land uses to an automobile-dominated environment’, a process that commences across the city during the 1950s and continues to the more recent advent of ‘big-box stores, power malls, mega supermarkets and multiplex cinemas, all of which rely on a large catchment of drivers’ (Filion 2013: 82).

John Brinckerhoff Jackson in A Sense of Place, A Sense of Time (1994), touches upon the spatial qualities of the contemporary American city that resonate with the reality of many Australian suburban and outer suburban environments, and geographies, including Melbourne. He writes:
Say you are passing through the renovated downtown late at night: you then find that the dominant feature of the scene is not a cluster of magnificent forms and spaces; it is the long and empty view of evenly spaced, periodically changing to red and green traffic lights along main street. The tall glass buildings, so imposing by day, are half-hidden in darkness and stand to one side to allow the street to thrust ahead, unimpeded. It cuts through the less opulent parts of town, the block after block of silent, nondescript houses like the houses in every other American city. It goes through the tree-grown suburbs and parallels the complex of warehouses and parking lots and industrial plants until at last it turns into an interstate highway, heading into the dark and featureless countryside (152).

Though the magical pattern of the mean streets, boulevards and freeways of LA may seem a long way from Melbourne they do in fact share a considerable connection. Both cities encompass a similar ‘centrifugal’ spatial organisation (Jackson 1994; Dimendberg 2004) that is configured through a vast network of street grids and embodied in the horizontal and non-architectural character of the built environment. This is particularly evident in the extensive suburban and outer suburban spaces and road corridors that both cities have devoted to facilitating car-based transportation solutions embedded in the design, construction and ceaseless expansion of arterial highways, orbital freeways, and more recently, semi-private tollways.

With an underlying interest in the attributes, meanings and ‘experiential richness’ (Borden, 2013: 9) acquired through automobilised and more traditional visions of the city, this creative research project investigates Melbourne’s ubiquitous and extensive road landscapes, or ‘autoscapes’. The research proceeds through the production of a series of digital image artefacts (graphic, photographic and videographic), whose purpose is to critically deconstruct the temporal, spatial and physical characteristics of three exemplary Melbourne road corridors. The intention here is to investigate through a sophisticated representational strategy the moments, scenes and settings that articulate the ways in which the topography and terrain is constituted, envisioned and influenced through an automotive presence, or layer, both temporally, spatially and physically within suburban and outer suburban Melbourne, as well as in the imagined spaces of suburbia. The research also extends to the
depiction of other places and sites that exist on the periphery of the city’s metropolitan boundary that are influenced by the presence of the car and the weight of the car system.

A conceptual position that influences the research is the notion that Melbourne’s roads ‘no longer merely lead to places; they are places’ (Jackson 1994: 190), and that a creative engagement with these movement and mobility corridors produces valuable critical insights into a range of relational complexities bound-together in moments of car travel through a sprawling and multi-dimensional suburban and outer suburban landscape. An additional conceptual component within the project relates to wider aspects of the car system and a desire within the research to depict an array of novel automotive objects, technologies, signs and supplies that reinforce the non-linearity and complexity of Melbourne’s car infrastructure throughout its metropolitan zone and beyond.

The examination of three road corridors within specific suburban road spaces, and across a broader sprawling suburbia, enables a consideration of actual environments (arterial highways, orbital freeways, tollways, truck stops and car parks), and the ‘abstract ‘places’ [and unwieldy objects] of identification and connection’ (Healy 1994: xiv), found within industrial parks, residential neighbourhoods, discount motels, burnt out cars and discarded televisions. Healy (1994) notes:

Real suburbs are never as they were remembered but are always in a state of transformation. In some ways, suburbia does not possess a geographical location. Suburbia has been a way of identifying traces which are not, and perhaps never were, really present (xviii).

In their depiction of different and diverging types of autoscape, the project artefacts produce images and image sequences that reflect both the contemporary temporal, spatial and built environments of the city’s suburban and outer suburban zones, as well as communicating through visual means aspects of the continuing cultural logic and consciousness of suburbia and the influence of the car system within this multifaceted and multiuse terrain.
The research juxtaposes varying types of autoscapes through different modes of critical representation. In this way, the temporal, spatial and aesthetic qualities of the three road corridors reveal a range of similarities and divergences. One road corridor, consisting of a historically sedimented and quotidian suburban landscape, with uniform and stable residential neighbourhoods, strip malls and parklands is configured in a predominantly linear visual narrative form. Within a more open and expansive visual approach, a second road corridor reflects the topography of a post-industrial zone with mixed visual hierarchies, uncelebrated geographies and nondescript sites, including port facilities, large distribution complexes, office parks, overpasses, petrol stations, abandoned former factories and new developments of tract housing. To a third road corridor, encapsulated in a longer non-narrative form, offering yet a further representation of an autoscape that consists of a visual regime encompassing flat, placeless, repetitious and bland terrain, fractured by instances of garish sculptural affectation, where notions of private and public space are blurred, and cultural depth is missing.
INTRODUCTION

Together these apparently diverse strands compromise an understanding of automobility that is irreducible to the automobile.

— Böhm, et al. (2006)

I. Mapping the Autoscapes of Melbourne

The constant expansion of Melbourne’s complex network of streets, roads, highways, motorways (freeways and tollways), and bypasses, has remained a cornerstone of the ever-shifting and dispersing spatial organisation of the city. As recently as January 2013, for instance, a major new road extension – the Peninsula Link Freeway, a continuation of the EastLink Tollway – was opened to commuters at the southeastern edge of the city. As Peter Newman and Isabella Jennings note in Cities as Sustainable Ecosystems (2008), ‘[s]ince the 1950s, cities have been shaped largely by motorized transportation, particularly in North America and Australia’ (127). Filion characterises the post World War Two car-dependent city in these terms:

The large amounts of space required too accommodate a generalized use of the car also shape urban form. Not only were certain types of buildings modified to suit the car (e.g., drive-through establishments), but all structures had to comply with formulas assuring sufficient parking space. The most obvious impact on suburban morphology was decline in density caused by the need to provide space for cars (2013: 80 – 81).

Car-dependent cities such as Melbourne are characterised by low-density patterns of housing where a preponderance of motorway infrastructure ‘… enables the city to be traversed more quickly by car than by public transport along corridors, or more quickly by car than by cycling or walking for local trips’ (Newman and Jennings 2008: 128). It is these types of road transportation corridors – arterially sited urban
highways, freeways and tollways, located within the suburban sprawl and on the outer suburban edges of the city – not the established streetscapes of central Melbourne that have drawn the lion’s share of scholars’ attention (see Annear 2005; Otto 2009) that form the main object of my research.

Figure 1. Metropolitan Melbourne (2013).
Source: Google, Mountain View, California, United States of America.

The aim of this research project is to critically interrogate the automotive environment, in essence, the autoscapes configured within three major arterial roads located across greater metropolitan Melbourne including, the urban highway
Springvale Road, the Metropolitan and Western Ring Road and the semi-privatised EastLink Tollway (see Fig. 1). The research project relies upon a mixed methodology incorporating visual and practice-based strategies with meaning derived from the conception, design and execution of a representative mode of creative practice, incorporating various performative activities including driving and walking through multiple and varied autoscapes across suburban and outer suburban Melbourne.

Three visual artefacts: the digital poster series *Urban Highway* (2011), the digital photography book *Ring Road* (2008 – 2011), and the high-definition non-narrative documentary film *Tollway* (2011), provide the means for the investigation as well as a material expression of its findings. These project artefacts incorporate a range of traditional and hybrid visual approaches, as mentioned in the preface, generating multiple mobile and static perspectives charting a process of critical discovery in relation to specific suburban and outer suburban automotive environments and sites. This accompanying exegesis addresses the critical contexts in which the artefacts were conceived, including the conceptual strategies and ideas that informed their creation as well as the creative decisions, directions and methods that helped to shape their final characteristics, forms and qualities.

The focus upon documenting and critically examining three of Melbourne’s most significant autoscapes is an attempt to produce a form of imaginative critical inquiry across a range of visual representations and styles that stem from experiences of car travel and the observation of car movement and mobility along these arterial and orbital roads. The key question addressed by the research project is: how might current investigations of automobility originating from the cross-disciplinary fields of social, cultural and urban theory be extended through the use of creative and critical visual modes of enquiry? A further aspect of this research project is to critically examine and document the temporal, spatial and material ‘hybrid’ assemblages that exist between the motorist (driver and passenger) and the autoscapes of the city. The research is ‘progressed through the creation of and interaction with [the] artefacts’ (Scrivener 2000: 3). Additionally, in a novel manner, the artefacts reflect upon the ‘socio-spatial’ sets of ‘[everyday] practice that seek to organize, accelerate and shape the spatial movements and impacts of automobiles’ (Böhm et al. 2006: 3) within metropolitan Melbourne.
These artefacts incorporate a range of formal image-making techniques. They have been designed in an exploratory and documentary mode of creative practice, and employ various visual and spatial tropes, including the mobile view from within and alongside the car, and the view from outside the car both above, and in many instances below, the spaces of the road. These perspectives are analogous to the rhythms, tempos and general function of the road corridors that have come to occupy the landscape within the suburban and outer suburban zones of the city. They provide an anchor for my investigation and suggest ways in which motorists, and others, situated beyond the car’s interior, view, experience and comprehend the autoscapes of Melbourne’s road corridors. Additionally, the various perspectives encompassed by the three artefacts represent differing visual documents depicting the wide array of human and non-human connections that exist within the everyday ‘time-space scapes’ (Sheller and Urry 2000) of the city, and that have a particular character and resonance within Melbourne’s arterial road corridors.

My representational engagement with automobility, and the depiction of automobilised time, space and landscape, encompasses a range of expository strategies, affects and results. The artefacts produce linear, fragmented and interrupted representations of car travel. They depict many areas, localities and specific sites of the car. They produce a range of visual abstractions through the encounter with the road environment as well as a collection of optical (distanced or deep) and haptic (embodied and sensory) visualities, associated with capturing the many topographic elements (elevations, contours, gradients, lines-of-sight and distances), landscape architectural features (embankments and plantings), road infrastructures (flyovers, tunnels, tolling gantries, on/off ramps, street lights and traffic signals), and roadside furniture and novelties (parking bays and site-specific artworks), that configure the autoscapes of three road corridors.

II. The City and the Car

This section of the exegesis contextualises the theoretical scope of the research project through a brief overview of the discourse surrounding notions of urban and suburban mobility. A dimension of this discourse is the rapidly expanding academic research agenda engaging with the nature, role and forces of the car, of which many
aspects are bound together in the notion of autonomous mobility, or automobility. An underlying aspect of the research project is an acknowledgement of the dense articulations of automobility present within the everyday environments of suburban and outer suburban Melbourne. By mapping the wide array of elements, objects and texts that combine to constitute the vernacular autoscapes of the city, the research stages an analysis of the prevailing realities and daily phenomenologies associated with these utilitarian spaces, places and locations.

A recent focus for the social sciences and related academic fields, including human geography, the new cultural geography\(^1\) and its sub-discipline urban geography, has been the multiple types, durations, scales, spaces and technologies associated with notions of mobility.\(^2\) The mobilities paradigm or ‘mobilities turn’ (Urry 2000 and 2007; Sheller and Urry 2006), has gained considerable theoretical traction by moving beyond earlier precepts in the social sciences based upon the ‘territorial’ and ‘static’ investigations of ‘bounded institutions’ and ‘social structures’.

Kevin Hannam, Mimi Sheller and John Urry, writing in the inaugural issue of the journal *Mobilities* (2006), suggest:

Mobility has become an evocative keyword for the twenty-first century and a powerful discourse that creates its own effects and contexts. The concept of mobilities encompasses both the large-scale movements of people, objects, capital and information across the world, as well as the more local processes of daily transportation, movement through public space and the travel of material things within everyday life (1).

\(^1\) The new cultural geography commences in the late-1980s. It comprises ideas and trends foregrounding issues of cultural difference derived from multiple disciplines within human geography. Additionally, the ‘cultural turn’ incorporates a wide range of interpretative and qualitative methods of research (Barnett 2009).

\(^2\) Other theories related to embodiment, performance, materiality and practice have also been explored with human geographers as well as anthropologists, architects, art historians and many others relying upon philosophical approaches including Marxism, positivism, phenomenology, feminism and post-structuralism to explore theories of movement, travel, landscape, place and space in relation to contemporary urban social life (Merriman 2007).
With an expansion in conceptual thinking related to the interconnectedness of
mobility, suburban geography and social life, a generally dormant critical focus on the
object and influence of the car has recently been re-established. An engagement with
the view of the contemporary city established from a moving vehicle, at varying
speeds, forms a component of the ‘hybrid’ assemblage that exists between the car-
driver – expressed in the notion of a combined human autonomy and machinic
mobility articulated in the term automobility – with the everyday spaces, durations
and processes of car travel.

As recently as 2004, Mike Featherstone could reasonably claim that despite a
growing influence in ‘flows, movement and mobility in social life’, that the more
specific form of automobility ‘has been a neglected topic within sociology, cultural
studies and related disciplines’ (1). Further, Phil Hubbard argues in City (2006) that:

… car culture has rarely been written of as an emergent set of machinic
relations between practices and technologies, involving, for example, the
development of highway rules and regulations, modes of driverly conduct,
road signs and markings, street lighting, radio travel warnings, road atlases
and satellite navigation systems (124).

In a detailed examination of the car that includes a definition of automobility, Sheller
and Urry (2000) characterise and investigate the ‘unique combination’ of components
that sustain the pervasive ‘car-system’, and account for the complex and everyday
linkages that exist between cars, drivers, passengers, pedestrians, machines, materials,
fuel, buildings, roads, geographies, societies and cultures. Their automobility matrix
outlines six key factors that reinforce the ‘amalgam of interlocking machines, social
practices and ways of dwelling’, whereby the extensive reliance and usefulness of the
car and car travel, ‘makes instantaneous time and the negotiation of extensive space
central to how social life is configured’ (2000: 739), with urban settings. For Sheller
and Urry, ‘Mobility is as constitutive of modernity as is urbanity, that civil societies
of the West are societies of ‘automobility’’ (2000: 738).

The significant level of individual car ownership, the complexity and scale of
the road network, and the dependence upon a drive-to and drive-in culture, is clearly
indexed in Melbourne’s car system in urban typologies that range from multi-faceted petrol stations incorporating the 24-hour convenience store to the serial built form of the drive-through family restaurant. Henri Lefebvre (1987) writes of such a system in terms of its desire ‘to sacrifice all of society to its dominion’ (8), while Urry notes ‘the [car] system’ generates the preconditions for its own self expansion’, describing it in terms of ‘a self-organizing autopoietic’, that for more than a century has locked many world economies and societies into an expansive and seemingly irreversible ‘steel-and-petroleum car’ (2004: 27) mode of mobility.

Automobility has also been considered in other ways, reinforcing and extending, the conceptual framework articulated by Sheller and Urry. Writing in the introduction to Against Automobility (2005), editors Steffen Böhm, Campbell Jones, Chris Land and Mat Paterson suggest:

Automobility is one of the principal socio-technical institutions through which modernity is organized. It is a set of political institutions and practices that seek to organize, accelerate and shape the spatial movements and impacts of automobiles, whilst simultaneously regulating their many consequences. It is also an ideological … or discursive formation, embodying ideals of freedom, privacy, movement progress and autonomy, motifs through which automobility is represented in popular and academic discourse alike, and through which its principal technical artefacts – roads, cars, etc. – are legitimized (6).

For some time their have been critiques of the role of the car both in general terms and in relation to influence within urban, suburban and outer suburban settings, although since the publication of Sheller and Urry’s work an increasing amount of academic literature has sought to further examine the specific nature and presence of the car in contemporary life.

Research into the multiple aspects of the car incorporating historical (Davison 2004), cultural (Seiler 2008; Redshaw 2008), political (Paterson 2007), social (Latimer and Munro 2006), affective (Thrift 2004), spatial (Merriman 2007), and sensory pleasures, distractions and experience of driving (Moran 2009 and Vanderbilt
2008), collectively produce perspectives that firmly establish, articulate and interrogate the coercive power of the car as well as its influence upon the nature, experience and quality of contemporary urban life. Jim Conley and Arlene Tigar McLaren argue in *Car Troubles* (2009) that:

> Given its iconic status in modern production and consumption and its critical relationship to urban design, the automobile is a particularly fruitful object for multi- and interdisciplinary exploration … The traditional separation of technical and social studies, for example, does not suffice for adequate theoretical explanations and strategies for change. Working across disciplines allows for greater insight into how automobility is entangled with material and social life globally and in specific cultural contexts … (2).

As a constitutive technology of the twentieth century, analogous to the role, visibility and influence of the cinema, television and personal computer (Castells 2001; Urry 2004), the car has remained the predominant form of urban, suburban and outer suburban mobility, producing and reproducing social life in predominately developed and western societies. In the introduction to a recent book exploring a post-car future *After The Car* (2009), Kingsley Dennis and Urry, reiterate that the car:

> … its associated activities and technologies is the most powerful product or system there has been over the last century or so … Over a billion cars have been manufactured and over 650 million currently roam the world’s roads and streets. It is predicted that, if nothing changes, within a couple of decades there will be 1 billion cars worldwide, especially as China fully moves from a bike society to a car society (1).

Although Dennis and Urry argue for a ‘new mobility’ era based upon ‘low carbon’ policies, technologies and social practices, the powerful influence, incessant demands and entrenched popularity of the car continues. Since the car’s earliest emergence in the urban environment it has continuously attracted the attention of theorists and artists (Young 1905; Marinetti 1909; Baudrillard 1968; Ruscha 1963 and 1967; Barthes 1972). The following section touches upon the visualities embedded in
the temporalities and suburban geographies of the car, and the spaces, places and sites associated with car travel.

**III. Visualities of Automobility**

This section identifies two trajectories of inquiry relating to the embodied nature of urban driving and the experience of the spatial landscape and conditions of the city when travelling by car.

The first trajectory is outlined in the work of architectural historian Iain Borden (2010), whereby he outlines a strong argument for considering the ‘actual experience and pleasure of driving’ across an array of ‘motoring speeds and landscapes’ (100). Many of the ways we consider the experience of driving and what it produces, including ‘… an experience of visual signs and signals, but also of time, hearing, smelling, judging space and size, danger and safety, impatience and frustration and an over-all sense of every-ready alertness …’ (104), as well as an array abstractions and altered states, have been explored in ongoing speculative work by artists, writers, filmmakers and photographers. Many of these creative practitioners have placed emphasis upon capturing and rendering the multiple sensations, feelings, emotions and visions, either real or imagined, associated with car travel. As the urban geographer Peter Merriman (2007) suggests:

The distinctive visualities of both *motoring* and *viewing passing vehicles* have been explored by a collection of (largely ‘modern’) artists from, Henri Matisse in *The Windshield, on the Villacoublay Road* (1917), Giacomo Balla in his futurist *Abstract Speed – the Car has Passed* (1913) and László Moholy-Nagy’s experimental colour photograph *Pink Traffic Abstraction* (1937-40), to David Hockney’s photographic montage *Pearlblossom Highway* (1986), pop art works by Roy Lichenstein, Ed Ruscha and Richard Hamilton, and video art works by Rachel Lowe and Julian Opie’ (15).

of the Road (1976) directed by Wim Wenders, and two subsequent films by Wenders, Paris, Texas (1984) and The End of Violence (1997), depicting notions of arrival, departure and complexity in images of the American freeway system. Also, the film Radio On (1979) directed by Christopher Petit, the high concept Duel (1971) directed by Steven Spielberg, and the non-narrative documentary A13 (1994) by William Raban, as well as the more abstract London Orbital (2002) directed by Christopher Petit and Iain Sinclair, are all valid narrative, non-narrative and documentary film texts reflecting at various moments the conditions and experience of car travel.

Merriman has explored notions of automobility in a different manner to the accounts mentioned earlier, by placing a critical emphasis on the histories, sociologies, geographies and sensory experiences of driving spaces and places. He considers ‘how specific spaces of driving – particular roads and motorways – have been envisioned, planned, designed, constructed, landscaped and used’ (2007: 20), and examines various site-specific encounters and experiences with motorway environments in order to examine a series of modern spaces and places which have been taken for granted or under-explored within his academic discipline. Merriman’s research is influenced by the work of the landscape architect Lawrence Halprin in Freeways (1966), and the architectural historian Reyner Banham in Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies (1971), both of whom assert in different styles of research ‘the importance of the driver’s embodied skills, and their kineasthetic experiences of both the freeway and the landscape’ (Merriman 2007: 2). Additionally, Merriman considers the work of other mid-twentieth century urban designers, theorists and architects including Donald Appleyard, Kevin Lynch and John Meyer and their study of Boston’s urban expressways in The View from the Road (1964); and Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour’s influential architectural study of the built environment of the Las Vegas strip in Learning from Las Vegas (1972), to suggest their findings reinforce the notion that: ‘Freeways are seen to be practiced and experienced as ‘places’, as distinctive systemic environments which are bound up with people’s everyday experiences and actions’ (2007: 2).

… critical accounts of the geographies, sociologies or anthropologies of driving along specific roads or through specific landscapes …tracing the ways in which subjectivities, materialities and spatialities associated with driving emerge through the folding and placing of the spaces and materialities of cars, bodies, roads and surroundings (with a variety of thoughts, atmospheres, senses and presences) into dynamic, contingent topological assemblages (146).

As Merriman indicates: ‘What the writings of Banham, Halprin and many others indicates is there is a rich history of writings on driving in the landscape’ (2007: 3), and that this history also extends into other artistic and fictional realms.

Further academic work includes the multi-faceted investigation of travelling by car within the motorway geography of England’s M56 and M6 in Defamiliarizing the Mundane Roadscape (2003) by Tim Edensor, and his persuasive critique of the notion that the spaces of car travel, or the landscapes of the road, are dystopian and featureless environments, and that driving is a purely automatic behaviour. Additionally, research by Lynne Pearce in Automobility in Manchester Fiction (2012), considers the characterisation of driving in literary texts as a way of developing a particular embodied and imaginary perception of the city, expressed through the spatial trope of the view from the window of the moving car, embedding the motorist within the ‘cultural and historical moment in which they reside’ (96).

The second trajectory relates to negative characterisations associated with the contemporary practices of driving within car-only environments. Marc Augé’s influential work Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity (1995) situates the contemporary motorway driver and passenger in ‘spaces of travel, consumption and exchange’, alone and desensitised ‘interacting with their environment and other people through texts and screens’ (Augé, cited in Merriman 2004: 146 – 7). This depiction of contemporary urban experience, Merriman argues, ‘fails to acknowledge the heterogeneity and materiality’ (2004: 147) of the road environment, and the ‘dynamic sense of place’ (Thrift 1999: 296), located in the motorist’s encounter with a complex urban geography, consisting of a variety of sights, atmospheres, and at times bewildering aesthetics of contemporary road infrastructures.
In relation to the divergent conceptual frameworks that have arisen in the field of automobilities research since Sheller and Urry’s influential article, I don’t seek within this research project to resolve those tensions or differences. Instead, Sheller and Urry’s research program can be understood to provide the critical motivation and context for my examination – via creative and critical visual forms – into the configuration and qualities of a number of exemplary contemporary autoscapes. In particular, my research seeks to extend Sheller and Urry’s persuasive manifesto by visually charting and engaging with many fragmented, momentary, abstract and concrete moments that define and reveal the ubiquitous processes and daily phenomenologies within the city’s suburban and outer suburban road corridors. The construction of these image based artefacts, illuminating the varying autoscapes, acknowledge in specific ways the weight and depth of the car system within the daily life of Melbourne’s commuters.

Having sketched out some of the current conditions under which mobility and in particular, automobility, have developed into important areas of critical social and geographic inquiry in relation to the contemporary city, I want to now briefly discuss the theoretical underpinnings of my research project.

IV. Driving Research Through Creative Practice

In undertaking my visual interrogation of automobilities in relation to the suburban and outer suburban geographies of Melbourne’s road network, I employ a project-based research methodology. The decision to complete the research in this manner was influenced by a precursory creative investigation that helped shape some of my conceptual ideas and creative approaches later during the execution of my PhD project work. In April 2008, I accepted an invitation to join a multidisciplinary research team undertaking a creative investigation/intervention into the relationship between differing building and urban typologies within a particular location in central Melbourne for inclusion in the Victorian State of Design Festival. The project Have you seen it? (see Fig. 2), underpinned by seed funding from RMIT’s Design Research

3 The State of Design Festival is an annual event held in Melbourne and throughout regional Victoria. It foregrounds conceptual and innovative design thinking and includes a public program and design workshops.
Institute, was developed by senior academics and postgraduate students from within the School of Architecture and the School of Applied Communication. It focused on understanding and documenting the influences and relationships that effect forms of inhabitation and sociologies in a distinct urban precinct – the vibrant intersection of Swanston Street and La Trobe Street – and took the form of a series of urban installations with emphasis placed upon uncovering the ephemera and flux of everyday existence in this place.

My contribution took the form of a four-channel video installation *Four Approaches to the City* (see Fig. 3), mapping and documenting car travel into the intersection from the outskirts of the city. This filmic intervention was an attempt to depict the practice of travelling by car across the geographies of the outer city and into the central business district of Melbourne. My approach was to juxtapose the everyday material conditions, processes, realities and landscapes of driving along four routes encompassing varying tempos, rhythms and speeds of travel. Each screen
within the installation captured a car trip that was loosely structured along routes aligned on cardinal directions from the north, the southwest (following the edge of Port Philip Bay), east and west of the city.

![Figure 3. Four Approaches to the City (2008). Video Still.](image)

Upon screening the work, the many spaces and places that comprise the fluctuating autoscapes of the four road corridors were encountered, revealed and subsequently suppressed. Additionally, due to the formal aspects of the work – clear juxtapositions between roadside landscapes and traffic conditions – the representation of the outer city and suburbs combined in interesting ways with that of the inner city. The experience of driving across a varied landscape was encapsulated in one screen with four fixed and engaging perspectives. In many respects it drew conceptually on the experimental filmmaker William Raban and in particular his film *River Yar* (1971–72), co-authored with Chris Welsby: a multi-screen film concerned with the depiction of time and space. Filmmaker John Du Cane notes that Raban’s film examines time in relation to ‘the way we perceive it normally in relation to the way the camera records it and the way it can be re-presented on the screen,’ and space, in relation to ‘the way in which we perceive it normally in relation to how the camera modifies that perception, preselecting the space and bringing out transitions and
transformations in that space that would normally be imperceptible’ (Du Cane cited in Wyver and Algar 2004).

My reflection upon this event prompted me to adopt a project-based research agenda in order to interrogate Melbourne’s autoscapes. The creation of visual artefacts established from a combination of digital camera technologies (still and moving), and derived from the multiple mobile perspectives and varying speeds encapsulated in car travel, offered many aesthetic affordances for the representation of the everyday realities of the automotive environment.

The intersection of automobility’s primacy and traits within the suburban landscape, with the graphic, photographic and videographic digital screen-based technologies utilised within the research, foregrounds the numerous and complex nature of the representations that focus upon and depict the autoscapes of the city. Through the examination of automotive environments this project enters, modestly, into the expanding collection of nuanced sociological, aesthetic and performed understandings of the ways in which people, objects and things dwell in and move through the suburban and outer landscapes of Melbourne.

V. The Exegesis Roadmap

This exegesis is structured as follows. Chapter One explores the first project artefact Urban Highway, encapsulating car travel through the geography of Springvale Road. A brief historical overview of the development of suburban Melbourne in relation to this key arterial is undertaken at the beginning of the chapter in order to foreground the role, position and influence of the car upon the vernacular architecture and spatial organisation of the city. I pay particular attention to the development of the poster series in relation to an earlier creative intervention that occurred sometime before its completion. In May 2008, I embarked upon a creative research project with a colleague, and together, we produced a single poster What is Automobility? included in a communication design exhibition jointly conducted by the School of Media and Communication, RMIT University and the College of Communication, University of the Arts London, through creative methods that I would later return to in the construction of the poster series. This initial outcome had
a profound effect upon the overall shape of *Urban Highway* and so I include it within my exegesis. Additionally, I examine the depiction within the poster series of the multiple, normative, processual and ‘manifold rhythms, forged through daily encounters and multiple experiences of time and space’ (Amin and Thrift 2002: 9) by motorists along the route. Finally, I touch upon the salient formal characteristics of the poster series and examine the slight shift from the discernable haptic visuality characteristic of the initial single poster, to a more pronounced optical visuality exhibited in the *Urban Highway* digital poster series.

Chapter Two explores the second artefact of my research project: *Ring Road*, a document of the heterogeneous spaces of Melbourne’s Metropolitan and Western Ring Road corridor, the material geographies and landscapes containing immobilities and (in)visible interlinkages between the car and the distinctive and repetitious moorings associated with car travel. It also includes a brief historical survey of that specific road before considering the road corridor as a constituent part of a post-industrial terrain situated at the periphery of outer suburban Melbourne. This almost indistinguishable zone between the city and countryside, and interface known as Melbourne’s edgelands, resembles a seemingly unplanned and shapeless open area full of many aesthetic contradictions. In an extensive photographic document the varying types, forms and scales of ‘movement and changeability’, associated with the Ring Road corridor offer an insight into the ‘experimental field of the urban periphery’ (Bittner, 2001: 139).

Chapter Three explores the third and final project artefact of my research *Tollway*, a depiction of the temporal, spatial and aesthetic character of the EastLink Tollway that incorporates two distinct notions – on the one hand affective or on the other decensitising – in relation to how this type of road space can be interpreted from the visualisation achieved in the artefact. A brief historical overview of the Tollway is provided before I undertake a description of my technical approach – derived from a collection of cameras anchored to a car – to documenting the outbound and inbound journey along the Tollway. I conclude the chapter by reflecting upon notions of duration and ‘drive time’, a uniform and perpetual travel experience associated with this semi-private motorway.
Overall, this research project represents a modest visual examination of the car and the city. Its formulation includes a dimension of social history and architectural study, produced from a collection of moving or car-based geographic explorations and wanderings by foot – into heterogeneous terrains and zones – within Melbourne’s suburban and outer suburban topography. The creative work is influenced by an ‘[sub]urbanism that emphasizes the city as a place of mobility, flow and everyday practices’, examining automobilities ‘from their recurrent phenomenological patterns’, and through ‘vantage points above, below and in between the surfaces’ (Amin and Thrift 2002: 7) of the city. It visualises different types of speeds, durations and scales in relation to the car’s ever-present movement, mobility and stasis – documenting and re-imagining the city and the car by grounding its imagery in the realities of greater metropolitan Melbourne – and in addition reflecting upon the influence of the car in shaping the temporal and spatial organisation and urban subjectivities of the many inhabitants who drive. The artefacts comprising the research project incorporate an array of intrinsic objects, qualities and consequences that encapsulate the city’s pervasive car system. Ultimately, the documentary nature of the research, wherein the artefacts have been largely conceived and constructed in a linear or concurrent manner – intuition mixing freely with pre-conceived thoughts and actions – establishes a solid rendering of the conditions, meanings and affects of the city’s suburban and outer suburban automotive environment.
1. URBAN HIGHWAY
Designing a Suburban Roadscape

One of the most acute observers of Los Angeles, Reyner Banham, coined the word ‘autopia’ to describe the new landscape brought into being by the motor car, and most strikingly realised in Los Angeles. His Australian counterpart, Robin Boyd, coined his own word for the mean, local version of the style – ‘Austerica’.


Introduction: Springvale Road

For over half its length, Melbourne’s longest urban highway Route 40 (see Fig. 4) constitutes an unambiguous cross-city thoroughfare, providing motorists with a near-perfect North-South axis to traverse at anytime of the day or night. Slicing through the city’s car dependent southeastern suburbs, Springvale Road displays many novel qualities from its functionality and usefulness, as well as an aesthetic kitschiness in sites and places, towards more negative notions associated with dullness and boredom. It is an undeniably busy and complex road passage, offering an experience of car travel in terms of:

… visual signs and signals, but also of time, hearing, smelling, judging space and size, danger and safety, impatience and frustration and an overall sense of every-ready alertness … (Borden 2010: 104).

On this route motorists encounter a gamut of oscillating road conditions and traffic management systems encompassing debilitating road congestion and acts of ‘hoon’ driving, while negotiating numerous sets of traffic lights, intersections and level crossings.
For Borden, the everyday realities of car travel offer insight into the nature of the city. He argues:

… it is the very dynamic of urban driving that we find its cultural meaning – meanings as both metaphor for, and constituent element of, modern urban life. Indeed, the situation is even more complicated in that while urban driving sensibility is certainly dulled – given that we do it many times and often routinely – it is also hyperactive, always aware of the changing state of the
city around us, always restless. It is, therefore, an experience that represents
the dual character of the city, that which is simultaneously anonymous,
repetitive and flat, and personal, rhythmical and variegated (2010: 104).

This chapter commences with a brief historical overview tracing the
development of Melbourne’s suburban landscape. It outlines the role of the car since
World War Two, exploring its influence in shaping the city’s spatial organisation
along with many aspects of its vernacular suburban architecture. The importance of
the car in the development of Melbourne’s suburban development, coupled with the
role of ‘American consultants … spreading the automobile focused urban
transportation gospel around the world’ (Filion 2103: 83), remains central to the form
and function of a major arterial road such as Springvale Road.

I then turn my attention towards completing a detailed discussion of the Urban
Highway digital poster series, firstly outlining and reflecting upon an earlier iteration
of the series completed with a colleague from within the School of Media and
Communication. The Urban Highway digital poster series represents the first of three
artefacts that in my opinion serve:

… to demonstrate that a focus on the phenomenologies of everyday life
involves an appreciation of the multiple relations between subjects and
objects, and need not centre on the (limited) agency of the human body-
subject … that the agency of the city is widely dispersed, and that cities are
more-than-human … an important reminder that the materiality of the city
needs to be taken seriously … (Hubbard 2006: 125).

This chapter also alludes to the conditions, characteristics and qualities of
suburbia, ‘a terrain which is rich in meaning and a … landscape that can be occupied
and traversed in various ways’ (Healy 1994: xiii), and in this specific instance –
captured and depicted via a visual process and detailed graphic format – the journey
along an arterial road. As the media scholar Roger Silverstone (1997) suggests:

Representation is the key term, for through it one can explore the ways in
which the particular reflexivity of suburban life is expressed. Suburbs
represent themselves. They are, both in the broad brush-strokes of landscape and class as well as in fine detail of distinction, offering a constant commentary on their own emergent aesthetic, on their own rights of existence. Their development has never passed without record or comment. The values that they are presumed to have encouraged and upon which they mostly depend – moral as well as aesthetic – have filtered through into literature, art, cinema, music and fashion (2010: 104).

I. The Geography of a Suburban Arterial: a brief history

Springvale Road is an important city route that expands and contracts at various sections, shifting between two-way single and three-lane dual carriageways as it passes through a collection of varying spatial, social and cultural microclimates or landscapes. In his exhaustive work on the city’s urban street plan Melbourne Miles (2003), Max Lay notes, ‘its 30 kilometres of straightness from Mordialloc Main Drain to Mullum Mullum Creek is a lasting monument to the surveyors’ unswerving domination over nature and typography’ (194). The road passes through a typical suburban spatial landscape that half a century earlier had been transformed in an era of American-led cultural, economic and social influence underpinned by the Menzies’ Government offering a program of subsidised loans, coupled with inexpensive land and few controls on development. American expertise in the design of the built environment was imported to the Australian city, and Melbourne was foremost in readily, and rapidly, adopting the new innovations associated with the construction of the family home, the planning of the suburb and the development of the regional shopping complex. This moment in the city’s history was to represent a decisive shift away from deeply established built forms, engineering expertise and aesthetic norms that had proved themselves incredibly resilient.

During this post World War Two era the suburbs of Melbourne became exemplars of a new suburban typology and spatial organisation. As construction across the city boomed – particularly taking hold on its rapidly expanding edges – this led some in the community (notably intellectuals) to focus their critical attention on the newly developing suburban paradigm. In 1960, the modernist architect Robin Boyd published his seminal work The Australian Ugliness, offering a lucid and
startling critique of Melbourne’s new suburbia, labelling the American-led changes to
the landscape as ‘Austerica’. Boyd characterised the movement in these terms:

Austerica is on no map. It is, as an Austerican advertisement would say, not a
place but a way of life. It is found in any country, including parts of America,
where an austerity version of the American dream overtakes the indigenous
culture. As its name also implies, it is slightly hysterical and it flourishes best
of all in Australia, which is already half overtaken by hysteria. Austerica’s
chief industry is the imitation of the froth on top of the American soda-
fountain drink (1972: 80-81).

Urban forms exhibiting inauthentic style, tacky ornament and the use of poor-
quality materials were at the heart of Boyd’s critique of suburban development across
Melbourne. As Davison suggests of that assessment:

In coining the word ‘Austerica’, Boyd performed not a double, but a triple,
word play. Austerica was not just a hybrid American-Australianism, but of a
frenetic (hysterical) pursuit of what was cheapest and nastiest in American

Commercial structures and sites, including service stations (see Fig. 5), used car lots,
petrol stations, drive-in theatres, and in particular strip malls and the motel, situated
along the roadside of increasingly cluttered suburban streets and shopping precincts,
were classified as distasteful and unattractive. Boyd writes:

The Austerican is entirely aesthetic, confining himself to visual and aural
imitations … He prefers the mass scramble of the commercial strip, with its
screaming signs, flashing light, plastic stone and paper brick. The Austerican
excels himself in the hotel business. He buys an old pub, paints the entrance
hall a shocking pink, gives the surly waiters new uniforms and changes the
name from The Diggers’ Arms to the Waldorf Vegas (1972: 82).
Increasingly sited in suburban developments throughout the city, Boyd considered the motel to be paradigmatic of an ‘Australian Ugliness’. He observed that ‘[i]n its approach to the public, in social and aesthetic values, in style, the motel often turned out to be a substantial offspring of the merry-go-round or the jukebox’. In short, it reflected a missed opportunity to create, and establish an authentic Australian (built) idiom.

One of the most important components in this formative period of development in suburban Melbourne was the large growth in car ownership and a desire for driving. As with the television, washing machine and a collection of other domestic technologies, the car was a machine that was highly sought after and embraced by Melbournians. It exhibited many of the most desirable qualities of twentieth century modernity relating to the practical (autonomous mobility), the symbolic (standing and status) and the technological (comfort and speed). Davison writes:
The car brought a new sense of time and space to the city. It reinforced the suburban sprawl that had been a feature of Australian cities since colonial times. It reshaped the suburbs, pushing their perimeter out beyond the rim of the mountains and far along the coastline, filling in the gaps between the rail and tramlines, transforming the regular oscillation of commuters from city to suburb into a more complex web of movements across the metropolis. It created new engineering, a new architecture, a new aesthetic (2004: 77).

The city’s new suburban landscape was now inextricably linked and in need of remodelling to accommodate the demands of the car. During this period many large complexes (public and commercial) were designed and constructed with the ability to accommodate the expansion in car use, some of the most prominent included: Monash University (1961), and the Pinewood Shopping Centre (1957) in the suburb of Mount Waverly on Springvale Road, built by Australia’s largest construction company of the period – A.V. Jennings4; the Oakleigh Motel (1957) (see Fig. 6); and the expansive Chadstone (1960) shopping complex, which at the time of its official opening was Melbourne’s ‘first regional drive-in shopping centre’ (Davison 2004: 81).

The strongest legacy throughout this part of the city (in built form) is found in the multiple and vast array of housing estates constructed by A.V. Jennings. Through the application of generally Fordist economic principles the company ‘… sought to integrate all phases of the business – subdivision, manufacture, construction, town planning, marketing and finance – into a single, efficient operation’ (Davison 2004: 87), and therefore was able to build and sell many thousands of single-storey, triple-fronted brick-veneer homes across an ever-expanding suburban frontier.

---

4 A.V. Jennings is a property construction firm founded by its namesake Albert Victor Jennings in 1932. It was important entity in the post-World War Two period developing and building residential housing estates and private homes particularly in Melbourne.
Predominantly, these new homes of the 1950s and 60s featured a single or double-bay garage, or carport, and were situated along the newly invented cul-de-sac or court. Davison accurately reflects this new spatial organisation:

It took some time for Australians to recognize the deeper implications of the drive-in logic of their new suburbs. The car had seemingly given a new lease of life to the old suburban dream of space and seclusion. By stretching the communication lines of an already far-flung metropolis it had brought the quarter-acre block within reach of a new generation of post war settlers. But in stretching and reshaping the suburbs, the car had also transformed their character. The new landscape of suburbia – the drive-in, the motel, the regional shopping centre, service station, the carport and the thousands of acres of bitumen linking them together – was designed to promote the speedy, almost frictionless, movement of individuals and families from place to place. The car promised to give everyone access to their own bit of semi-rural seclusion, to offer Everyman and Everywoman their own little Eden (2004: 109).

Yet during this period, there were important voices of dissent. The artists, Charles Blackman (The Shadow 1953) and Robert Dickerson (Wynard Station 1959)
deliberately explored suburban subjects and themes in their work, critiquing the sprawling and repetitious forms of the suburban home developments occurring across Australian cities. In the context of Melbourne, John Brack rendered these new environments in a series of works: *New suburb* (1954), *The unmade road* (1954), and *Subdivision* (1954) (see Fig. 7).

Art historian Chris McAuliffe, writing in *Art and Suburbia* (1996), suggests Brack held an ambivalent or pessimistic vision of the outer city’s rapid suburban development. A ‘weird melancholy’ (McAuliffe 1996:68) pervades Brack’s paintings from this period wherein suburbs ‘were depicted as bland, uniform and lifeless; an existential wasteland’ (McAuliffe 1996: 70). These post-war Melbourne artists including the young satirist Barry Humphries and photographer Mark Strizic, produced post-war performances and imagery ‘marked by a wry, even bitter, resistance to what they saw as the cultural void of the suburb’ (McAuliffe 2006: 68).

Figure 7. *Subdivision* (1954) by John Brack.
Source: TarraWarra Museum of Art Collection, Healesville, Victoria, Australia.

The unabated desire for home ownership regardless of the persistent negative characterisations of suburban living as ‘something marginal’, and existing ‘in between known sites (neither rural nor urban …)’ (McAuliffe 1996: 12), has retained a powerful momentum over the last 70 years. Crucially, it has been underpinned by the
dominant role of the car and its associated drive-in logic, so vehemently critiqued by Boyd, and more generally, the artists of the mid-twentieth century. Along Springvale Road an extensive collection of commercial entities are solely devoted to servicing the suburban home owner and his or her car, including, the ubiquitous ‘big-box’ home goods and hardware retail store, the multi-bay car wash, and the all-in-one suburban entertainment complex, configured as a hotel (with on-site poker machines and gaming rooms), bottle shop and adjoining motel.

Commencing at an early age and extending into adulthood it was the experience of travelling by car along many of southeastern Melbourne’s suburban arterials, as a passenger and subsequently as a driver, that established my interest in the imaginative possibilities contained within the city’s suburban and outer suburban carlands. Undertaking a creative style of research along a vernacular car route such as Springvale Road – encapsulated in the Urban Highway digital poster series – reflects an attempt to come to terms with the complexity and interrelated properties of time and space embedded in the everyday practice of car travel within the built environment of Melbourne’s outer suburbs. Additionally, the research seeks to determine how the multiple, diverse and changing material realities encountered by motorists might be configured through a critical and revelatory visual form.

II. A Poster Collaboration: *What is Automobility*?

The genesis of *What is Automobility*? (see Fig. 8) an A2-sized poster (594mm x 420mm) – lay in a conversation between myself, and Dr Michael Dunbar (at the time a communication design research student and fellow member of the Media, Communication and Design (MCD) studio⁵), with a suggestion from Michael that we consider collaborating on a submission for the ‘New Views 2’ poster Exhibition at

---

⁵ The Media Communication Design (MCD) studio is a ‘research community oriented towards the creative development and expression of practice based knowledge objects and systems in the context of contemporary information ecologies’ and is located within the School of Media and Communication at RMIT University, Melbourne.

⁶ The exhibition was staged in conjunction with the ‘New Views 2: Conversations and Dialogues in Graphic Design’ symposium, and was held at The Well Gallery, London College of Communication, University of the Arts London, from 09 - 19 July 2008, before relocating to Melbourne and exhibited from 14 November 2008 - 15 February 2009 at the Melbourne Gallery Temporary Exhibition Space, Museum of Victoria.
the University of the Arts, London in July 2008. I expressed my desire to Michael that we attempt to capture, through a hybrid graphic and photographic design, the spatial organisation and roadside landscapes of a suburban road.

I explained to Michael that for the preceding six months, I had completed a series of substantial car journeys across metropolitan Melbourne in order to critically explore and document the spaces of driving and to identify the materialities and components of the city’s wider car-system. Upon further discussion we both agreed that the project should attempt to document the autoscape including the varying social and geographic microclimates located within an outer-city arterial road. Our self-fabricated brief was to capture and reconfigure through visualisation – within the designated brief outlined by the conveners of the exhibition – a typical car journey across suburban and outer suburban Melbourne.

At the beginning of the planning/pre-production phase of the poster project, Dunbar and I decided upon the use a compact high definition video camera mounted in the centre of the dashboard of my car with the camera’s deep focal length achieving an extended perspective of the road and immediate roadside. Its wide field-of-view was relatively close in size to the dimensions of the car’s windscreen. As we continued to plan our journey, I suggested to Michael that we travel together at the moment we film the trip, in order for him to become more comfortable with the characteristics of the route (one with which he was unfamiliar) and to engage in an extended discussion/reflection on the suburban environment we were traversing. The exemplar for this approach was *London Orbital*, a companion film to Sinclair’s similarly titled book, whereby, a series of extended car journeys and walking explorations through the landscapes of the M25 motorway are assembled as a hallucinatory, weirdly acoustic and psychogeographic circumnavigation, and interrogation, of London’s most significant road corridor. Ultimately, I envisioned that our journey documenting the road would produce psychogeographic affects, framed by the windows of the car, modulated by the flow of traffic, durations of travel and influenced by the ever-changing autoscape.
Figure 8. *What is Automobility?* (2008).
Source: Michael Dunbar and Ashley Perry, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia.
Springvale Road was selected as our route as we both felt that such a prominent arterial would offer a particular paradigmatic experience of Melbourne suburban car travel. We elected to commence our trip in the outer northeastern suburb of Donvale and travel south along the entire length of the arterial, ending our trip in the car park of a McDonalds’s restaurant in the southeastern suburb of Chelsea Heights. The estimated length and duration of the journey would allow for a single and continuous take, and as this represented the first time Michael had travelled along Springvale Road, we took the opportunity to identify, discuss and reflect upon the various road conditions, spatial landscapes and feelings/atmospheres associated with car travel, and to catalogue as many of the novel and serial (static) material objects and (mobile) things that we passed, and that passed by us along the route. Many aspects of our conversation later informed the additional textual layer superimposed over the poster – an overt and deliberate graphic concession to adhere to the general context of the exhibition.

Upon completion of the filming we had approximately 45 minutes of footage. One option would have been to select key frames from the sequence in order to depict certain interesting moments of the journey; however, we decided to rely upon a systematic, chronological and software-based technique that periodically selected and extracted still frames from the footage, effectively producing a sequentially linear time-lapse of the trip. The number of frames that were to encompass the full dimensions of the poster became a trade-off between image size and frame density. This number eventually came to approximately 700 images, equating to each individual frame on the poster representing 2.5 seconds of drive time. An additional (automated) software-based process determined the layout of the images configuring the finished poster in the form of a large-scale photographic contact sheet.

It must be noted that creative constraints informed the project as much as its authors did, although, in many respects, it was a generative process with a series of temporalities – uncovered along the duration of the trip – revealing the most significant conceptual aspects of the poster’s finished form. Finally, and in an unintended way, upon its completion the poster became a document of the temporal durations, flows, rhythms and stoppages that punctuated the journey. It clearly depicted not only the spatial arrangement of the road, but also the time it took to drive
along it, reflecting in its finished form ‘the intersection of lived time, time as represented and urban space’ (Crang 2001: 187) and effectively establishing and examining the ‘patterning’ that exists across ‘a range of multiscalar temporalities’ along the route – including the ‘mechanical’ temporalities associated with car travel, ‘whose rhythms provide an important constituent of the experience and organization of social time’ (Edensor 2010: 1).

III. Critical Reflections: a glance in the rear view mirror

Towards the end of 2008, upon completion of the poster exhibition in Melbourne, Dunbar and I reflected upon What is Automobility? and attempted to unpack its key findings. Our belief was that the realities of the habitual car journey along a suburban road had been successfully rendered through a multitude of panoramic imagery, effectively distilling the motorist’s experience of car travel in a nuanced and imaginative visual form. The transmedia imaging method followed by the subsequent manipulation of the footage, via a post-photographic computer process, had successfully encapsulated (in one form) the rhythmic and transitory qualities of the journey.

The non-human objects, shifting tonal qualities of the sky and the large amount and density of the imagery within the poster combine to produce a significant dimension of its overall visual quality, sophistication and meaning. In The Skin of the Film (2000), film theorist Laura Marks suggests:

… a haptic work may create an image of such detail, sometimes through minaturism, that it evades a distanced view, instead pulling the viewer in close. Such images offer a proliferation of figures that the viewer perceives the texture as much as the objects images (162-163).

Further, Marks writes:

Haptic images can give the impression of seeing for the first time, gradually discovering what is in the image rather than coming to the image already knowing what it is (178).
Evident within the hundreds of sequential frames are the shifting colours, in blocks and lines of light, that constitute patterns from the changing sky, as well as the multiple repeating shapes of physical objects (cars, buses, vans, trucks, traffic lights and signs) that suggest traffic has ground to a halt, all combining to produce an index of the processual and often repetitive nature of suburban car travel.

For Dunbar and I, the images within the finished poster also represent the relational nature of car travel that exists between the motorist, the shifting temporal realities of the road and the spatial qualities of the adjoining landscape. Further, the poster succeeds in its documentation of the automotive environment associated with a suburban and outer-suburban car journey, representing a nuanced and experimental form of visual interrogation – albeit within a constant temporal scale. In this sense, temporality (movement, stasis and duration) becomes a central thread to the documentation of Springvale Road. Additionally, our representation of Melbourne’s eastern suburbia produces something more than a direct rendering of the road tarmac and adjacent landscape. Ultimately, we believe the poster met its aim: to depict the entirety of a car journey by bringing the viewer into the front seats of the car, in order to get a sense of the momentary and fleeting qualities, potentially affective and abstract, that this form of quotidian commuting by car has the capacity to embody.

A passage from Mike Crang (2001) in his chapter on ‘Rhythms of the City’, suggests that we might consider the poster to form part of a tradition of ‘works addressing time and space in the city’ (187). Finally, the significant amount of road traffic featured within the poster, remains emblematic of the most prominent aesthetic experience of everyday suburban Melbourne. As Nigel Taylor (2003) argues:

… it has been claimed that, for significant periods, our aesthetic experience of the modern city is synonymous with our experience of motor traffic. Further, while there may be some aspects of the experience of road traffic which some find aesthetically invigorating, it can be conjectured that most people find the sensory and cognitive invasiveness of road traffic in the modern city aesthetically unpleasant and often oppressive (1623-24).
In a modest way ‘What is Automobility?’ represents a motorists perspective of urban space and time within the environment of an outer-suburban arterial. Importantly, the collaboration with Michael occurred at a formative stage in my research. It produced an imaginative practice-based research outcome, arrived at through a solid conceptual framework, and provided me with the confidence to further pursue in a more precise and inventive way my exploration of Springvale Road.

IV. Artefact I: Urban Highway digital poster series

The Urban Highway poster series developed towards the middle of 2011, expands upon the scale and visible detail of the initial poster What is Automobility? In addition it reduces the visual density and as a consequence lessens the haptic visual quality of the initial poster’s imagery. It more readily and fully encapsulates the temporality, spatiality and materiality associated with the realities encountered by motorists along the Springvale Road corridor, by extending the duration between each frame (10 seconds), and expanding the overall poster size to A0 (1189mm x 841mm). Further, the formal design of the posters has been modified each containing a different number of images reflecting the duration of the various journeys. Configured over the course of a single day, at six-hour intervals, the individual posters comprise a series of journeys along the route, articulating a collection of road conditions, speeds and tempos of car travel. The posters: Early morning, Midday, Late afternoon and Midnight, are designed to ‘contribute to the development of the temporal [and spatial] understanding of place and space’ (Edensor 2010: 1), by documenting the dynamics of this route in greater visual detail and depth.

Due to amplification in scale and multiple depictions of car travel at varying durations over a 24-hour period, the viewer of Urban Highway is able to perceive an enhanced vision of the road environment and the associated spatial landscape of Springvale Road. From the systematic configuration of the route, street lights and traffic signs, to the position of road works, lane closures and the actions of myriad other road users, the multifaceted rhythms and spaces of the road are captured as a matrix of times and varying tempos of vehicle traffic. Additionally, the changing roadside landscape comprising a collection of strip shopping centres, advertising billboards, offices buildings, parks and sporting fields – illuminates ‘the complex
series of flows and matrices that connects spaces, times, representations, and sensations’ (Edensor, 2003: 154), along the arterial. Additionally, as Edensor suggests:

Framing the outside through the windscreen, traces of work, domesticity, history, and agriculture pass in a blur, detaching drivers from traces of lives in the process of being lived. But when you get to know a journey, familiar sights crowd each mile, are reassuring signs of continuity and subjects for speculation, becoming axes of orientation after a period of immersion in sound and reverie (2003: 156).

Lefebvre writes: ‘[e]verywhere where there is interaction between a place, a time, and an expenditure of energy, there is rhythm (2004: 15). His concept of ‘rhythmanalysis’, with its focus on the music made by diverse beats forming the experience of place, located in quotidian and everyday movement and stasis of road traffic, resonates within the representation of the arterial across Urban Highway. As Edensor notes:

Rhythmanalysis … develop[s] a fuller, richer analysis of these synchronic practices in space while accounting for spatial qualities, sensations and intersubjective habits … [and] can help explore notions that places are always in a process of becoming, seething with emergent properties, but usually stabilized by regular patterns of flow that possess particular rhythmic qualities whether steady, intermittent, volatile or surging (2010: 2-3).

Within Urban Highway the tarmac of the road features as an important motif which due to its constant position stabilises the depiction of a multiplicity of recurring texts and objects moving along the road, as well as many other entities located on the roadside, that slightly modulate across the posters on a moment-to-moment or frame-by-frame basis. A puzzle-like quality draws the viewer to follow a perspective of the road wherein a collection of moving and static objects vanish, only to reappear in adjoining and/or future frames. The images are tightly stitched together and contiguous, and this multiple-image idiom, or grid, helps to reinforce the spatial organisation of the road, enabling it to be read in narrative terms – the story of four
car journeys across the duration of a single day. The highly structured form of *Urban Highway* echoes the photographic experimentations of Eadweard Muybridge and his work capturing the movement of the horse *Occident* (see Fig. 9) in 1876-1877.

![Image of Eadweard Muybridge's Occident (1877)](source: Library of Congress, Washington DC, United States of America)

As Cresswell writes in relation to the layout of Muybridge’s horse studies:

… we can see how space and time are recorded into the horse’s movement. The presentation of Muybridge’s photographs as a grid also produces a way of reading them as a kind of narrative. The layout proceeds from left to right and from top to bottom mimicking the written page. This leads the western viewer, at least, to see images as a short, concise story replicating the passage of time in the layout of space – the space of the page (2006: 63).

*Urban Highway* amplifies the experience of car travel by retaining the uncomplicated format of the proto-cinematic filmstrip employed in the earlier poster. By expanding

---

7 Leland Stanford, the former governor of California, hired Muybridge, to photograph his horses in 1872. As Cresswell notes: ‘One of the key questions of the day was whether all four feet of the horse left the ground while the horse was trotting (2006: 59).
the size of the individual frames and reducing the frequency between each image the representation of the constantly oscillating geographic experience extends from the immediate detail beyond the windscreen to the territorial aspect[s] (Borden 2010) of Springvale Road. The series more fully encompasses the speed by which the motorist views any number of the sites, entities and objects on and off the road through the use of an extremely wide (fisheye) lens.

Not unlike its single poster antecedent, Urban Highway establishes and maintains visual engagement with the viewer by sparking an interest in and offering a synthesised view of, a typical car journey. The representation it produces is suggestive of Sheller and Urry’s belief that:

… automobility makes instantaneous time and the negotiation of extensive space central to how social life is configured. As people dwell in and socially interact through their cars, they become hyphenated car-drivers: at home in movement, transcending distance to complete series of activities within fragmented moments of time (2000: 739).

It ties together a range of material entities, daily processes and spatial conditions that exist within the everyday times and landscapes of a suburban and outer suburban arterial road, while provoking a closer frame-by-frame inspection of this roadscape and the salient components of the city’s car system that it represents.

Conclusion

The Urban Highway digital poster series attempts to redress a generally underdeveloped level of insight into the experience and landscapes of everyday car travel within the context of suburban and outer suburban Melbourne. The posters reflect the perspective of the motorist, documenting the multiple tempos and rhythmic movements of car travel, while depicting the material conditions and spatial configurations of a quintessential arterial road. Peter Wollen in Paris Hollywood: Writings on Film (2002) suggests that Walter Benjamin in his now-classic essay from the 1930s on ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’ forwarded the importance of montage albeit in relation to cinema in creating ‘a mobile space
within which events were constantly reframed, extended and accelerated, approached and distanced’ (201). Across the four posters that comprise the series the overt use of montage in documenting the travel conditions of Springvale Road define the corridor as a site that is ‘densely inhabited [and] ingrained with meaning’, while representing the road as a ‘dynamic space that is kinetic rather than contemplative’ (Wollen 2002: 201).

*Urban Highway* documents the habitual and quotidian practices of motorists across various times of the day along the route, while suggesting that a constant and fluctuating interplay or series of relational assemblages has the potential to be forged between car, driver, passenger, and the landscape of the road, often in a variable interconnection dependent on the speed of the travelling car. In addition, the posters represent a myriad of fluid and changeable views, sights and outlooks into Melbourne’s suburbia. They encapsulate through a formal aesthetic filter an imaginative narrative map of the sights and visual sensations of suburban car travel, while reinforcing the capacity of a creative visual mode of address to represent the many and varying dimensions of Springvale Road’s autoscape.

Kris Lackey in *Roadframes: The American Highway Narrative* (1997) writes of speed as an important factor in determining a great deal of the view from a car within the city. He writes of urban landscapes becoming surfaces of motion comprising of a flow of built forms that eludes the consciousness attached to these forms (1997). While Schwarzer (2004) suggests:

The glass, steel and plastic compartment of the automobile frames a view of the built environment through penetration and dispersion. In cars, drivers wriggle through gaps and shoot down empty roads. As they course through a city or suburb, buildings and other structures lurch toward them and then give way. When traffic is light, the effect can be grand and processional (71).

Ultimately, the *Urban Highway* digital poster series encapsulates the representation of the suburban landscape of Melbourne – incorporating the Springvale Road corridor – helping to critically materialise the layers of ‘flexibility and coercion’ (2000: 739) explicated by Sheller and Urry.
2. RING ROAD
Photographing the Material Geographies of a Road Corridor

Introduction: The Metropolitan and Western Ring Road

By the late-1960s the desire to build freeway infrastructure within Melbourne was gaining momentum and plans were developed between local design teams ‘in association with a group of American ‘transportation’ engineers’’ (Lay, 2003: 200) to provide for a significant amount of road architecture for the city. Lay notes that The Melbourne Transport Plan (1969) ‘is thought by some to have been modeled on Los Angeles … [a] view possibly stem[ing] from the use of similar service standards’ (2003: 200) and US road building practices. It would take another 20 years before work commenced on the first sections of Melbourne's Metropolitan and Western Ring Road (see Fig. 10), a 38-kilometre freeway connecting the northern and western suburbs of the city to a series of freeways and feeder roads.

The Metropolitan and Western Ring Road comprises two major sections – the Metropolitan Ring Road extending across the northernmost edges of Melbourne, while the longest section referred to as the Western Ring Road traverses the city’s extensive western fringes before bending eastwards towards central Melbourne. The freeway is signposted as the M80 for its entire length, funnelling commuter and freight traffic from major arterial roads to every significant interstate and regional freeway system. Various freeways connected to the Ring Road include the Hume Freeway to the north of the city, the Tullamarine Freeway providing a link to Melbourne Airport, the Calder Freeway to the northwest of the city, the Western Freeway, the Princes Freeway linking Melbourne with Geelong, and the West Gate Freeway providing a link to the city’s port facilities and its downtown core, as well as beyond towards Melbourne’s southeastern suburbs.
The fabric of contemporary Melbourne is shaped by these extensive and ubiquitous road spaces, with an ever-expanding number of the city’s residents travelling along these routes, witnessing and registering the multitude of small and large details that encompass the topography.

I decided to employ a critical still image-based methodology in capturing the spaces of the Metropolitan and Western Ring Road corridor. The photographic investigation comprises 135 monochromatic digital images (selected from
approximately 14000 images) and sourced from multiple points of observation across an array of high and low perspectives within the landscape of the road. The imagery captures many off-road objects, tangible and physical things, as well as surfaces (natural and artificial) located within this automotive or auto-orientated terrain. The Ring Road (2008 – 2011) digital photography book encompasses the spectacular and the ordinary, the mysterious and the deadpan, while also incorporating a theatrical and an a-theatrical quality in order to convey both the quotidian and at times revelatory qualities of the topography. This photographic approach to the Metropolitan and Western Ring Road was conceived, designed and executed in a less formally controlled and temporally precise mode of representation than the previous Urban Highway digital poster series. The aim of the photography book is to represent the wider spatial and material landscape of a major road, and one that that exists beyond the immediate field of view framed by the car windscreen.

This chapter commences with a short examination of the location of the Metropolitan and Western Ring Road corridor. It characterises this place in the context of an edgelands geography – a liminal zone imbued with human and non-human interlinkages, or attributes, associated with the car and car travel. Further, the chapter outlines my peripatetic and exploratory approach to the visual representation of this topography, and in this sense is aligned to the practice of the late-twentieth century German photographer Joachim Brohm. His photographic practice is an extension of a deeper tradition of landscape photographers, exclusively American, who utilise the raw materials of the city to examine the everyday spaces of streets, roads, car parks and buildings. They include: William Eggleston in Los Alamos (1966 – 1974), Stephen Shore in American Surfaces (1972 – 1973) and Uncommon Places (1973 – 1981), and the self-published photography books of the West Coast pop-artist Ed Ruscha, including Twentysix Gasoline Stations (1962) and Thirtyfour Parking Lots (1967). I then turn my attention towards an account of the road and its surroundings, with particular emphasis on critical reflection on the major thematics that emerge from within the four major sections of the photography book.

In the introduction to their engaging study of the Britain’s Edgelands (2012), Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts state:
This was a difficult landscape to immerse our selves in physically – there would be no tree climbing, and swimming in standing water was out of the question – though in the backs of our minds there was a sense of letting the terrain speak for itself, rather than framing ourselves within it as intrepid explorers … (9).

My critical visual interrogation of the Metropolitan and Western Ring Road corridor maintains a similar intent to that of Farley and Roberts by producing for the viewer a descriptive, imaginative and potentially, ‘meditative’ set of representative qualities. In essence the Ring Road digital photography book establishes an image-based map and document of the Metropolitan and Western Ring Road corridor, encompassing a wide array of automotive objects (functional and broken), aesthetic surfaces (shimmering and scarred) and roadside sites (above and below the freeway plane), reflecting the visible and hidden architectures and landscapes within a macro component of Melbourne’s car system. The images are emblematic of Sheller and Urry’s belief in the car’s expansive ‘technical and social interlinkages’ (2000: 738) across an array of functional and broken automotive objects, forms, sites and entities located across the edges of Melbourne.

I. Exploring Melbourne’s edgelands

The environmentalist Marion Shoard (2002) was the first person to specifically draw attention the characteristics of edgelands. She writes:

Between urban and rural stands a kind of landscape quite different from either. Often vast in area, though hardly noticed, it is characterized by rubbish tips and warehouses, superstores and derelict industrial plant, office parks and gypsy encampments, golf courses, allotments and fragmented, frequently scruffy, farmland. All these heterogeneous elements are arranged in an unruly and often apparently chaotic fashion against a background of unkempt wasteland frequently swathed in riotous growths of colourful plants, both native and exotic. This peculiar landscape is only the latest version of an interfacial rim that has always separated settlements from the countryside to a greater or lesser extent. In our own age, however, this zone has expanded
vastly in area, complexity and singularity. Huge numbers of people now spend much of their time living, working or moving within or through it. Yet for most of us, most of the time, this mysterious no man’s land passes unnoticed: in our imaginations, as opposed to our actual lives, it barely exists (117).

In the context of Melbourne the edgelands exist not as a specific site, nor as a definitive place, but rather function as an in-between space at the margins of the city. Local writer and academic Simon Sellers (2010) notes:

> In the built environment, the ‘edgelands’ describes the interfacial interzone between urban and rural. A mix of rubbish tips, superstores, office parks, rough-hewn farmland, gas towers, electricity pylons, wildlife and service stations (150).

In many locations, as it skirts the Northern and Western edges of the city, the Ring Road corridor offers an appropriate setting to investigate the ‘hollows and spaces’ (Farley and Roberts: 2012: 10) of a declining industrial landscape where car mobility dominates.

Situated within the many divergent spaces of Melbourne’s periphery is the car. It is the dominant technology within this environment and fundamentally constitutes the time/space parameters, and experiences, of the city’s inhabitants travelling or commuting within this terrain. A ‘defining characteristic of the edgelands’ (Farley and Roberts: 2012: 11), the car and its many co-related entities exist in an array of reoccurring automotive configurations. From the large manufacturing plants of global carmakers to myriad car, van and truck workshops/garages, including many small-to-medium motor mechanic and smash repair businesses, all are contained within various-sized industrial estates littered across this outer-urban zone.

A series of car and car-related objects, buildings and landscapes populates the photography book; it includes vacant, abandoned and ruined buildings, burnt-out and rusting cars, stockpiled, scattered and dirt encrusted car/truck tyres, disused roads and unmarked tracks, damaged street signs, litter and rubble, as well burnt rubber and oil stains on bitumen, with discarded plastic caught on fence lines. These images are
intended to be emblematic of the pervasiveness and inescapable reality of the car system as well as the hidden or forgotten spaces, dirty surfaces, and in some instances, the cluttered and maze-like quality of the terrain often only accessible (or viewable) when travelling by car.

The appearance of these banal spaces on the periphery of the post-industrial city, and the catalogue of discarded objects and novel forms that they contain within these locations, suggest an amorphous quality present in the landscape. The Ring Road digital photography book is an attempt to reveal the role of a distinct automotive architecture located within the topography of Melbourne’s most prominent freeway network.

II. Photographing the Metropolitan and Western Ring Road corridor

At the beginning of 2008 I commenced what would become a collection of planned explorations that were designed to uncover the palimpsestic and rich automotive-infused nature of the Metropolitan and Western Ring Road corridor. From slightly beyond the northern edge of the Metropolitan Ring Road, I photographed the road and its adjacent terrain in stages, always moving in parallel with the route, and in a general anti-clockwise direction that led from the periphery of the city to the Port of Melbourne precinct on the western edge of central Melbourne. It was a deliberate approach to encounter and examine an extensive amount of the road’s geography, to not dwell for any significant amount of time in one place, to be always in a state of moving forward in the one direction and firm in the realisation that I would not re-encounter the route on any return journey.

My intention was to craft a place-specific structure for the photography book, albeit one that was generally linear in its form, as it tracked the direction of the road from the outer-edges of the city, towards its post-industrial core. Additionally, I sought to capture as many of the salient topographic features of the route, over an array of times and climatic conditions, risking a degree of repetition and sameness in the imagery. A firm focus lay in simultaneously collecting as many visual representations of the present on/off-road topography of the route as I could – from a
varying collection of viewpoints – in order to seamlessly intercut within the finished text between various sites, settings and situations.

Of some interest were the unseen or unnoticed architectural forms and divergent pathways, or ill-formed tracks, that exist within the road corridor, as well as the spaces that have developed into a wild and disordered ‘underland’ directly below the Metropolitan and Western Ring Road. I placed specific emphasis upon capturing the slightly incomplete, deformed or decaying aspects of these spaces and deliberately ventured to uncover what lay beneath the road’s many bridges, flyovers and overpasses. Additionally, I had a desire to capture the various networks of waterways (minor rivers, streams, creeks, wetlands and storm-water drains), the many undisclosed or disused paths, tracks and trails as well as hard to identify and partially destroyed buildings either vacant, abandoned or ruined within the landscape.

My rambling journeys on foot across the Metropolitan and Western Ring Road corridor can be characterised as ‘Urban Exploration’ (UE), or ‘urbex,’ an umbrella term for a practice Emma Fraser (2012) outlines:

… in which participants seek to enter locations that offer experiences beyond the everyday. Most commonly, urban explorers visit sites of abandonment and decay, or forbidden locations (such as drains, sewers and subway tunnels) (139).

As Robert MacFarlane writes of this urban phenomenon in a review of Bradley Garrett’s, Explore Everything: Place-hacking the City (2013), this recent phenomenon requires ‘a fascination with infrastructure’ and a desire to examine ‘disused factories, former military installations, bunkers, bridges and storm-drain networks’ (2013). Further MacFarlane contends that:

The cultural origins of urbex would include, to my mind, Tarkovsky’s Stalker. The fiction of JG Ballard … and (inevitably) Guy Debord and his situationist dérive – the randomly motivated walk designed to disrupt habitual movement through the cityscape (The Guardian).
On display in the photography book is a survey of my immersive encounters with a collection of surprising spaces from wide-open grasslands and wastelands to enclosed portals and tunnels, often present in counterpoint to the instrumental and highly ordered conditions of the Metropolitan and Western Ring Road. The images of burnt-out cars, smashed television sets and the carcasses of dead animals (domestic cats, foxes and kangaroos) – coupled with an array of spray-painted signs and symbols adorning concrete walls and pillars that support the road – produce a distinct juxtaposition with the representations of the Metropolitan and Western Ring Road’s highly functional traffic operations.

The writings of Augé and Banham would suggest that the autoroute or freeway operates as a detached component to the modern metropolitan city and that contact with the landscape from the motorway extends no further than roadside signage. It was what lay beyond the road fringe, often visible in the middle distance and beyond when driving, that I have sought examine. The architectural theorist Ignasi De Solà-Morales Rubió (1995) notes:

As with any other aesthetic product, photography communicates not only the perceptions of these spaces which may accumulate but also the affection; in other words, those experiences which pass from physical to the psychical, converting the vehicle of the photographic image into the medium through which we come to form value judgements about these seen or imagined places (109).

My aim was not to draw specific attention to the programmatic, instrumental and operational qualities, and purely functional aspects of the Metropolitan and Western Ring Road, but to reveal a wider, layered and more complex sense of the road corridors’ various material, spatial and temporal qualities not readily witnessed by car travelers journeying along the route. Also, I sought to trace the ways in which the road system exhibits a colonising quality or force that seeps out beyond the obvious infrastructure visible while driving into the only half glimpsed folds and pores of the surrounding environment.
The photographs in *Ring Road* catalogue and represent a broad array of artefacts within the format of a broad visual record. The images attempt to communicate an affective quality which parallels that achieved in Brohm’s long-term photographic projects *Ruhr* (1980 – 1983), *Ohio* (1983 – 1984) and *Areal* (1992 - 2000), in which the subject matter concerns industrial decline in the hinterlands between urban and rural areas in Germany and America (see Fig. 11). Although my photographs are monochromatic (Brohm is a pioneer in the use of colour), they forward a similar notion to that associated with Brohm’s imagery, whereby ‘the actual “text” … is written by the viewer in response to the pictures themselves’ (Stahel, 2002: 127).

Source: Steidl, Göttingen, Germany.

The image-making strategy behind the *Ring Road* digital photography book was to account for the mosaic of varying built forms (storm water drains, freeway overpasses, distribution centres, tract housing and car parks) and natural geographies (creeklines, wetlands and grasslands), with an eye towards capturing the unusual (scrap yards, rubbish piles and disused quarries) spaces embedded along the edges of the road corridor. People are not often present in these spaces. It is a collection of everyday, vacant, strange and broken, places and objects, difficult to fully comprehend yet accounting for the visible and atmospheric aspects of the existing
material urbanity of outer Melbourne. Regina Bittner (2002) writes of Brohm’s images from *Areal* in these terms:

> We find ourselves moving within a dynamic field of optical signs and rhythms, a context in which perpetually shifting situations and characteristics are refracted by the very objects’ intrinsic unwieldiness … The images expose the marks of temporal/spatial compression in which presence and absence are reciprocally interrelated – empty spaces defying expectation in which nothing is any longer of interest (143).

Any notion of the Metropolitan and Western Ring Road as a singularly comprehensible place is placed under pressure through the imagery contained within the *Ring Road* digital photography book. In a visual style that oscillates between restraint and the dramatic, eventful and uneventful moments are central to a desire to reinforce as well as transcend the familiar qualities of the road and its adjacent surroundings.

The influence of Brohm’s photographic style is noticeable in the images that comprise the *Ring Road* digital photography book’s images, as they maintain a similar untrained pictorial aesthetic. It is an approach that references aspects and qualities of amateur photography, albeit in the case of my photographs (as mentioned above), without the use of colour and exhibiting a slightly greater precision in the framing of the subject matter. In Brohm’s photo-series *Ruhr* there is a specific pictorial concept at play, a desire to capture an objectivity and documentary truth, designed to demystify the geography of the post-industrial Ruhr Valley, and it is a similar task that I seek to achieve in relation to the Metropolitan and Western Ring Road.

This documentary photographic tradition has its roots in the pioneering images created by Eugène Atget (1857 – 1927), located in his engagement with the street life of Paris. The seminal Depression-era photographic work of Walker Evans located in *Let us now Praise Famous Men* (1941) with James Agee still resonates today, as do the photographs of Robert Frank in his noted work *The Americans* (1958). The images of Lee Friedlander within *Factory Valleys: Ohio and Pennsylvania* (1982) also retain a strong connection to the documentary photographic tradition. These
important photographers are not enslaved by the creation of purely factual imagery; rather, they cultivate a realist aesthetic with a deliberate artistic style that incorporates a cool objectivity, witnessed in the images of Evans and Friedlander, and a social engagement as noted in the photographs by Atget and Frank, collectively located across a diversity of landscapes, settings and situations.

The topography of the route can often appear fragmentary, or at times feel stitched-together, a formal quality that is replicated in my photographic survey. The images do afford a certain degree of aesthetic pleasure, and although it is often the case that the imagery is not always beautiful, the Metropolitan and Western Ring Road corridor can induce visual wonderment. This is a surprising quality found within a collection of photographs that represent ‘places where the city’s dirty secrets are laid bare and successive human utilities scar the earth check by jowl with one another; complicated, unexamined places that thrive on disregard’ (Farley and Roberts 2011).

III. Artefact II: *Ring Road* digital photography book

My representation of the Metropolitan and Western Ring Road corridor is achieved by examining – always in close proximity to the route – the topographic features located above, below, towards and beyond the immediate road space. A key characteristic of the photographs is their directness. They address the visible, unpretentious and banal terrain of the road corridor in an expressly controlled and generally restrained compositional structure.

The *Ring Road* digital photography book comprises four major sections. I intend analysing each of these sections, commencing with that encompassing the *Metropolitan Ring Road, Hume Freeway (Cooper Street Interchange) & Sydney Road* located on the northern hinterland of Melbourne. Within this opening collection there are 37 images incorporating the representation of different types and scales of road infrastructure, viewed from above and below, with particular emphasis on a series of vehicular and pedestrian bridges (in some instances significant road spans under construction), flyovers and overpasses. These frequently repeated built forms, as mentioned above, are mainly photographed from below in an attempt to reveal the physical qualities of their non-visible underside. In addition, imagery depicting the
damaged and rusting objects from couches to cars that lodge in or are deliberately dumped beneath these structures, maintains a visual fascination with icons of the detritus generated from the car system. Also, the interlinking natural and man-made networks that help to sustain the Metropolitan Ring Road and its immediate roadside landscape, including minor rivers, creeks, wetlands, weirs, sewers and storm-water drains reveal a greater systemic complexity configured within the road corridor. A collection of other built forms closely associated with the Ring Road is captured in this initial section of the photography book, and includes, a petrol station complex configured to service long-haul trucking operations and the ubiquitous low-profile freight distribution centre, both interdependent of one another. Other notable imagery includes, the headquarters building for Ford Australia, a budget motel and a Sikh temple. Images of vacant car parks as well as a collection of various types of permanent and transitory objects (generally waste or rubbish in the form of discarded building materials, televisions or stripped cars to old tyres and the remains of small animals), is present both in this section and the other sections of the photography book. This remains one of the clearest motifs throughout the work.

The second section of images details the Western Ring Road & Deer Park Bypass situated on the western edge of Melbourne. This group of 43 images is the largest of the photography book and includes representation of the longest single section of the Ring Road. It also captures the space and architectural form of a bypass situated at the western-most edge of the freeway, depicted in a series of night photographs. Various freight vehicles from large long-haul trucks to medium-sized as well as small delivery vans, from another motif that feature throughout the photography book. In close proximity to this section of the Western Ring Road, many new housing divisions have materialised. These rapidly constructed communities rely upon quick and easy access to the road. In addition, overhead power lines align closely with the contours of the Ring Road; this imagery is also coupled with further representations of large road infrastructure, including the span of the Ted Whitten Bridge and the spaces located beneath it – encompassing enclosed bushland, muddy tracks and a short distance away, a disused quarry. An industrial park is also situated in this general location, containing used car parts traders along with an assortment of other auto-oriented businesses. Further depictions of abandoned cars – a staple along
the Ring Road corridor – truck stops and petrol stations remain a feature throughout this section.

The third section of the digital photography book incorporates a collection of 35 images of terrain surrounding the West Gate Freeway Including [the] Princess Freeway Interchange, situated towards the southeastern edge of metropolitan Melbourne. In many respects the imagery throughout this section bears a close resemblance to the proceeding one. Further representations of newly constructed homes, additional images of freight distribution centres, of overhead power lines, large (static and moving) vehicles, storm water drains, burnt-out cars and dumped television sets, as well as vacant or ruined buildings, underpin much of the exploration relating to this section of the road corridor.

The fourth major section of the digital photography book depicts the monolithic forms and environs associated with the West Gate Bridge, Bolte Bridge & Port of Melbourne precinct. At 19 images, this is the smallest section in the photography book and its focus is on the representation of infrastructures, built forms and automotive sites that in many ways constitute and underpin Melbourne’s car system. In this section I document the monolithic West Gate Bridge and travel beneath the elevated sections of the Bolte Bridge, discovering in general terms a series of vacant voids. The terrain isn’t completely featureless but it is a characteristically functional space dominated by lines of concrete pylons supporting the road above. The imagery in this section of the photography book clearly captures the unrelenting operational nature of Melbourne’s road network, and in the vicinity of the Port of Melbourne many objects, surfaces and forms are homogeneous and designed for industrial purposes.

The creative visual strategy adopted here of depicting the ring road corridor through a broad photographic survey, allows for a detailed evocation of what de Solà-Morales Rubió terms a ‘terrain vague’, whereby photographic images produce ‘territorial indications of strangeness’ (122). As he puts it ‘… the condition of these spaces [are] … internal to the city yet external to its everyday use … These strange spaces exist outside the city’s effective circuits and productive structures’ (120). Throughout the sections of Ring Road there is a desire to examine the
materiality of the landscape. The photographs seek to document the spaces of the road corridor, places and sites both readily visible and those hidden from view and the qualities of the functional and dysfunctional elements that comprise this major route.

**Conclusion**

The American influence and aesthetic similarities present in Melbourne’s road design, architecture and operational logic is today relatively easy to locate and comprehend. The monotony encountered by driving on a long, straight freeway such as the Metropolitan and Western Ring Road accounts for the difficulty in establishing any sense of place. The American geographer John Brinckerhoff Jackson writes, ‘It is my own belief that a sense of place is something that we ourselves create in the course of time’ (1994: 151). A desire to expand my line of sight beyond the specific on-road characteristics encapsulated within the suburban driving experience and break with the formal constraints of pictorial perspective, as expressed in the *Urban Highway* poster series, led me towards accounting for the wider temporal and spatial conditions of Melbourne’s periphery. The affordances of a more traditional photographic landscape approach, with the ability to leave the confines of my car and venture beyond the tarmac of the road, fitted my desire to account for an array of elements, often automotive in form or character, embedded within the topography of the city’s edgelands.

The Metropolitan and Western Ring Road corridor has for sometime operated as Melbourne’s western threshold. In more recent times this notion has shifted as the urban boundary of the city expands further across an arc from the northwest to the southwest. All sense of the city retaining a central entrance, or gateway, established along a specific arterial route into the historical centre of the city has slowly eroded. Currently, there exists a continuous blending of multiple, transitional places and spaces incorporated into the orbital logic and liminality associated with the landscape of the Ring Road corridor. In this zone, ‘overspill housing estates break into scrubland; wasteland’ (Farley and Roberts 2011), and the landscape increases in complexity and shifts to reinvent its position ‘as economic tides and social tides come in and out’ (Farley and Roberts 2011).
The Metropolitan and Western Ring Road corridor produces a boundary, or marks a borderline between a relatively unstable and shifting suburban zone, and a more unwieldy exurban or rural space that is often perceived as ‘an incomprehensible swathe we pass through without regarding; untranslated landscape … by and large … not meant to be seen, except as a blur from a car window, or as a backdrop to our most routine and mundane activities’ (Farley and Roberts 2011). In many respects this interfacial zone is where the aesthetic singularity of the autoscape (and its design integrity) is first ruptured as the photographic evidence of automotive residue provides an index of the car system’s inescapable presence and evident limitlessness. The assemblage of car travel, storage, repair and detritus within this terrain underscores Sheller and Urry’s belief that contemporary cities ‘remain primarily rooted in and defined by automobility’ (2000: 737).

The Ring Road digital photography book was a deliberate attempt to represent the richness of a road landscape and ‘explore places of possibility, mystery and beauty’ (Farley and Roberts 2011), by capturing the temporal fluctuations, spatial voids and residual places often invisible or rarely considered by commuting motorists. The desire to critically examine the full length and breadth of Melbourne’s Metropolitan and Western Ring Road – an underexamined outer suburban automotive environment – from a wide array of elevations, perspectives has led to a sizeable photographic archive of the historic, contemporary fabric and topography articulated by the road corridor’s forms, flows and forces. The imagery depicts many types of temporal, spatial and physical abstraction and fragmentation, along with signs and symbols of a distinct geographic restlessness ‘where urban and rural negotiate and renegotiate their borders’ (Farley and Roberts 2011), beyond the edge of the road.

Taken in a multitude of sites, localities and positions astride the Ring Road corridor, the photographs convey the interplay or tension between the particular tonality and aesthetic resonance of the edgelands, and a criticality located in the documentation of the scope attributable to the resource-use and residual waste associated with the car system. Automotive sites, forms and objects within this zone are often habitually invisible - hidden and concealed - often because they are unremarkable and have become over time seamlessly embedded in the landscape. The quality of the images within the Ring Road digital photography book, often depicting
strange, vacant, ruined spaces, buildings and machines, in a sense resonate with the notion of the urban palimpsest, as they reveal the car-centric levels and fabrics of the road corridor as well as in their formal construction – through a series of image collections – produce a documentary archive that critically interrogates the pervasiveness, dominance and relevance of the car system over Melbourne’s outer suburban landscape. Finally, the photographs offer the potential to reconfigure an unwatched and unseen landscape into a legitimate photographic subject and to investigate this fabric and contours of this automotive dumping ground.
3. TOLLWAY
Filming the Driving Spaces of a Motorway

Introduction: The EastLink Tollway

A month after its official opening in 2008, the EastLink Tollway (see. Fig. 12) became fully operational. The dual six-lane carriageway opened up a new arterial passage linking inner city Melbourne to its outer eastern and southeastern suburbs. Characteristic of neo-liberal forces of privatisation that consider the city ‘a decentralized metropolis where relatively few journeys [are] capable of being made by public transport’ (Davison 2004: 252), the Tollway seeks to ‘meet the transportation needs of the new world of electronic communication, information-based industries and just-in-time-technology, and of a workforce increasingly geared to part-time, casual and mobile employment’ (Davison 2004: 252). The Tollway’s route traverses across an interstitial space that slices through established suburbs, passes by new outer-suburban housing developments and across a collection of other sites, including golf driving ranges, scrap and timber yards, electrical substations, water treatment facilities, market gardens, wetlands and grasslands, as well as a variety of commercial and industrial parks and ‘big-box’ stores.

As with all of the city’s major roads, the EastLink Tollway is aligned to a major watercourse reflecting the common arterial ‘[nature] of the transport networks developed in Melbourne in the past 120 years’ (Presland 2008: 220), with many of the city’s major arterial roads and freeways situated adjacent to the flow of rivers and creeks. The EastLink Tollway was initially conceived during a period of urban expansion linked to the transportation planning of the late-1960s, as mentioned in the previous chapter, and for the duration of its construction period, commencing in March 2005, the Tollway represented Australia’s largest and most expensive infrastructure project. Since its inception the Tollway has been lauded on many counts – from its complex architectural design to its engineering characteristics and timely construction.
In an initial response to the new road the architectural critic Dimity Reed (2008) observed:

To drive along EastLink is to experience the city as through a film clip. You move from dense residential areas to open landscapes and big skies, on through industrial landscapes, back to parklands and outer-suburban developments, and then on through market gardens beneath more big skies … (2008: 70).
Reed’s impression of the road as it passes along an unerring trajectory through thirteen outer-metropolitan suburbs equally reflects and invokes the kineesthetic nature and experience of high-speed car travel along the Tollway. Her comments are also suggestive of the possibility for ‘sight, senses, intellect, landscape, meaning, artistic creativity and the human body’ to be ‘potentially reconfigured’ (Borden 2010: 109) for motorists journeying along the route. In many respects, Reed’s interpretation of the Tollway’s design is similar in tone to Reyner Banham’s ebullient, earlier comments in relation to the mobile visual characteristics present at the intersection of the Santa Monica and San Diego freeways in LA, when he notes:

Thus the wide-swinging curved ramps of the intersection of the Santa Monica and the San Diego freeways, which immediately persuaded me that the Los Angeles freeway system is indeed one of the greater works of man … the … intersection is a work of art, both as a pattern on the map, as a monument against the sky, and as a kinetic experience as one sweeps through it (2001: 71–71).

Since the mid-1960s architectural theorists such as Banham and others (mentioned earlier), including Lawrence Halprin, and in recent times the architecture critic Rowan Moore (2000), with his focus on London’s elevated Westway, have considered the visual, sculptural and design characteristics of these types of limited-access, high-speed, dual carriageways in complex aesthetic and cinematic terms.

This chapter explores the temporal, spatial and physical conditions of a road corridor located on the southeastern edge of outer suburban Melbourne. It is an autoscape critically encountered from within the form of a non-narrative documentary film, offering a representation of the specific nature of driving within the topography of the EastLink Tollway corridor. The construction and content of the film reflects a combination of complex, affective, banal and repetitious relational assemblages – fleeting and sustained – that are encountered, established and endured by motorists and their passengers, often at high speeds, along the route.

The EastLink Tollway operates as a paradigmatic user-pays road that reflects the ‘historic link between economic liberalism and automobility’ (Davison 2004: 243)
embedded in the city’s urban consciousness. In built form the neo-liberal conditions of privacy, individuality and flexibility materialise – establishing associations with political, economic and cultural characteristics of urbanisation and globalisation – which are consistent with the spatial, temporal and material qualities of outer suburban Melbourne (and emblematic of many contemporary cities). It also represents a significant urban development project designed to re-activate a dormant stretch of semi-industrial/rural land providing the opportunity for an expansion in the commercial interests and individual lifestyle, consumption practices of outer-suburban residents.

Additionally, this chapter will examine the tension that exists between on the one hand an experience of driving along the EastLink Tollway that produces a relationship with place, achieved via glances, glimpses and moments of social, material and imagined connection – offering the potential for the formulation of mobile identities and the establishment of meaningful attachments – along the route, and on the other hand an experience of tollway driving characterised by Borden as an experience within:

… a placeless world, an abstract and flattened terrain, destination-focused and overtly functional activity, as well as a driving experience devoid of consciousness or bodily senses … motorists speeding along a straight-line … in blind ignorance of a majestically beautiful landscape (2013: 127 – 128).

In particular the discussion examines both the ‘affective and imaginative connections’ (Edensor 2003: 152) motorists experience along the route, often in an array of engaging sensations and within the atmosphere of ‘complex topographies of apprehension and association’ (Edensor 2003: 152) that exist within the road corridor. As well as the notion that the EastLink Tollway is:

… inescapable, providing the driver with nothing other than the physicality of the endless motorway and traffic, with no chance of creating other social connections, cultural associations, memories and mental abstractions (Borden 2013: 132 – 133).
An underlying theme running through this investigation relates to centrality of car-led mobility in the urban life of Melbourne – something common to many cities. The animated and embodied experience of car travel requires that consideration is given to the ‘specific feelings which arise from momentary associations and attachments that are integral to the ongoing [and] performative constructions of places’ (Merriman 2006: 77) and, in this instance, as they apply to motorists travelling along the EastLink Tollway autoscape.

I. Travelling the semi-privatised geographies of a tollway

A significant amount of research as discussed in the introduction has examined the role and powerful effects of the car-system in relation to contemporary urban life. Recently, this research has been supplemented (as also noted in the introduction) with consideration given to the conditions, experiences and pleasures of car travel within cities. Borden suggests:

Through driving – a continual and restless mobile interaction with cities, architecture and landscape – the human subject emerges as someone who has experienced one of the most distinctive and ubiquitous conditions of the modern world, and who has become, as a result, a different kind of person (2010: 120).

In relation to the urban environment, Borden’s research has examined the affective qualities of driving in terms of sensory, cognitive and embodied experiences while questioning ‘the various pleasures involved in different kinds of driving, at different speeds and in different kinds of spatial landscapes’ (Borden 2010: 100). Borden attempts to reappraise the relationship between driving and the urban environment. He suggests that the material conditions of urban architecture when experienced through the mobile and animated activity of driving are responsible for unlocking a range of social and cultural meanings for the motorist, as well as powerful emotions. The material conditions and physical sensations related to the practice and experience of tollway driving maybe characterised as non-sterile, embodied and pleasurable. Motorists ensconced within a ‘mobile semi-privatized
capsule’ (Urry 2000: 190) engage in a series of physical and mental skills that are reinforced by an implicit connectedness to the passing spatial landscape.

At the commencement of their investigation into automobility, Sheller and Urry described the motorway as a site of ‘pure mobility within which car-drivers are insulated …’ (2000: 746). This negative connotation ascribed to the spaces of the motorway as solitary and alienated environments with motorists enveloped in high-speed travel, is located in the theories of Paul Virilio and Jean Baudrillard. Sean Cubitt suggests that for Virilio the motorway remains ‘the scene of picnolepsia, the suspended consciousness of auto-pilot driving’ (1999: 140), where the car becomes ‘a device which isolates the driver from the world’ (1999: 139), and ‘a device for immobilization and subjection’ (1999: 140), encompassing a roadscape effectively ‘smeared across the windscreen, devoid of detail, no longer a world of objects but a landscape flattened into a perpetual and undifferentiated present’ (2001: 62).

Baudrillard writes that driving at high speeds reduces ‘the world to two-dimensionality, to an image, stripping away its relief and its historicity’ (1996: 70). Definitively labeled ‘non-places’, and reinforced in the familiar trope of the single-occupant driver speeding programmatically to-and-from work along ‘unstimulating and desocialised’ (Edensor 2003: 152) auto-routes/passages, these spatial conditions of the motorway are alternatively characterized as ‘abstract’ (Lefebvre 1991) and ‘placeless’ (Relph 1976; Casey 1993).

An alternate argument in relation to motorway driving, mentioned briefly in the introduction, stems from Merriman and his less cynical examination of the car and the experience, practice and performance of driving. His investigations of the ‘the diverse ‘scapes’ associated with car travel’ (2006: 75) resonate with journeying by car along the EastLink Tollway. A car trip along the Tollway exposes motorists to fleeting and/or sustained moments of stimulation and reverie where imaginative, visually diverting and existential thoughts – including daydreams, musings and opinions – as well as physical sensations and feelings derived from the high speed encounter between the route, the motorist and the roadside environment amplify the driving experience. Additionally, a series of ‘topologies and multiple, heterogeneous ‘placings’” (Merriman 2004: 154) are uncovered along the elaborately conceived, designed and engineered motorway. The ‘multiple sensualities, materialities,
topographies and psychogeographies’ (Edensor 2003: 152) encountered on the Tollway are augmented for example by strategically positioned site-specific public artworks among a collection of built forms.

These transformative notions also allude to the multi-dimensionality of the landscape. The Tollway encompasses a terrain of vibrant and diverse geographies and possesses the ability to facilitate a sense of ‘strangeness, newness and disconnectedness’ (Borden 2010: 108) at various times of the day and night. These relational assemblages and sensibilities can encompass both fleeting moments or sustained periods of thought and embodied sensation that lead to the onset of ‘immanence, nostalgia and anticipation’ (Edensor 2003: 154) for motorists. This assessment extends towards Edensor’s belief that:

… the linearity of the road … dissolves as monuments, signs, and surprises form a skein of overlapping features, enveloping the motorway in a web of associations. This is topography of possible sights and destinations that reference other spaces and times because motorways are spaces of material, imaginative, and social flows (2003: 156).

When travelling by car along the EastLink Tollway, motorists encounter a collection of ideas, feelings and sensations present in the material conditions on and off the road. These tactile non-human objects, signs, surfaces and textures are embedded within the varying natural and built forms of the roadscape. The spectacular design features are essential components in the capacity of the Tollway to forge a dynamic and engaging sense of place for motorists.

Travelling by car along the route offers the potential for drivers and passengers to ‘become enfolded within [the] externalities’ (Thrift 1999: 296) of the road. This process of integration with the route is hard to dismiss when passing along the 45-kilometres of motorway standard-road, through the twin 1.6-kilometre, three-lane tunnels, or beneath the 90 bridges and three rail crossings (Reed 2008). It remains difficult to escape the omnipresence of the Tollway’s operations centre, sited in a dominating position above the northern end of the road and clad in various shades of green or neglect the extensive plantings, kilometres of bicycle and walking tracks
and the positioning of ten slightly more concealed minor-scale artworks that aid in placing the motorist within the geography of the road.

A car trip along the Tollway may trigger in the motorist any number of ‘memories, sensations, desires, fantasies, interpretations, stories and bits of knowledge’ (Edensor 2003: 166). Sited in a prominent position along the Tollway roadside is Callum Morton’s evocative artwork *Hotel* (2008) (see Fig. 13). A scaled model of a multi-storey hotel, it simultaneously embodies imaginative, generic and symbolic notions of both the local and global characteristics of contemporary cities, while producing a compelling relationship between the passing motorist and the roadside environment.

![Hotel (2008) by Callum Morton.](image)

Figure 13. *Hotel* (2008) by Callum Morton.

The program of roadside artworks represents a tangible link to the ‘visual regime of the motorway’, where the ‘constant oscillation from the detail to the territorial, from the local to the global’ (Borden 2010: 114) exists. The presence of
Hotel amplifies this juxtaposition as the passing landscape is experienced both individually and collectively, offering multiple opportunities for motorists to apprehend and consider ‘a host of intertextual and interpractical spaces, places, eras and occasions’ (Edensor 2003: 153), while encompassing a landscape imbued with ‘many stories [from] pre-settlement through to the making of orchards, market gardens, industry and new housing’ (Reed 2008: 70).

Positioned at various points and in the line-of-sight of motorists travelling in either direction along both the inbound and outbound trajectories of the road, the EastLink Tollway’s public artworks are configured in diverse and spectacular forms, which engage an array of audiences in ways that are suggestive of a desire to offer a more expansive, intensive and non-standard engagement with art objects beyond the institutional spaces of the art gallery (Kwon 2004).

II. Filming the spaces of the EastLink Tollway

After my attempts at capturing the temporal qualities of a suburban road environment within the Urban Highway digital poster series and the spatial landscapes of an outer-suburban road environment – beyond the frame of the car windscreen – in the Ring Road digital photography book, I sought to represent another type of Melbourne road in a manner encapsulating its temporal, spatial and material qualities within the form of a high-definition non-narrative documentary film. Tollway was conceived as one journey along the EastLink Tollway, commencing from the northeastern edge of the road and traveling south to its end before re-entering and making a return trip. This approach to mapping the route, unlike my photographic exploration across the Metropolitan and Western Ring Road corridor, was to be a detailed and tightly planned activity. This was due to the requirement to document the journey through the use of multiple high-definition video cameras.

The literature in relation to travelling by car – driving and/or passengering – on a tollway is, to the best of my knowledge, not very extensive. William Raban’s examination of the A13 (1994) motorway, a film referred to briefly in the introduction to the exegesis and a text that forms part of a trilogy investigating London’s East End
and in particular the Canary Warf precinct and Isle of Dogs, represents the capacity for car journeys to produce fleeting moments of associations with environments, places and ideas. Representing an extended car journey, Tollway (approximately 66 minutes in length), is a series of moments (in total 16 sequences), of varying lengths that seek to encourage a deep felt association with the multiple facets and spaces of the road.

Perhaps there is a connection to a concept surrounding the idea of moments – encapsulated within Tollway – referred to by Lefebvre from the third volume of his Critique of Everyday Life translated into English in 2008, where he writes of:

Intense instants – or, rather, moments – it is as if they are seeking to shatter the everydayness trapped in generalized exchange. On the one hand, they affix the chain of equivalents to lived experience and daily life. On the other, they detach and shatter it. In the ‘micro’ conflicts between these elements and the chains of equivalence are continually arising. Yet the ‘macro’, the pressure of the market and exchange, is forever limiting these conflicts and restoring order. At certain periods, people have looked at these moments to transform existence … (2008: 17)

On this filmic journey the viewer via the motorist’s car remains connected to the road tarmac, while simultaneously moving at high speed above the road surface; the film documenting the conditions of the journey and continually placing an emphasis upon the Tollway’s functional efficiency, smoothness and transactional user-pays logic.

III. Artefact III: Tollway non-narrative documentary film

The representation of EastLink within the high-definition non-narrative documentary film Tollway is established through the use of multiple video cameras attached at various points to the outside of a car. A series of automobilised viewpoints are established within the film and revealing the visual regime of the road. The exploration of the Tollway’s autoscape maintains a clear formal connection to the actualities of early cinema summarised by Patrick Keiller (2007) in these terms:
Until the mid-1900s, most films were between one and three minutes long, and consisted of one or very few takes. The Lumière company’s films, for example, are typically 48-52 feet long and last about a minute. They were made by exposing a complete roll of film usually without stopping. Most early films were actualities, not fiction, and many were street scenes or views of other topographical subjects, some of them photographed from moving vehicles and boats. Cinematographers would sometimes pause if there was a lull in ambient action, if the view was blocked, or for other reasons, but other kinds of editing are unusual. The reconstruction of time and space by joining individual shots together was an aspect of filmmaking that began to dominate only after about 1907 (116).

Films photographed by mounting a camera on the front of railway engines during this period of early cinema were known as ‘phantom rides’, as they offered the ‘sensation of disembodied consciousness’. Views from ‘other moving vehicles – trams, [cable cars] and, later, cars – are sometimes called phantom rides, but the term seems to have been most specific to the view from the front of a locomotive, which was then seldom encountered in ordinary experience, even by the engine driver’ (Keiller, 2007: 117). I adopt a similar approach to the framing of the car journey that constitutes Tollway, with the most prevalent camera position producing a recurring low-angled view of the route.

The space of the Tollway is represented with a series of moving single frames that resolve from-and-to a black image, a strategy that potentially makes it less likely that the viewer’s attention will fall upon a single subject or object within the frame. As Keiller writes in relation to the single shot actuality or phantom ride, ‘one’s eye can more easily wander in their spaces, and because of this, they invite (or even require) repeated viewing. Moving-camera films often create a striking illusion of three dimensionality, which early film-makers sometimes referred to explicitly as “the stereoscopic”’ (2007: 117). In multiplying the number of cameras attached to a moving vehicle I tend to displace the ghostly affect associated with the phantom rides of the early-twentieth century and replace it to a degree with a contemporary surveillance-style aesthetic, at times producing a peculiar and mild hallucinatory vision.
A further influence lays in a sequence from Mann’s crime film *Heat* (see Fig. 13) where a veteran thief Neil McCauley (Robert DeNiro) is pursued at high-speed and at night along a Los Angeles freeway by a relentless police detective Vincent Hanna (Al Pacino).

removed due to copyright restrictions.

---

Source: Warner Bros. Pictures, California, United States of America

This moment confirms for Norman Klein in *The History of Forgetting* (1997) the director’s deliberate strategy to ignore the ‘deadly haze of the L.A. cloverleaf’ (110) and in so doing produces a definitive example of the city’s centrifugal urban spatiality. Edward Dimendberg writes of centrifugal urban space in relation to film noir in an expansive critical survey *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity* (2004) and indicates that the characteristics of this spatial configuration include:

... suburban settlements, industrial landscapes, shopping malls, but also urban regions that have lost their formal centripetal features (perhaps through renewal projects, suburban exodus, or economic blight) or have become incorporated into conurbations such as ... the type of extended development or “edge city” now omnipresent throughout the United States’ (176).

Dimendberg also notes that the centrifugal spatial environment of contemporary cities including a car-centric city such as Melbourne is marked by a shift from ‘metropolitan density and agglomeration ... to the horizontal sprawl of suburbs and larger territorial
units’ as well as a ‘redeployment of surveillance mechanisms away from the bodies of city dwellers toward the automobile’ (176). It is this latter notion that seems to characteristic of the visual logic of the film, regardless of the linear configuration of the sequence, commencing during the late afternoon and extending into the early evening.

In many respects Tollway’s visual form and strategy is reminiscent of CCTV footage. With multiple fixed cameras attached to the car, it effectively becomes a mobile surveillance device, omniscient and endlessly collecting raw, unmediated, vision of a long and tedious process – journeying outwards and inwards on a non-stop trip – with few meaningful or interesting narrative events. This visual approach does produce feelings of solitude, distance and boredom and perhaps represents the most common affective experience of the EastLink Tollway, as it mimics the actual manner in which the road is monitored with fixed roadside CCTV and speed cameras.

A minor correlative to this quality of the road is located in the artefact’s rendering of a dromoscopic view of the tollway. The cultural theorist Paul Virilio (2005) establishes this term by accounting for the intensified effects of driving at high speeds and the view of the passing landscape through a car’s windshield:

Movement governs the event. In making transparency active, speed metamorphoses appearances. In the accelerated enterprise of travel, a simulation takes place which renews the project of trompe-l’oeil. The depth of the landscape rises to the surface like an oilspot on the surface of a painting. Inanimate objects exhume themselves from the horizon and come bit by bit to impregnate the sheen of the windshield. Perspective comes alive. The vanishing point becomes a point of assault projecting its arrows and rays on the voyager-voyeur (105).

Borden suggest that:

In a train carriage, the traveler is fundamentally detached from the view, which unfolds from side to side, but for the automobile driver the frontal windscreen means that views are framed head-on, and are also sequenced,
juxtaposed and speeded up by the effect of rushing up to the windscreen, all of which is further intensified by the dynamic participation of the driver in the act of driving the car (2013: 143).

The persuasive aspects of Tollway are found in its representation of car travel overwhelmingly marked by the production of a smooth and clinical autoscape and experience of speed reflected upon at a distance. However, it is not able to completely produce the embodied affects this form of driving and passengering has the potential to generate. The film struggles to generate a sense of the potential for relational assemblages, experiences or distinct urban interactions that occur between the motorist and the roadside landscape. The formal qualities of the film are unable to rupture in any significant way the controlling and singular nature of the impermeable surveillance bubble present within this road corridor.

Conclusion

Mitchell Schwarzer (2004) writes that during the modern age ‘the architectural image of the city gave way to an infrastructural image – the city as a grid, a crisscross of lines, a spaghetti-jumble of expressways’ (2004: 77). As Tollway is configured in a collection of views from the perspective of a car travelling along EastLink it is unable to formulate an alternate image of the route, yet the visual regime of the Tollway remains definitively horizontal, a key expressive form of the journey’s vision-track.

Tollway is configured through many sequences to show one continuous event; a journey by car, in both directions, along the full distance of the route. It is a high-definition non-narrative documentary film, offering only a slight casual chain between the sequences, with the film cycling through the small collection of perspectives achieved by the various camera positions from the travelling car. Wollen suggests this type of approach is reflected in the tradition of the artists’ video suggesting that they are:

… atavistic works, deliberately returning to the single-shot technique which ruled at the very dawn of cinema, setting up a continuous action and then
filming it within a given time-limit without any edits or even camera movements (2002: 234).

Important differences exist between Wollen’s characterisation of the artists video, usually designed for installation and viewing inside the space of the gallery and the film I have produced to document and map the EastLink Tollway, although an important similarity exists in relation to the depiction of time. Within Tollway the primacy of time is depicted as duration and although the film breaks between sequences the duration remains linear to the extent that the film runs for approximately the time it takes to drive, in both directions, the entire length of the route.

The EastLink Tollway within the film is documented in a precise manner establishing its credentials as a limited-access route functioning more like a rail route that remains disengaged as well as disembodied from its immediate surroundings and that the massive elements of infrastructure strategically separates the motorist from the suburbs, neighbourhoods and many other places and sites within its immediate vicinity. Travelling by car along the EastLink Tollway in many respects mirrors that of London’s M25, which is accurately described by Borden (2013) via his reflection of Petit and Sinclair’s London Orbital:

And so the M25 is inescapable, providing the driver with nothing other than the physicality of the endless motorway and traffic, with no chance of creating other social connections, cultural associations, memories and mental abstractions. This kind of driving is truly placeless, offering only its own reality of vehicles, tarmac, signs, lights and directions, all held together in a single, gigantic, and unending … movement’ (2013: 132).

It should be noted, however, that the M25, in some respects, is a different type of road to that of the EastLink Tollway. Its design and construction history reflects a route ‘stuck together [with] bits of new motorway and pre-existing roads’ (Moran: 2005: 99), and that by retaining multiple intersections along its route creates endless difficulties associated with the flow of traffic, a phenomenon the EastLink Tollway
strategically avoids in its ceaseless production of continuous two-way vehicular movement.

The depiction of monotonous, high-speed commuting, across the outer suburban landscape of Melbourne along the EastLink Tollway, reinforces Morse’s general notion that that freeway is not so much a place but a vector (1998), and visually extends Sheller and Urry’s contention that:

… automobility divides workplaces from homes and business districts … eroding town centres, non-car pathways and public spaces … turns access zones on urban fringes into wastelands, necessitating ever-further travel to escape the urban prison of cement and pollution (2000: 744).

Additionally, Tollway reflects Sheller and Urry’s notion that automobility ‘also generates new scapes that structure flows of people and goods along particular routes, especially motorways … [tollways] or interstate routes’ (2000: 774). The representation of the EastLink Tollway as a ‘transport-rich tunnel’ (Sheller and Urry 2000: 774) is emblematic of the way contemporary road planning and infrastructure is engaged in an uneven distribution of ‘access and exclusion’ (Sheller and Urry 2000: 774), whereby public transportation services (bus, rail and train) and (non-car) routes are often secondary to the demands of private business and the car-user.
CONCLUSION

Cars are everywhere. They take us to work, shop and play. They monopolise our streets and roadways and mould the landscape to their insistent demands …


The terrain explored in this exegesis is informed by aspects of the mobility turn in contemporary social science with particular interest devoted to critically examining and depicting the multiplicities (temporal, spatial and geographic) associated with one of the dominant forms of physical mobility, referred to as automobility. Understood as a ‘disciplining and dominat[ing] … system of production, consumption, circulation, location and sociality engendered by the ““motor car”” (Urry 2000: 57), automobility constitutes a diverse array of economies, systems, practices and performances within the suburban and outer suburban zones of the contemporary city. This project has sought to concentrate its attention on interrogating the times, sites and micro-geographies of everyday life and the city – intertwined within three distinct road corridors – encompassing an urban highway (Springvale Road), an orbital freeway (Metropolitan and Western Ring Road), and a tollway (EastLink).

The coercive and awesome nature of automobility is formally revealed in many moments throughout the project research. The digital poster series Urban Highway depicts the adherence to road rules (proper speed maintenance and appropriate lane behaviour), the digital photography book Ring Road reveals the unruly, chaotic and mysterious places (car crushing and sewage treatment sites) where the detritus of the car system and the edge of the city collide, while the high-definition non-narrative documentary film Tollway captures in a precise and exceedingly clear manner the extreme limit of coercive road environment design. Collectively, the three artefacts represent a selection of ‘generic practices of driving’ at varying speeds that are linked to the ‘micro-spaces of the car,’ along with the exploration, documentation and mapping of the ‘landscaping of specific driving environments’ (Merriman 2011:...
99-100) encapsulated in three exemplary suburban and outer suburban road spaces across wider metropolitan Melbourne.

In specific terms the digital poster series *Urban Highway* produces a multi-image vision-track that examines the spatial characteristics, complexities and temporal durations associated with car travel by day and night along a suburban arterial route. The significance of this systematic artefact lies in its capacity to visualise at different temporal points – from a fixed perspective – across a 24-hour period, the configurations and interplays bound together in the practice and experience of car travel along a suburban autoscape. The poster series articulates from within the autoscape many of the contemporary technologies, roadside furniture and forms, as well as the planned and unplanned events and diverse places – incorporated in a representation constantly modulating and changing through the shifts in time and driving speeds – within the wide suburban environment that is traced and mapped.

The digital photographs that comprise *Ring Road* condense the meanings represented within the road corridor into an assortment of spaces, architectures and sites that produce an articulation of the topographic qualities of the autoscape. Shoard characterises the type of terrain that exists within the city’s ring road corridor in these terms:

… rubbish tips, electricity substations, sewage works, gas-holders, motorway interchanges and so … Strange pieces of debris of twentieth-century capitalism have some of the capacity to inspire awe in the same way as leftover artefacts of other ages, such as Stonehenge. Like ancient relics, the relics of our own age stand outside the humdrum landscape of everyday life. These things have not been designed by some functionary eager to satisfy the bland tastes authority attributes to the public … This is a vaguely menacing frontier land hinting that here the normal rules governing human behaviour cannot be altogether relied upon … Yet this living museum of our recent past is also the powerhouse of the society of the present (2002: 130).

These images capture an assortment of elevations, textures and surfaces, along with natural and artificial features, including new and established road infrastructures
combined with abstract forms and shapes, old and new buildings, discarded and ruined automotive objects, living and dead things, with many situated within non-visible and hidden-away sites, from culverts, storm-water tunnels and creeklines as well as on the underside of freeway overpasses. The photographs produce ‘singular images that … convey significant ideas’ (Schwarzer 2004: 303) about the nature of the city’s edgelands and/or marginal landscapes which are embodied in the temporal and spatial performance of the Metropolitan and Western Ring Road corridor.

The high-definition non-narrative documentary film Tollway captures an array of shapes, surfaces, outlines and colours embedded in functional forms, including the comprehensive and extensive nature of the signage systems (static and animated), the novel and variegated roadside landscape (large artworks and mass tree plantings), the variance of large novel and decorative objects (multi-level flyovers and roadside artworks) that constitute the planned nature of the route. Yet, a repetitious quality to the construction of the film significantly produces a representation of the road corridor that is devoid of site specificity and where time as Margaret Morse (1998) suggests is ‘largely expressed as duration … “drive time” guided by the graphics in Helvetica, connoting a clean, homogeneous or unmarked publicness and a vague temporality’ (109).

The first and third artefact of the research project produce starkly different representations of suburban and outer suburban southeastern Melbourne, with the two road corridors examined through a mobile and generally fixed graphic and videographic perspective. The affordances of these visual forms, and where they are effective in their construction, is in their capacity to capture and reveal a series of aesthetic phenomena related to the view established via car travel. At varying moments, times and speeds – dependent on the volume, flow and density of road traffic – both artefacts visualise the temporal, spatial and physical juxtapositions between the socio-historical richness, established forms and increased traffic density of Springvale Road, contrasted against the cultural blankness and reduced traffic densities associated with the depiction of EastLink Tollway. In addition to these strengths both artefacts retain problematic visual dimensions, which are linked to their serial linearity and strict formal construction, producing an undisguised tunnel-like vision of both road corridors. Although this may be a legitimate quality of both
autoscapes the formal quality of both artefacts attributes an overly alienating sense of flatness, placelessness, disorientation and boredom in the experience of car travel and in the comprehension of the roadside landscape.

In contrast to the formal qualities and outcomes attributable to *Urban Highway* and *Tollway*, the middle artefact *Ring Road*, encompasses a more exploratory view or ‘anti-tour’ of a road corridor. Configured as a photographic study of an orbital freeway, located on the western edges of the city, the second artefact establishes a bridge between the other two artefacts, particularly in its wider capacity to assemble and depict many sites, objects and scenes, as well as the residue and detritus of the automotive layer that has reflected over many years our view of outer suburban Melbourne and into the edgelands of the city. The digital photography book reveals, animates and archives multiple aspects and instances of both the visible and hidden layers of Sheller and Urry’s machinic complex across the autoscape of Melbourne’s extensive orbital freeway.

As this research reflects, contemporary Melbourne is one of many cities that develops, produces and fosters what might best be articulated as an extensive and immensely flexible, coercive, non-linear and powerfully influential car-system. The history of this process begins during the 1920s with the slow move away from the railroad as a preferred mode of urban transportation and intensifies after the Second World War as outlined at the beginning of Chapter One. Aspects of the 1969 Melbourne Transport Plan underpinned road building throughout the 1990s, and as Mark Raggatt writes:

… US post-war urbanism, exported globally, that continues to promote the garden city and urban sprawl. In greater Melbourne it has been used effectively to stimulate the economy at the expense of turning productive farmland into unproductive suburbia, delaying the necessity of investing in public transport and spreading Melbourne ever thinner around the countryside (Raggatt 2012: 110).

The underlining appeal of the car is expressed by Schwarzer in these terms, ‘[u]nlike mass transit, with its spotty schedules, crowds, and fixed routes, the automobile
offered freedom of movement, a personalized way to see things’ (94). Over time, however, the car centric city and any of its real or perceived benefits in relation to personal and private mobility, has begun to falter. Filion notes:

A number of circumstances have caused the suburban model to lose its varnish, prompting a chorus of complaints about suburban form and lifestyle. In many places, the accessible suburb utopia has given way to congested suburb reality. Expressways and arterials are saturated by the rising number and length of car journeys, largely a function of the distribution of suburban activities … Criticism of suburbs also stems from an awareness of the adverse health effects of the sedentary suburban lifestyle. Long distances between activities and the general unsuitability of suburban environments for other modes rule out most alternatives to the car (2013: 82 – 83)

As Melbourne’s urban expansion continues the idea of examining existing road corridors (old and new), and documenting the environments and aesthetic qualities of complex entwined temporalities, spatialities and landscapes, specifically in relation to the sites, places, objects, atmospheres and speeds traversed and perceived from the car, and beyond, is a useful undertaking given the continual spread of the city’s grid-based road network (Merriman 2011).

The three road corridors represented within this project-based research are visualised and traversed from a deliberately contrasting range of perspectives, through different lenses and at varying critical speeds. The multiple forces, flows, operations and components that comprise Melbourne’s car system have provided the broader context for the research and a well spring of inspiration in the development of an imaginative, hybrid and novel project that has sought to capture the conditions of three suburban and outer suburban road corridors. The research has also produced an outcome that is greater than a series of three static framings of three autoscapes. The juxtaposition of graphic, photographic and videographic representations – systematic, animated and banal – articulate in imaginative ways the site-specific characteristics and qualities of the autoscapes of Melbourne. In turn the investigation of the city’s major suburban and outer suburban road corridors, including the geography of Melbourne’s edgelands, establish a visual extension of Sheller and Urry’s belief in
automobility’s capacity to occupy, influence and reconfigure – at an everyday scale – the contemporary city of Melbourne.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


A13 (1994), Dir. William Raban, United Kingdom: British Film Institute, Illuminations Films.


Annear, R. (2005), Bearbrass: Imagining Early Melbourne, Melbourne: Black, Inc.


Casey, E.S. (1993), *Getting Back Into Place: Towards a Renewed Understanding of the Place-world*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.


*Collateral* (2004), Dir. Michael Mann, United States of America: Paramount Pictures, DreamWorks SKG, Parkes/MacDonald, Edge City.


Duel (1971), Dir. Steven Spielberg, United States of America: Universal TV.


*Kings of the Road* (1976), Dir. Wim Wenders, West Germany: Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR), Wim Wenders Productions.


*London Orbital* (2002), Dir. Christopher Petit and Iain Sinclair, United Kingdom: Film Four, Illuminations Films.


*Mad Max* (1979), Dir. George Miller, Australia: Kennedy Miller Productions, Crossroads, Mad Max Films.


*Paris, Texas* (1984), Dir. Wim Wenders, United States of America: Road Movies Filmproduktion, Argos Films, Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR), Channel Four Films, Pro-ject Filmproduktion.


