This Masters of Landscape Architecture investigates the occurrence of small, temporary urban voids in inner northern Melbourne. The study asks whether these spaces operate as Public Domain (Hajer & Reijndorp 2001) and uses the concept of “Terrain Vague” (Solà-Morales Rubió 1994a; 1996) to compare and contrast values defined by the different uses of different urban open space types.

The research question values the inclusive qualities of terrains vagues and speculates that similar spaces exist in inner Melbourne, asking how are they currently used and, more importantly for landscape architecture, what strategies are most effective in designing with them.

Specifically this study aims to investigate how the landscape architect can develop design methods that negotiate with the small urban voids of the inner city, in order to maximise opportunities for occupation and involvement, while retaining the sense and potency of Terrain Vague qualities. This is important to the practice of Landscape Architecture as it allows a contribution by the discipline to a discourse on the more effective design of public domain in the inner city context.

The research understands terrains vagues in the terms established by architect, critic and educator Solà-Morales Rubió in the 1990s, as ‘ambiguous, unresolved, and marginalized spaces in the urban landscape’ (Solà-Morales Rubió 1994a). His initial description first appeared in the ‘Anyone’ series (Anyplace 1994a) and was supported by subsequent articles in ‘Anyway’ (1994b) and ‘Anyhow’ (2000). He describes them as ‘empty abandoned spaces in which a series of occurrences have taken place…In these apparently forgotten places, the memory of the past seems to predominate over the present’.

Two years later Solà-Morales Rubió further refined these observations in an interview with ‘Kerb’ (Stutterheim 1996). Here he broadens an operative function for terrain vague as supplying the need for ‘alternative’ spaces and uses within the contemporary city. His description of how they should be approached focuses on the idea that they are available to be reused and renovated. He notes that such needs are well known to urban planners and designers. However to ensure that such renovation still allows for ongoing alternative use and avoids the deletion of terrain vague qualities valued in the initial appreciation, planning and design requires ‘a more subtle approach which is not exactly accepted” (1996 p.15). In both the ‘Kerb’ interview and the ‘Anyplace’ essays Solà-Morales Rubió offers examples of large post-industrial spaces: ‘enormous urban voids’ (1994a) that were once centres of production and distribution located on the outskirts of their host city. Now that these metropolises have grown the voids find them selves within the suburban fabric.

A significant difference between Solà-Morales Rubió’s original spaces and those of this study is size. Those of this Melbourne study are far smaller. The study intends to demonstrate how these mini terrains vagues share similar qualities and capacities as the large, essentially post-
industrial spaces which were a noticeable feature of cities in the 90s. They also have an added allure and potential in that they invite a more accessible and immediate, while still ambiguous engagement, requiring the designer to consider the dense contextual relationships of the inner city.

The crucial characteristic of original terrains vagues was their ambiguity of use and ownership. They are occupied and used in ways not observed in other open spaces. Naming is also an important part of describing and defining. The term ‘Urban Yard’ was given to the mini terrains vagues of inner Melbourne in consideration of an existing nomenclature of small urban voids. They share some similarities with Papastergiadis’ ‘parafunctional’ spaces (2002), Kayden’s ‘privately owned public space’ (2000) and Cooper Marcus & Hilliard Greene’s ‘mini park’ and ‘vest-pocket park’ (1997). The urban yard is distinguished by a more recognisable ambiguity of function and ownership, an oblique and unintended relationship to the inner-city context, and distinct qualities of appearance, physical form and level of organised infrastructure.

The ambiguous qualities of such terrain vague sites in an inner-city context allow a type of free engagement by the local population with urban open space that is otherwise discouraged and which is a vital and rich experience. This engagement or involvement can be as simple as an ‘exchange’ or ‘meeting’ (Hajer & Reijndorp 2001). The designer must facilitate this without the erasure of terrain vague qualities. The sanitization of these qualities was an ever present risk throughout the study. Any design of the Urban Yards could easily be over-design, where imposition of legible function onto the site supplanted ambiguity of use and the emergence of diverse uses. The quality described as ‘parafunctional’ by Nikos Papastergiadis (2002) comes closest to that of the urban yard terrain vague, being neither programatically multi-functional nor dys-functional.

The study concludes with an understanding that the designer must act simultaneously in two ways, from-a-far and in-the-midst of urban yards. Both ways require a particular set of strategies to arrive at the same outcome, namely the maximisation or intensification of potential use without the eradication of valuable terrain vague qualities. The former is a decisive urban planning move that provides a definitive description of the way in which urban yards operate and where they are likely to be located. The latter requires actual involvement within individual urban yards and design collaboration with occupants. Acting in-the-midst must continually provide the means for safe and stimulating occupation and reorganisation for the life of the site.

It is recognised that such an understanding of context is an ambition of much design, particularly within landscape architecture, which is understood to respond to and reveal innate or intrinsic site qualities as a measure of its efficacy. In this way the findings of the study offer a means for other disciplinary engagements with terrain vague which value and enhance their unique role as the ‘alternative space’ for uses which established open space does not allow.

Notes:
1. Cooper Marcus & Hilliard Greene’s ‘mini-parks’ and ‘vest pocket parks’ are specific types of recreational open space. Within the inner-north Melbourne study area there are many of these types of parks under municipal ownership and stewardship. Some of these ‘parks’ even appear to be not much more than a small urban void. However it is the terrains vagues qualities that I am interested in investigating not the appearance and design of small public recreation spaces.
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The durable visual record of this Masters of Landscape Architecture is arranged to be understood as a sufficient document for appreciation of the core work of the study. It has, however, edited the substantial material developed through several projects over the course of the research. To sufficiently cover the seminal issues of this study the durable visual record is presented as two books. Book One includes the main essay and design study descriptions. Book Two is an annotated catalogue of the Masters exhibition presented in May 2005.

The first book begins with an introduction to the ambition of the study to identify and then experiment with the potentials of a new type of terrain vague within Melbourne: the ‘urban yard’. It hopes to make a contribution to design discourse by making explicit the difficulties of working with such sites, while clarifying that there is a necessity and value in doing so.

It introduces three key concepts that framed a series of conceptual experiments and actual interventions: Use, Over-Design and Acting. These represent a roughly chronological approach to, firstly, the investigation and identification of urban yards as terrains vagues, secondly, the risks of design as over-design within these special sites, and finally the possibilities for design action which negotiates such risk.

The body of the work is outlined in the four central chapters which group most of the various projects associated with the research, expanding and illustrating the three frames of the introduction. These are: Finding Urban Yards, Defining the Urban Yard, and Interrogating the Urban Yard and Demonstrating the Urban Yard.

The conclusion reiterates the findings of the various experiments and interventions, formulating a guide to design actions comprising two main considerations – ‘from-a-far’ and ‘in-the-midst’ - bridging the approaches of planning, urban design, art and architecture. Finally the study speculates on the future of terrains vagues and of landscape architecture to reveal, encourage and celebrate their richness.
INTRODUCTION

The provocative imagery of terrains vagues described by Ignasi de Solà-Morales Rubió in his initial writings (1994a) is where I begin my investigation. Through design interventions undertaken as part of the study, I examined the question of what design strategies may be most effective in maximising the opportunities for use of such urban open spaces without losing the potency of terrain vague qualities.

Since Solà-Morales Rubió first put forward the provocative concept of terrain vague, there has been a profusion of projects, articles, discussions and presentations in response. These have developed along many trajectories, the majority being within the fields of photography, theatre and film. Recalling the early writings, this study explores a particular perception and description of urban landscapes, applying these understandings to a new attitude for design, construction and maintenance of urban open spaces. The number and richness of the excursions of visual and theatrical arts into this territory, hints at the difficulty of a translation of seemingly infinite ephemeral and abstract appreciations into decisive, concrete and specific spatial offerings.

If terrains vagues are not easily translated however, this is not simply because they resist order in favour of disorder (Lévesque 2002). They are not simply ‘vague’. As Solà-Morales Rubió explains: “The French ‘vague’ has Latin and Germanic origins. The German ‘woge’ refers to a sea swell, significantly alluding to movement, oscillation, instability and fluctuation. Two Latin roots come together in the French vague. Vague descends from vacuus, giving us ‘vacant’ and ‘vacuum’ in English, which is to say the relationship between the absence of use, of activity, and the sense of freedom, of expectancy, is fundamental to understanding the evocative potential of the city’s terrains vagues.” The phenomenon appears to be best captured on film and is harder to re-capture in the flesh. Essentially ephemeral in their function, form and meaning, such urban voids continually encourage, realise and erase their potentials, shifting from one ambiguous manifestation to another (Solà-Morales Rubió 1994a).

If instability is an essential characteristic of terrains vagues, it seemed likely that they had and would continue to manifest themselves in new places, identifiable through their other characteristics; temporality, ambiguity, marginalisation and lack of resolution. This study sought to find these probable new urban terrains vagues within inner north Melbourne. It speculated that with the redevelopment of the vaster post-industrial voids of the docklands and railyards of Melbourne, a finer local variation of this urban phenomenon might be found around neglected residential laneways. It attempted to locate, observe and negotiate with these in order to identify what a ‘design’ intervention might do amongst the other invitations and interventions they accumulated. These Melbourne spaces were small, visually obscured but easily accessed from the street, surrounded by or adjacent to low rise residential buildings, and had ambiguous ownership. They were urban yards.

The title ‘urban yard’ offers a succinct identification of small urban voids that exhibit terrain vague qualities. This term, rather than ‘park’ or merely ‘void’, reflects ambiguity of function and ownership, as well as a particular relationship to the inner-city context, their work-a-day material appearance, physical form and a level of internally situated infrastructure.

While the discourse on terrains vagues is vast there are few attempts to critically re-examine them through constructed design projects or physical design interventions. Several texts such as ‘Stalking Detroit’ (eds. Young, Daskalakis, & Waldheim 2001) have positioned their evolution within the play of greater forces of economic and national politics. Others have noted the opportunities they present for community gathering and ‘playgrounds’ (Cooper Marcus & Hilliard Greene 1997). Nikos Papastergiadis (2002) gives a precise description and various
examples of ‘parafunctional’ spaces which exhibit terrain vague qualities in that they have no single function and ‘escape the determinism of a planned environment’. In general these texts all discuss the ambiguity of function as an important defining quality of terrains vagues when they appear as urban voids. I position my reading of the greater territory of terrains vagues amongst these references, seeking to contribute to a design discourse. \(^3\)

The current discourse on terrain vague spaces within Landscape Architecture continues some confusion in regard to establishing social or political frameworks as moral guides for a discussion of form. Landscape architectural attention to ‘parafunctional’ spaces has generally sought to rehabilitate, reclaim or embroider the void with combinations of ecological nurturing and explanatory land-art. The International Federation of Landscape Architects 2006 conference included a paper by Helen Armstrong’s paper entitled; ‘Time, Dereliction and Beauty: an Argument for Landscapes of Contempt’ in which she overviews the theoretical territory of this topic. However, without an example of constructed design in the terrain vague context it is hard to deduce how these ideas come to ground.

A brief examination of two recent projects will help to situate an understanding of the issues associated with attempts at such grounding.

Duisburg-Nord Park in Germany (1999) and the Thames Barrier Park in London (2000) exhibit different approaches to dealing with previous site use. Is it a question of quashing the past to start anew or lightly touching the site in an effort to honour the history and memory of the place? Both projects, to varying degrees, simultaneously conceal some parts of the past while allowing other remnants to exist as functional elements, acting as reminders of the sites history and memory. Duisburg-Nord Park is an example of ‘naturalised industrial archaeology’ (Shannon 2006) that skilfully reprograms the remnant infrastructure, while Thames Barrier Park smooths over and beautifies the site while allowing much of the artificial topography to reveal the past.

An important difference between the urban yards of inner-north Melbourne and these projects is that they are away from the centre of the city. Duisburg-Nord Park and Thames Barrier Park are large enough to be considered entities distinct from the surrounding urban fabric in which they sit and therefore are far less affected by their position in relation to the city. While they are large they are no longer the vacant ‘enormous voids’ (Solà-Morales Rubió 1994) that they once were. Nor are the understandings of what takes place within them ambiguous. They are intended to function and be recognised as large parks. I would argue that this treatment runs the risk of instilling a cultural and contextual amnesia. In seeking to resolve the problem of ambiguous function the qualities of Terrains Vagues have been lost and the memory of the site begins to unravel.

The risk of such over design is a key point of this study as it allows identification of terrain vague qualities at the moment they are over-written. This is expressed by Luc Lévesque (2002) when he calls for an approach that privileges neither the ‘temporary’ or the ‘permanent and the planned’, when intervening in the terrain vague spaces, but rather seeks a dynamic mix of elements that ‘broaden the terms of the experience’. He continues;

‘This approach is still underused in landscaping, where the tendency too often is to create a decor that is complete in itself, that represses or forgets the crucial role of bodies, the plurality of material tonalities and the richness of the unexpected.’

(Lévesque 2002)
By selecting the inner city context of Melbourne I have deliberately attempted to study spaces that have a clear connection to wider urban processes and are therefore less able to be considered discrete entities in themselves. The original ‘enormous voids’ were recognisable and intriguing because of their immediate contextual relationship with the denser urban fabric. The urban yards do not exist as large empty spaces; they are far smaller and confined to the specific dimensions of the property allotments. However they are as intriguing, and rely similarly on their adjacency to a busy purposeful context to define part of their paradoxical strangeness.

The urban yards are temporarily accessible, if vacant, and so are available to occupation and appropriation by people who reside locally. The inner-urban context is important as it provides, through proximity, a greater intensity of public involvement with the spaces. The spaces I have observed are well ‘used’ in diverse ways and very much part of the residential and commercial context in which they sit. Greater opportunity for involvement allows a ‘parafunctional’ employment of the space. Potential activities were defined, maximised and redefined through different studies of several sites, seeking to encourage ever new and diverse public recognition and use.

This study understands that a terrain vague site, regardless of any specific prior industrial activity or dereliction, relinquishes its terrain vague qualities the moment the ambiguity is ‘designed out’ of it and a clear park or other function and identity established through intentional site construction.

There have been three phases of appreciation of these sites. The first recognised and sought to understand and then better define an observed new type of terrain vague. This search determined that the diverse – and subversive – potential for ‘use’ of the site was a key quality. The exercises associated with both understanding and definition of these new spaces called urban yards are detailed in Chapters 1 and 2 respectively. The second phase, attracted to speculative design engagement with them, realised that the qualities most valued were easily lost with certain modes of intentional engagement, resulting in ‘over-design’. The conceptual propositions and actual interventions are outlined in Chapter 3. The last phase sought to find modes that preserved these qualities while enabling and directing ‘action’ necessary to design. This outcome is partially revealed throughout the work and explained in the conclusion. The three phases are discussed briefly here as ‘use’, ‘over-design’ and ‘activity’.

Use – the encouragement and diversity of appropriation of a site – is a defining characteristic of terrains vagues and urban yards. The ways in which the urban yards are used provides the most compelling and dramatic proof of the nature of their existence. I employ the word ‘use’ to describe any activity by people in and around the site. The ephemeral qualities and forms of terrains vagues of inner-northern Melbourne were best understood through the various ways in which the occupants were observed using them. Observation and measurement of the spatial qualities of the sites alone did not allow a full understanding of how they operated and which methods to use when designing with them. I employ the word ‘use’ to describe activity by people in and around the site. Coupled with the ambiguity of ownership of the spaces this use often becomes the appropriation of another person’s property. Hence I understand appropriation as an activity that takes place when privately owned space is being occupied by members of the public.

Over-design is a constant threat. Whether enormous terrain vague or intimate urban yard, the conditions of a site’s original apprehension and ongoing attraction are tenuous and difficult to maintain throughout a conscious engagement. The inviting condition is impossible to replace once the self-conscious, essentially collaborative activity of exploratory recommendation becomes a self-evident, fundamentally assertive act of condemnation. Design activity moves from description to the edge of prescription but the proscription beyond obliterates a past and future world of possibilities.
Throughout this document the term ‘small urban voids’ will be used to define the voids in general and not specific to the inner-northern Melbourne context. The term urban yards shall be used to identify void spaces specific to inner-northern Melbourne. I feel that the descriptions of ‘yard’ and ‘yards’ by both Ford (2000) and Jacobs (1961) are also pertinent here.

Cooper Marcus & Hilliard Greene’s ‘mini-parks’ and ‘vest pocket parks’ are specific types of recreational open space. Within the inner-north Melbourne study area there are many of these types of parks under municipal ownership and stewardship. Some of these ‘parks’ even appear to be not much more than a small urban void. However it is the terrain vague qualities that I am interested in investigating not the appearance and design of small public recreation spaces.

For an expanded discussion on these sources please refer to the Annotated bibliography.

I define appropriation as the use of property that is not owned by the user, nor does the user have explicit permission to use this property.
Finding the Urban Yards

The occupation and the presence of the urban yard sites has been casually observed by myself and discussed with others. This is how they were initially ‘found’. They are understood and cherished colloquially as an essential quality of the inner-northern suburbs of Melbourne. Much of this casual observation has a tendency to romanticise the qualities of urban decay, abandonment, and subversion of the wider economic process of property ownership and development. However it is important to note that while there is support for and experience of individual terrain vague sites in the city, there is little clearly articulated agreement as to their specific nature. This is demonstrated through interviews with both local residence and officers of the local council as the responsible authority. I speculate that this is largely a result of the seemingly random and opportunistic ways in which these spaces appear in the urban fabric as well as how they are then appropriated and experienced. Both local residents and authorities consider them individually and not as a collection or part of a greater phenomenon. This chapter intends to seek, collect, categorize and make more specific the qualities and uses of terrains vagues in inner-northern Melbourne.

A catalogue of fifty possible urban yards was assembled with a view to closer analysis that might help better define them. As this process was initially based on personal ‘hunches’ formed and recorded freely in the field, the collected examples were extremely diverse in a wide variety of probable defining characteristics. There might have been as many definitions as there were urban yards.

After taking an inventory of fifty suspected urban yards sites it became apparent that there were no easily defined or common attributes shared by the spaces. I used the descriptions of (Solà-Morales Rubió 1994); temporal, ‘ambiguous, unresolved, and marginalized spaces in the urban landscape’ and the qualities embodied in the term ‘parafunctional’ (Papastergiadis 2002) as initial collective qualities.

More specifically ‘parafunctional’ spaces are, through the Greek meaning of the prefix, those that are ‘similar to’, or ‘alongside’ the function of another space. This meaning also can be extended to include ‘in support of’ the function of another space. This definition allows comparison between different known functions and spatial types, such as ‘street’, ‘park’ or ‘playground’. However a ‘parafunctional’ space does not completely exist as a recognised type, it resists a singular unique function and will shift from one specific use to another.

The ‘parafunctional’ urban yards are chiefly manifested as ‘small urban voids’, or spaces that at first appeared to have no specific or an ambiguous relationship to the adjacent land use. As they are also manifest as open spaces and can be occupied by the public they exhibit similar, but not exactly correspondent, qualities of the ‘public domain’ and ‘public open space’ of Hajer & Reijndorp (2001). Taking into account previously documented methods of observation and recording public urban space (for example, Whyte 2004; Cooper Marcus & Francis 1997) the study focused on an analysis of occupants’ behaviour. Much of this information about use was derived from the ‘behavioural trace’ mapping described by Cooper Marcus & Francis (1997 pp. 345-356).

Ultimately, it was the ways in which urban yards were observed to be used by others that provided the most definitive and consistent test of these spaces.

Once gathered I then used them to better define the how an urban yard exists. I began using several techniques; drawing, measuring, and mapping their locations with adjacent land uses. The aim was to translate the qualities of the urban yards in such a way so that they may be reasonable compared with each other.
The initial investigation of the inventory had involved the measured ‘drawing’ of the urban yards. Through this I hoped to discover whether there was a link between the physical arrangement of the sites and the activity of their occupiers. I found that the most commonly repeated aspects were:

- The urban yard’s distance from street edge.
- The number of access ways leading into the urban yard.
- The heights of buildings adjoining the urban yard.
- The consistency of boundary fence or wall around the urban yard.

Through the drawing exercise I was able to conclude that many of the urban yards conformed to the spatial dimensions of the prevailing division of land and allotment layouts and typically appeared next to buildings of two to three stories. This was particularly prevalent in yards within purely residential areas. In addition to this, the number of entrances and proximity to the streets could be compared across the whole group.

These common traits combined to produce a specific sense of enclosure, yet with continuous passage through the site. This sense of enclosure was usually combined with at least two access points or two open sides: enclosure without opportunity for entrapment. The sense of an easy evacuation combined with the visual screening from overlooking public and private areas could increase the sense of security for the active appropriator. Perhaps less definitive was the number of yards that had interrupted internal view lines. The sense of enclosure was therefore heightened through this partial interruption. These three qualities of enclosure, access and partially interrupted view lines become important when considering why certain yards hosted a greater level of use than others.

Following page
The following pages depict the first thirty-two yards collected and the plans drawn of them. Please refer to section 2.3 for further information of these yards.
1.3 Mapping

Through the mappings I was able to understand what the relationships these sites had with adjacent land uses. I wanted to develop a method that enabled predictions to be made as to where the next voids may emerge. Such a tool would be highly useful for the urban planning of local governments. Such spaces could be included in analysis and anticipated in development control overlays or strategic planning policy. The authority would then have a way to monitor the spaces. Urban yards already seemed to occur as a result of certain conjunctions of designated land use zones. That is, they appeared to be partially the result of planning policy and controls. This hunch was based on my observation that urban yards occurred where the certain urban processes converged favorably; for example, where a substation service area adjoined by two storey residential buildings in a multi-use land zone and no more than 50 meters from a retail area. I attempted to find, once again, the correct mix of contextual conditions in which yards were more likely to appear than others.

The mapping images were generated using the local planning policies and the electrical reticulation system main lines pre 1950’s, with both confirmed by field inspection of the yards themselves. These planning scheme maps are developed by the local authority and are intended to dictate preferred land use of defined areas. The pre 50’s electrical mainlines and substations were also interesting as the installation of this system disrupted the residential allotment patterns of the area. The mapping exercises did enable an understanding of a relationship to a series of both abstract and physical urban processes; economic, bureaucratic and infrastructural. However as the qualities of terrains vagues that I had initially attempted to find in inner-north Melbourne were predicated on the spaces being ambiguous, temporal and unresolved, mapping methods which could record ephemeral qualities of the sites were needed. Finding long-range and broad-scale methods of land use zone change and prediction was more difficult.

I concluded that a prediction method required the observation of individual urban yards responsive to the unique demographic and economic pressures of their locations. In this way I aimed to deduce not what the spaces were physically and spatially, but how they operated and how they were used as part of the invisible and omnipresent infrastructures of politics and land development. It is interesting to note that Cooper Marcus & Francis (eds. 1997) describe a similar attempt to map emerging voids. They found that it was almost impossible to predict the locations of these sites and where the next ‘opening’ would occur.

This highlights an important aspect of the definition of small urban parks. That is, the opening and emergence of active voids within the urban context involves a process distinct from an anticipated need for their mere physical and spatial presence; a continual action over a static physical condition. They do not occur or even become used for a specific singular need. Rather they are opportunistically exploited, occupied and appropriated; taking advantage of opportunities created by other wider urban processes.
Basic mapping

This image is a map comparing the locations of the yards (black) with the allotments, land use zones (green, blue and brown) with the electrical reticulation infrastructure (red).

**KEY**

- Urban Yard sites
- Business Zone
- Public Park & Recreation Zone
- Mixed Use Zone
- Major Roadway
- HV Power conduits (pre 1950’s)
- HV Substation (pre 1950’s)
If the long range prediction of the opening of voids is not possible then what are the parts of the urban yards that we can predict? It is important to appreciate the processes of opening and the precise spatial effects this has on the urban yard. How these spaces become open was observed as commonly being the result of a series of larger urban processes idiosyncratically combining or resulting from a single dramatic and rare event causing destruction or dereliction of the occupying structure. Specifically these processes include the economics of property development, the accommodation of changing spatial requirements of urban infrastructure and new technologies, the revision of legislation and urban planning policies, and, following closely on these, the reactive curiosity and will of local residents to exploit the new spatial opportunities of new voids. The new exploitations and interventions are the keys to creating urban yards.

The locations at which these new openings occur appear to be random as they rely on a unique set of circumstances that do not usually form a predictive pattern. The size and form of the urban yards however are directly related to the allotment layout which they occupy, which in turn are commonly influenced by road alignments, their legislated forms and hierarchies. We have then a standardised and predictable basis for form and size of the small urban space, specific to the pre-existing pattern of the division of land. We do not though have as precise a method of predicting the locations of these standard forms and sizes.

While the forces creating voids are unpredictable, any void requires diverse occupation to become an urban yard. In other words, not all voids will be urban yards as there is no guarantee of occupation, use and appropriation; but all urban yards will be occupiable voids. Patterns of use and behaviour in any public space then can hint at where an urban void, if it were created, would be actively engaged with, so that it is perhaps more useful and valuable to map past public space use to predict future use and therefore future urban yards, than to map present voids to predict future voids that nonetheless may not become occupied urban yards.

Acting on the premise that the behaviour of people in space is the simplest way of deducing intensity and type of use, I attempted to predict the possible parafunctionality of new void spaces through proximity to existing activity. The question of whether these spaces fulfilled the role of a public domain space or of public open space was also of interest. Hajer & Reijndorp (2001, p11) specify the difference between public space and public domain. Public space is ‘freely accessible for everyone’ whereas public domain requires spaces to be ‘valued as places of shared experience by people from different backgrounds or with dissimilar interests.’ They note that public domain can ‘be found beyond the traditional urban spaces of the streets, parks and squares.’ This mode of use of open space is useful in describing the types of use observed.

The behavioural observations strongly suggested that the urban yards did function as incidental ‘meeting’ places for people whose intentions of using the space greatly differed. They were contested grounds where people of differing views of ‘what should go on there’ argued both verbally and passively. Through the observation of this use I then aimed to understand more about the public nature of the urban yards. However, direct observation proved difficult. The intimate scale of the space meant that to observe a person required standing within a few paces of them. The observer then became a participant and an effecting agent in the behaviour being observed.

I then attempted to deduce function through indirect observation of behaviour and use. I began this observation by studying the detritus left in these spaces from previous occupations and appropriations and then speculated as to what may have taken place in these spaces. Traces are residual marks and material left over from the action of urban processes, occupation and appropriations in the urban yards.
**A CONSTRUCTION SITE?**
Collection, dumping & storage in various yards, 2004

**DECORATIVE COLLECTIONS**
Decorated tiles, balloons & posters in the King William Street yard and another yard, 2004

**AN INTIMATE GATHERING?**
Candles, tray & clothing in the King William Street yard, 2005

**THE DISCARDED**
Trolley, sharps bin & computer in the King William Street yard, 2005

**A HOME?**
Shelter, garden & pictures in various yards, 2003
I was influenced at this time by Agrest’s (1976) description of sets of ‘fragments’ in the urban environment as ‘units of reading’ and of building up a density of meanings into ‘semantic volume’, again to be read as a series of found texts that would reveal the ‘signifying mechanisms of non-design.’ She describes points at which the fragments overlap to create ‘signifying nodes.’ It is at these points, according to Agrest, that design and non-design are said to collide. While I am not concerned in fully engaging in this study with the reading of the ‘meanings’ of the found traces, I am interested in the ideas of Agrest’s ‘fragments’ collecting in specific ways to built a body of ‘non-designed’ material and spatial form.

I began by compiling photographic essays, written and diagrammatic audits of the residue found in the sites. I hoped that these would provide me with clues as to how the spaces have been occupied, used and appropriated. I was guided in latter observations by used Cooper Marcus’ and Francis’ (1997, pp. 354-356) ‘behaviour trace’ mapping techniques to record basic signs of use over time. These ‘signs’ were physical remnants from previous activities; such as drink cans, burnt out candles, stacked bricks and balloons. These remnants allowed me to speculate broadly on how the spaces had been used previously.

While these exercises gave me a far clearer picture of the happenings within individual urban yards, they were less able to assist in constructing rules of occupation across all sites. The rifling through detritus and observation of occupants over time did afford a helpful understanding of the uses of individual yards. For this reason, and for the purpose of clarity in this essay, an individual urban yard shall be examined. I have chosen the former urban yard located near the corner of King William and Fitzroy streets for this explanation. ¹

The King William Street yard allows me to examine the question of the establishment of a fixed pattern of usage and the concept of a space remaining open. This space has progressively become closer to a pattern of use that is similar to a publicly owned passive recreational space and child’s playground. This yard is a combination of two property allotments that have both, for different reasons, had the residential buildings removed and not replaced.

One half of the site is still under private ownership while the other has been recently acquired by the local authority. As an example of terrain vague it does not conjure up the images used by Solà-Morales Rubió. It is contested as a space between the local residence and other temporary occupants who gather in the space. It does provide us with an excellent example of a small urban void, which has an ambiguous relationship with both ownership and use; it serves as a meeting place and therefore public domain and sits within its allotment boundaries. How it performs as an ephemeral public space is however less clear.

The publicly owned section as been burdened with a roped off and unused children’s play ground previously installed by the local authority. While the privately owned section will be sold off when the electrical infrastructure is rationalised, the technology improves and the substation is no longer required. For now however it is in limbo. Ironically, it is the most imposing and permanent feature of the site, the playground, that is used the least. As this site has remained open for many decades it also allows us to speculate as to what the important features of a well used urban yard are.

The following chapter discusses the common qualities or properties of the urban yards found in this chapter. These qualities are then used to more clearly define a set of ‘operating parameters’ that can be used to measure and hopefully anticipate urban yards and the occupations they invite. I use the term ‘operating parameters’ to describe the ideal limits that each quality operates within when the yard appears to exhibit a terrain vague sense and also allows a high degree of occupation and use.
The King William Street yard exhibits many of the ideal yard qualities. On investigating the history of this particular yard I found the events that led to its formation interesting and important in understanding how the wider urban processes colluded to form it. The allotment facing Fitzroy Street was originally acquired in 1933 and cleared to host an electrical sub station. This new infrastructure needed only part of the site, leaving the remainder open.

The allotment facing King William Street was acquired in 1948 by the Fitzroy Association for the purpose of a Returned Serviceman’s recreational house. This structure was latter destroyed and the allotment has reportedly not hosted a building since 1972.

The allotment facing the King William Street was then acquired by Yarra City Council some time between 1994 and 1998, and is partially maintained by the authority. The other allotment however is in the ownership of the utility company and therefore privately owned.

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This chapter attempts to establish a useful, working definition of urban yards which could identify future urban yards and the levels and types of activity that will be prevalent in them.

From the common qualities of urban yards observed in the previous chapter I attempted to find common limits within which these qualities operated. These ideal limits of the four qualities I have termed their operating parameters. One bureaucratic and three spatial operating qualities and their ideal parameters were determined. Together they produced the particular condition that I was seeking; a terrain vague yard that allowed various forms of occupation and use. Clearly the qualities and their parameters were strongly related and it was necessary that an urban yard exhibit all four qualities within their corresponding parameters simultaneously. The four qualities were; access, enclosure, size and ownership. The parameters therefore set limits on the qualities. They focused on; limited and variable types of access over time, a predominant sense of enclosure and a majority of impermeable edges, small void sizes compared to adjacent building mass, and finally an ambiguous or apparently contested ownership. These parameters were useful in guiding latter design studies. However I found that it was difficult to reduce these to precise quantifiable standards. I latter found that the combination of the qualities, their parameters and the observed use of the yards begin to describe a more profound quality of the yards: 'openness'. Conversely, to what extent and in what way a yard can be described as open relies on the mix of evident occupation and the four parameters.

As difficult as it proved to be to observe behaviour directly in the yard, the observation of the entering and exiting of the yard by occupants was fairly simple an unaffected. The greater number of access points to a yard space the more it was observed being occupied. Cooper Marcus’ & Francis’ work (1997) infers that the predominant factor leading to a successful small urban park is the number of access points and level of permeability. And similarly, as evident in descriptions of New York’s ‘privately owned public spaces’, use and access are the basic requirements for a site’s success. With further design studies into my sites I discovered that a variety of less visible and accessible parts of the urban yards needed to be balanced with the more accessible and visually open areas.

However, the number of access points becomes excessive when it begins to interfere with the effectiveness of the next quality: enclosure. From the evidence of observations, I speculated that the yards could operate most successfully with three narrow points of physical access and one side of the yard ‘open’ at any given time. A corner lot for example allowed multiple points of entry across the two open sides however this caused a significant reduction in the sense of enclosure for the site, hence the balance becomes compromised. The King William Street yard, for example, has an irregular shape which mitigates the loss of a sense of enclosure imposed by the openness of King William Street edge.
Enclosure

(Above) Images demonstrating areas of spatial enclosure and exposure in the King William Street yard and its neighbourhood.

(Right) This image roughly indicatively demonstrates where the enclosed areas of the yard are. This is based on an appreciation of physical enclosure derived from the distance of one wall to another.

Access

(Above) These images show the points of access and in and beyond the site.

(Right) This image shows the three points of access into the King William Street yard.
Another common condition observed was the partial enclosure of smaller spaces within the site itself. The majority of the ‘behavioural traces’ was gathered in the most enclosed spaces. It can be speculated that the appropriator feels a sense of ‘refuge’ (Hudson 1993) and is afforded a comforting ‘prospect’ of the space. In this way the occupant can continue with an activity without fear of being observed or ‘caught in the act’. These areas of enclosure partly deny the passive surveillance of the entire space from outside the yard. This condition, while seemingly antithetical to Jacobs’ (1961) understanding of sound urban planning, only occurs in parts of the yards. I speculate that the majority of the yard requires passive surveillance to foster a sense of security and connection to the less ambiguous public open space of the street. Again, a tension exists within the yard space itself between two types of space, enclosed and exposed, furthering the apparent internal ambiguity of the yards. They are neither simply open nor closed. The areas where this type of enclosure existed a build up of behavioural traces was commonly found. In this example the images depict the using of posters and aerosol stencils applied to the walls to demonstrate the ‘build up’ of residual traces.

I speculate that a sense of enclosure within the space is important to the maximisation of specific activities within it. As explained above, this sense can be eroded when the site is excessively permeable. A site becomes too enclosed when the occupant can become entrapped in any part of the site and the sight-lines are so restricted as to not allow visual access to the majority of the points of access. Again the King William Street yard demonstrates a level of enclosure that allows a combination of free movement through out, views of two of the three entry points at all times and also has areas that are screened from the other half of the site.

Consistently throughout all yards is the adherence of their spatial boundaries to the allotments and cadastres in which they sit. In this way they conform precisely to the network of property ownership. The compact scale of these spaces denied the urban yards a sense of detachment from the adjacent building and the urban context in general. The King William Street urban yard is sited with in a residential area, and therefore conforms to the residential sized allotments. In this case the urban yard is composed of two conjoined residential allotments. The effect this has on the types of activity that can be executed here is profound. Most forms of active recreation are denied, the viable space allowing only domestic and passive recreational uses. I speculate that the ways in which people come together to confront, meet and make a cultural exchange are greatly affected by the intimate scale the urban yards. This compression of the social space and creation of the ‘friction’ (Hajer & Reijndorp 2001, pp.96 & 130) creates a greatly increased level of interaction between occupants and involvement by them in the space. The inner-north Melbourne area multiplies this effect through its compact urban form allowing more people to experience the yards more frequently. The effect of this creates an atmosphere of participation in the current activity of the space, rather than spectatorship (Hajer & Reijndorp 2001, p. 88).
Fitzroy
Brunswick Street
Area: 320 sqm
Access: 2 points
Enclosing sides: 2
Owner: private
Lots: 2
Land use: res/comm

Carlton
Drummond Street
Area: 150 sqm
Access: 2 points
Enclosing sides: 3
Owner: private
Lots: 1
Land use: residential

Carlton
Rathdowne Street
Area: 425 sqm
Access: various
Enclosing sides: 2
Owner: private
Lots: 3
Land use: public

Collingwood
Keele Street
Area: 125 sqm
Access: open sides
Enclosing sides: 2
Owner: private
Lots: 1
Land use: res

Collingwood
Easey Street
Area: 215 sqm
Access: 2
Enclosing sides: 3
Owner: private
Lots: 3
Land use: multiuse

North Fitzroy
St Georges Road
Area: 395 sqm
Access: open sides
Enclosing sides: 1
Owner: private
Lots: 1
Land use: commercial

North Fitzroy
Batman Street
Area: 350 sqm
Access: 2 points
Enclosing sides: 2
Owner: private
Lots: 3
Land use: public

Fitzroy
Argyle Street
Area: 115 sqm
Access: 2 points
Enclosing sides: 2
Owner: private
Lots: 1
Land use: commercial

North Fitzroy
Watkins Street
Area: 345 sqm
Access: 2 points
Enclosing sides: 2
Owner: public
Lots: 1
Land use: commercial
The King William Street urban yard, as described earlier, is an open space consisting of a conjoined publicly owned allotment and a privately owned allotment. Indeed many of the spaces in this study were occupied by the public, however, remained under full or partial private ownership. This ambiguity allows such spaces to operate both within and outside of the ratified urban planning policy (Kayden 2000; Hajer & Reijndorp 2001). Many of the sites under private ownership are rented out for public use for financial return. The question of whether a site has become established is made further ambiguous as a repeated pattern of use relies upon the exchange between the private owner and the public who use the space.

Another aspect of this concept of ownership is that under the Victorian planning system the local government does not need to own land to partially dictate what happens to it. The local authority, under their power to define strategic planning guidance, is able to control the fate of the urban yard even in private ownership. This question of planning control is best illustrated though the texts of Low et al. (2005), Kayden (2000) and Whyte (1980). They describe and analyse the legislative structure that created the most significant collection of New York public spaces. Under the ‘Zoning Resolution Laws’ of 1961 the concept of ‘private public space’ was created. The Resolution defines the seemingly oxymoronic title of ‘Public Private Space’ as cited by Kayden;

“...a physical place located on private property to which the owner has granted legally binding rights of access and use to members of the public...”

(Kayden 2005 p.9)

The city of New York has experienced far greater pressures on its available public land, streetscape continuity, solar access and natural ventilation than Melbourne. However, it does demonstrate that the question of mass public occupation of private land for the purpose of recreation is possible with the support of the local planning authority. The pertinent issue here is that under the legislation these spaces were not dealt with individually, but through an overall decree based on quantitative assessment of space. The reality of the application of the Resolution is quite different in 2006, as it has become compromised by a vast multitude of addenda (New York City Department of City Planning Website 2005). The difficulty in allowing the urban yards to be recognised under planning legislation is that their definition and operational parameters are not easily defined quantitatively as they are through the New York example.

Ownership of a yard profoundly affects the other three qualities and their ideal operating limits; access, size and enclosure. Each quality must have a balance of good and bad permeability, of a sense of openness in some areas and closed-ness in others, a tension must exist between these first two parameters. Size of the yard dictates to what degree the former two may interact; the larger the yard the greater the possibility of the yard simultaneously holding a wider variance of both enclosure and access. Where lots have been conjoined the acceptable limits of access and enclosure widen yet again. Ownership and the levels to which this ownership is exerted over the yard work differently here. The limits of ownership must remain within a level where the site is
Access, Size and Enclosure

These diagrams (below) demonstrate how the two simple spatial qualities of number of access points and overall yard size effect the sense of enclosure within an Urban Yard. A yard with more than one access point allows a through flow of pedestrian activity diminishing the sense of enclosure (shown as arrows). As observed with many Urban Yards the increase in size requires a conjoining of yards which then creates an irregular shaped space.

The simplest yard configuration; a single block, single entrance yard enclosed on three sides. This creates a high degree of enclosure.

When an additional point of access is applied to a yard of the same dimensions the sense of enclosure is dramatically reduced.

When the yard size is increased by elongating its shape it does not necessarily increase the sense of enclosure.

When the yard size is increased again by returning back to its original square shape the sense of enclosure does not necessarily increase. By removing or adding additional points of access the sense of enclosure may be controlled.

However when the configuration, or shape, of the yard becomes irregular then the yard begins to exhibit multiple areas of strong enclosure. Overall the size of the yard and number of points of access do strongly effect the sense of enclosure. This diagram intends to show that when multiple lots are conjoined the shape of the lots begin to widen the possibilities of this interrelation.
allowed to be temporarily occupied. The complete barricading of a site, for example, is an exertion of ownership of the yard that completely denies the public access and therefore occupation of the site.

Many of the urban yards surveyed had poorly maintained wire fencing that freely allowed access to those prepared to climb under or through the wire, a sense of trespass heightening and defining the occupation of the yard as appropriation. The King William Street yard is however almost completely open. Ironically the only fencing installed is to keep children within the defunct playground area. This is as much a sign of ownership as the barricading of other yards.

Along with ownership comes the duty of care toward those who occupy the space, with or without permission. And in today’s increasingly litigious environment this complete exertion of ownership and barricading is as much for the safety of the public as it is a symbol of control. Ownership then operates at two levels, within legislation and urban planning and at a smaller individual scale through the exertion of effort to make the space exclusive and not accessible to the public. The occupation, and therefore appropriation, of a yard can be compared to the archaic ‘squatters rights’ of the UK Property Law system (Webber 2006). These rights no longer exist in any effective form today. They did allow the ‘adverse’ occupation of a property by people who did not own it and after 12 years the property was considered the right of the squatter. What is important to this study is that this adverse occupation of buildings still happens today in inner Melbourne. The occupiers have no real legal rights however if the owner does not know that they are there then they can not be prosecuted or moved on as it is in the owner’s initiative to force the squatters out. Although a defunct legal principle this concept of squatting gives an interesting precedent as to how the occupation of urban yards could be legally recognised.

So far in this chapter I have discussed how a small group of qualities common to all urban yards in the inner-north of Melbourne have been developed into a set of operating parameters. I recognise that these parameters could be developed beyond this study; however I felt that they were sufficient to allow the following series design studies. Through the active exercises undertaken to begin testing these parameters it becomes clear that the open quality of any individual site is highly important. The degrees to which a space may be considered open rely and can therefore be measured through the qualities and their limits; access, enclosure, size and ownership. When this balance is achieved patterns of use begin to develop. These uses have been promoted to occur through the combinations of site qualities described above. The important difference between an easily identified open space type, such as a park, and an urban yard is the establishment of a particular pattern of use. These uses in an urban yard must be allowed to shift, remain ambiguous to retain their terrain vague qualities; a park for example is defined by its fixed pattern of use. The operating parameters of the yard then must also be allowed to shift and the tensions between the qualities be retained. This then is a more specific description of both an urban yard and the terrain vague qualities that I seek to retain within them; allowing patterns of use to shift without one becoming privileged and established.
I use the term established to describe the condition that exists when a space develops a fixed pattern of use. When a space has a function assigned to it and is constructed to support this function it has become established. This term is important in the context of urban yards as the uses and function must remain ambiguous. From the behavioural trace mappings and observation of the sites I have found that a particular pattern of use may occur in an urban yard only to be supplanted by another. This sense of establishment is then vague and ephemeral and is necessary to retain the terrain vague sense.

The King William Street yard is a good example of how a space left open to the public can develop shifting patterns of use as it demonstrates a good balance between the qualities and their ideal limits. As these patterns develop the space moves closer to becoming established as a space that serves a specific function. For example, the playground section of the King William Street yard serves as another example of when a function is determined for a space, by the designer, and a corresponding form assigned. In this case the playground set and enclosure represents a pattern of use that has been deterministically forced on the space. As the playground has been taped off and closed since early March, 2006, I conclude that this imposition was rejected by the users of the urban yard. This rejection signalled through both lack of use and partial destruction of the equipment. The public authority could have repaired this structure however seems to have decided not to. The conclusion here is that form and function must be allowed to emerge from the patterns of use defined by the occupants of the urban yards; within a terrain vague site this must be allowed to remain an ambiguous relationship.

These essential qualities of the site, one legislative and three spatial were derived from observation and speculation only. While the discussion of openness and establishment are important to the study, they needed to be tested in the sites. The first design study included the erection of posters within the site the second used a collection of numbered boxes left in the site. Both of these exercises aimed to begin an ‘exchange’ within the urban yard with other users. Overall I gained a brief glimpse into the process of appropriation and the effects this type of intervention had on the specific urban yard sites. The original intent of this way of working that I developed was to understand the rules that governed the acts of occupation and use and to test whether the sense of enclosure or exposure had an effect on this occupation, use and appropriation process.

Notes:
1. This idea of ‘open’ I understand as being both social and physical. Socially open requires a sense that the act of entering the site is not contrary to the basic moral underpinning of society, as perceived by the occupier. Physical openness interests me here as it is more readily appreciated and measured. I understand it as a physical condition that relates to its immediate contextual urban form. The pressure to maximise developable property area for private means and the desire to retain a sense of streetscape means that property or allotment boundaries are defined and enforced. This built form is therefore constructed up to this line, commonly offset from the street by a consistent distance along the street length. It is therefore in places where this built form temporarily ceases to occupy the land behind the property boundary that the land is said to be ‘open’ and a void created. Hence the open public streetscape merges with the open private property and the ambiguity of ownership begins. Therefore I consider the quality of ‘openness’ in context with a greater urban fabric is the base requirement for small urban open space.

2. I use the conclusions of the connection between a ‘compact development’ and the ease of walking put forward by the environmental physiologist R. Banai (1996); and the writings of J. Gehl & L. Gemzæ (2001) to support this statement.
Interrogating the Urban Yards

The qualifying conditions of urban yards, one legislative and three spatial, were derived from passive observation and speculation only. While the discussions of openness and establishment are important to the study, they also needed to be tested in the sites. The ‘interrogations’ of the urban yard in this chapter consist of three conceptual projects and two actual interventions which demonstrated the defining qualities and their parameters determined in the previous chapters. Two active exercises were performed in the urban yards. The first included the erection of posters within the site the second used a collection of numbered boxes left in the site. Both of these exercises aimed to begin an interrogating ‘exchange’ within the urban yard with other users. Overall I gained a brief glimpse into the process of appropriation and the effects this type of intervention had on the specific urban yard sites. The original intent of this way of working was to understand what rules might govern the acts of appropriation and to test whether the sense of enclosure or exposure had an effect on this appropriation process.

One particularly prevalent form of trace in the yards was poster art. I was curious as to what dictated the locations of the mass-produced posters depicting a broad range of artistic work. They appeared to be placed in a manner that was highly sensitive to their spatial and social environment. As an emerging form of street art posters are replacing the role of painted graffiti. Poster artists are able to mass-produce and apply their statements far faster and at many more locations than the paint-based artists. This type of installation was one in which the appropriator directly used the space as an installation opportunity.

I had observed that many of these posters had been destroyed and that others accumulated at specific points of the yards. I was interested to know what the etiquette or rules of appropriation were in this case and decided to develop my own series of poster-art installations. I selected five sites that I believed to be the most actively appropriated and ambiguous public private relationship. I then selected parts of the sites, determining the most and least visually prominent parts of the site. I would gauge the accuracy of my selections by observing how long it would take for each poster to be removed, defaced or act as an accumulation point. In doing this I hoped to learn more about this particular type of appropriation and translate the lessons into a design strategy based on the creation of traces and residue.

Within the King William Street yard I placed posters at four specific locations. I selected these points based on the strength of their sense of physical and visual enclosure and on their proximity to access points. I found that the greater the number of existing posters at each point, the longer my poster installed amongst them would survive un-molested. Poster volume had no discernible original relationship to greater enclosure or access, but was rather a reactive response to prior poster use. This strengthened the concept of traces accumulating in hot-spots, allowing a stronger connection to Agrest’s notion of a ‘semantic volume’.

The exposed parts of the yards generally hosted larger and more complex posters. While the posters in the more enclosed areas tended to be smaller and less sophisticated. This way of working introduced the concept of using traces as a way communicating to other occupiers. It developed my understanding of trace making as a more complex understanding of the process of appropriation as a social exchange.

This next way of working also used the active appropriation of the yards to probe the reactions of other co-occupants using mobile tamperable objects placed in the site. It again was a highly visual and active interrogation of the site. It intended to measure and observe effects of newly introduced and freestanding objects placed in specific areas of the site.
Behavioral traces
This image demonstrates the activity of posterling and appropriations within the King William Street Yard. This shown through the mapping of ‘behavioral traces’ and the lines of movement observed during several ‘box’ design studies.

KEY
- Sence of Enclosure*
- Observed appropriation*
- Lines indicative of observed occupant activity
  * Darker shading designates higher degree
**Build up of posters - public allotment**
These images demonstrate the build up of posters on the eastern wall of the publicly owned allotment. The first image shows the existing posters (blue), the second shows my poster (orange) and the third shows the effect after six weeks.

**Build up of posters - private allotment**
Similar to the above these images show the effect of the intervention of my poster in the same yard, on the eastern wall of the privately owned space. In both cases the poster seemed to attract more of its kind. The more enclosed space - the private allotment - already exhibited a larger volume of poster and aerosol art. The poster I placed here did not seem to draw as much attention to its self as it was in a less open space.
### 3.2 Boxes

Again, I wanted to understand the effect which a sense of enclosure or exposure had on this level of activity, and to do this at different times of the day and week. This way of working also tested the guardianship of space more readily than the previously described posters, as the freestanding objects were far more obvious and easily removed. A question that emerged from the poster exercise was the importance and effect of active and vigilant ownership of the sites. A defining characteristic of the urban yard condition was that it has an ambiguous relationship to public and private access and use. Many of the sites I had surveyed were closely guarded and well maintained by their owners, regardless of the amount of appropriation that occurred in their yards. This I considered another socially based urban condition that affected the use of the yards.

The boxes exercise involved the placement of three marked cardboard boxes in the same five sites chosen for poster installations. These yards were chosen as they featured a wide range of enclosed and exposed areas; they also offered a variety of public and private relationships.

Each box was white with an orange number placed on three of its six sides. They were tied loosely with string to allow them to be held together more securely but not tight enough to prevent opening. The appearance and manipulability of boxes was important. They needed to be highly visible, easily tampered with, useful, retaining the ability to work as a box, and to be uniquely marked so I could record their progress every second or third day.

I repeated this design study twice. Each study lasted approximately two weeks before all the boxes had been destroyed, removed completely. They had variously been worn as apparel, burnt and collected to be reused as a box. I presumed that the boxes that were placed in a part of the site that was significantly more enclosed were more likely to remain in the site and also remain undamaged. Thus the relationship between appropriation of elements of the site and the enclosure of the site could be established. I found that after placing the thirty boxes over three months and monitoring these for over twenty-eight days there was a much stronger relationship between the enclosure and the level of movement of the boxes than had been observed with the posters.

In some cases my probe boxes were immediately destroyed and stacked neatly in a hard rubbish pile. I concluded from this that the owners were weary of unauthorised objects being placed in their yards, and were quick to remove anything foreign. This evidenced a potential for the study to create controversy and unease. This way of working extended the idea of trace observation into an active participation by other with the trace making. In a more profound way the designer was also the various occupiers and appropriators. I had wilfully and consciously set the appropriation process in motion.

Following these active exercises it became clear that the design outcomes were various and hard to predict. This was determined to be in part a symptom of their ephemeral occupation as well as their ephemeral existence. Urban yards are continually at risk of becoming closed and therefore rendered unavailable for occupation. Above all other issues concerning the viability of the yards it was concluded that retaining ‘open-ness’ became the most important factor. Without denying the greater urban process of property development, viability becomes a negotiation with wider urban concerns.

Overall I gained a brief glimpse into processes of appropriation and the effects these types of intervention had on encouraging appropriation of specific urban yard sites. The original intent of this way of working was to understand what rules might govern the acts of appropriation and to test whether the sense of enclosure or exposure had an effect on this appropriation process.
I selected five yards that I had previously observed. A variety of enclosure and access to adjacent public areas was important. I also selected sites that appeared to have high levels of appropriative behavior.

The construction of prepared folded boxes was simple and fast. This was important as I was not interested in communicating directly with other potential occupants at this stage, only through the boxes.

I placed the three boxes in separate areas of the yard. Number one was at the most enclosed, number two in an area less enclosed, and number three in the most exposed part of the yard.

After leaving the boxes I returned at regular intervals to monitor their movement. Many were found destroyed with some being reused as boxes to store and carry items of the occupants.
However I felt that the real value of the exercise was ultimately not a detailed understanding either of rules of appropriation and the effects of enclosure, but a deeper understanding of how the residual traces of activity could be observed and reapplied. I had achieved this by using a purpose built appropriateable object that had been placed within the yard. Perhaps a further design intervention in an urban yard could utilize a similar process starting with a better consciousness of ongoing trace values. The design intervention would then include and involve a manipulation of the pre-existing processes that were active in the yard, such as certain evident appropriations and the enforcement of security by the owner. The design strategy would require both an active catalytic insertion in the yard and also a sensitivity toward the existing form making processes already active there.

The findings of these interventions need to be considered against the findings of similar urban space investigations and speculations. I have chosen the following four texts to situate and contrast these findings of the shifting patterns of use of urban yards with findings of previous studies. These are; ‘Rethinking Urban Parks’ (2005), ‘Privately Owned Public Space’ (2000), ‘The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces’ (1980), and, as an alternative to New York centric studies, ‘New City Places’ (2001).

The differences between the open spaces these studies focus on and those of this study bring into clearer focus the essential requirement for a tension to exist between the planned and unplanned; the well defined conventions of property ownership and the ambiguous use of the urban yards. All of these texts examine spaces that have been previously constructed, have been established as predominantly passive recreational space, are clearly designated as areas for public use, have clearly defined ownership, and have been constructed as a result of a single-outcome design process.

Their conclusions are rationally able to then define a series of design criteria, guidance, and checklists for good outcomes because the parameters that have been tested do not change and neither do the methods for their material realisation. The qualities that make good urban yards are fixed but are actually realised through continual and uncertain material shifts and interventions.

The small voids are, and more importantly are perceived to be, ultimately temporary. Like their terrain vague big sisters they are waiting to be redeveloped. They are poised to be resolved into something less ambiguous. This temporary quality allows the void to hang in a creative and teasing limbo. They cannot be redeveloped with permanently recognisable open space function and simultaneously retain their generative uncertainty.
Tracking the boxes

These images show the movements of the boxes over a two week period. Each image is approximately three to four days apart.

In this example all three of the boxes migrated around the yard and ended up stacked neatly together.
While the design studies attempted to test the operating parameters of particular qualities, it is the question of ownership and openness that remains mostly unresolved. This issue is most interesting here as it allows a connection between the urban yards and the greater urban process of property economics and local planning law. This connection is important as it allows the designer a way of understanding how the yards may be manipulated through these urban processes. An examination of the history of ‘small neighbourhood parks in the United States’ in work carried out by others spanning back to the early 1960’s (Cooper Marcus & Hilliard Greene 1997) can assist further in an understanding of the creation of openness, establishment and ownership.

As I have noted previously Cooper Marcus & Hilliard Greene demonstrate how the size and planar form of small parks was easy to define and was commonly related to the prevailing dimensions and number of housing lots, either singly or in combination. Furthermore, they report that the hardest characteristic of the parks to usefully define were their function and a concise description of use. The appropriations that took place in these spaces were ambiguous and difficult to fit into well understood categories of public space use. This somewhat anticipates a recognition of terrain vague spatial qualities. Another difficulty was establishing criteria for the prediction of future locations of similar sites and where the next ‘opening’ would occur to enable them.

The idea of ‘small urban voids’ can then can be recognised with more clarity as encompassing both a process of opening of the urban fabric, and also as process of particular occupation of these openings. The opening process involves the appearance of terrains vagues with their ambiguous function and unpredictable location. Understanding the opening as a process, both ongoing and separate to the decisions of future development, we can appreciate the temporal and changing nature of the site for its own sake. The authors appear to regard the opening as a single event that just seems to happen and is unimportant except inasmuch as it then allows for future development. They are more concerned with the end state as it more easily relates to their description of ‘types’ of recognisable and fixed space. The resulting parks emerge as a result of their adherence to the predetermined structure of the street form, allotment layout and the division of land. However their emergence at all is not guaranteed and not as interesting as the possibilities for the voids if a park actually fails to emerge.

Cooper Marcus’ and Francis’ parks are described as almost evolving inevitably within the urban context. The prescriptions for design that they give also then deny further evolution or cultivation of future use and form. In setting out checklists and guidelines for ‘what to put where’ the park becomes established and fixed. Many of the urban yards that I have observed could not support such treatment as they are regarded as temporary openings and are soon to return to hosting a building. The process of opening may then never be properly completed as the yards exist in this unresolved process.

Even though the American spaces of Cooper Marcus and Francis are designed, built and maintained, the legislative territory in which they exist is very similar to Melbourne’s urban yards, in that they are both public and private simultaneously. The predominant perception of Melbourne’s urban yards is that of public space which is nonetheless not completely owned or maintained by local government. The idea of public and private spaces as mutually exclusive is challenged in urban yards, fostering the sense of ambiguity.
The existence of such spaces in a legislative context is a crucial factor in the definition of the yards. They are either legally recognised and therefore clearly described, or they are not. This definitive recognition allows the space to be recorded and treated as a particular type of space, setting out its proper function. There is a profound distinction between a mere open space and a park, affecting all aspects of the ways in which the space is handled, budgeted and managed. If legislative description were able to encompass the temporary nature of the small urban void rather than its static eventual outcome, it could exist in its own right. How do we regard a space that has no legislative definition or recognition? Must we deduce that the public interaction, use and access, of such spaces are then necessarily subversive? Or is there a middle ground of private land occupation by the public that could be described by the local authority and tolerated by citizens?

How then can the designer plan a series of interventions with legislative support that may be inserted into both the private and publicly owned urban yards? Such insertions must be understood as part of an ephemeral process and not a set of permanent end-state designs. As many urban yard owners are long term absenteees or care taker institutions, permission for use may be very hard to attain. The chances of receiving complaint from such owners is, however, also remote. Interventions will need to recognise the qualities and operating parameters of access and enclosure. The size and scale will need to remain that of the allotment. As such an undertaking will aim to have the recognition of the local authority, a duty of care for the safety of the public will need to be considered. Overall the installation must retain the space’s sense of ambiguity. It must also allow for shifting patterns of use and for use to be developed over time through occupation for the site that will remain open. Only with consideration of all these points will the site retain a terrain vague heritage, avoiding over-design while permitting some intentional active engagement.

Over-design is a constant threat when working in the urban yards and the design studies of this chapter aimed to test the limits of this. The speculative interventions described below use a series of surfaces in the context of two urban yards. The concept of surface, rather than structure, allows first of all for a relatively simple and safe occupation of a yard. It thereby addresses one of the most basic local authority concerns, its duty of care to the public, and mitigates the physical hazards commonly found within under-maintained urban yards. Using surfaces avoids designation of a specific function. They do not prompt the use of a space in a definitive way although can be suggestive and invite interpretation. Finally through the installation of an occupiable surface the site is able to appear more open.

Through working with the site’s ephemerality the following interventions began to investigate when a particular prescribed use would become establishment on the site, how such a site would come to have a particular function associated with it, and, effectively, when urban open space would become a park.

As the urban yards are temporary the surface needed to be easily recoverable and mobile. This opened up the possibility for a constant relocation of the device to a range of yards. It would then need to adapt to different spatial and material requirements.
Kit-of-planes study
These are explorations into the forms created from a collection of flat planes. These explorations were to form the basis of physical models that had the ability to change shape and adapt to various yards.

Early image of a concept for a yard surface intervention

‘Escofet’ play surface

Exploration in a yard in Barcelona
Mobile Surface

I appropriated well-known and accepted forms of play equipment to allow: safe occupation of the site, an increased variety in the sense of enclosure and exposure, and to create an installation that would draw interest and attract future occupiers to the yard. I hoped to find a way of manipulating and varying processes of appropriation and operations of urban infrastructure. Also by developing an alternative approach to the barricading of open space I hoped to reinstate the ambiguity of the yard’s public-ness. If this could be achieved then the yard spaces could become public events drawing a wider audience and including broader sections of the local community than they would otherwise.

The models on the adjoining page show the concepts I found most useful. I used hinged faceted boards and a series of narrow boards that had been pinned together. I was interested in how these folded and moved in different ways and the possibilities for occupation they allowed. The ability for these surfaces to adapt to various sites and to also allow for the arrangement into partially enclosed forms was largely successful. The study opened up the notion of designing a continuous ground surface that could evoke a sense of enclosure. However when designing-in the ability to adapt to all yards I removed a unique and intimate connection to specific yards. The mobile surfaces seemed to loose an important relationship with the yards as they sat over and smothered them. Through attempting to eliminate all possible public injury hazards, and observed a ‘duty-of-care’, I had lost a connection to integral parts of the urban yard character.

As I had observed the effects of enclosure and exposure on the process of appropriation through the poster and box design studies, I hoped that a broader series of spatial situations would give me a more sophisticated way of manipulating occupation, use and appropriation. I began to explore the possible range of forms this continuous surface could achieve.

I then attempted to represent this form in the Charles and George Street yard in a sketch montage. I did this by constructing a series of models in card of the surface based on the previous exercises. I had now developed a kit-of-planes that could be easily shifted and a basic reference system that could compare the resulting forms to the previously sketched moments of experience. Through this modeling and montage design study I found that the generated forms resembled some of the more regularly experienced elements of the urban landscape. Elements such as: the slope for sitting, the elevated ground for viewing, the flattened linear pathway, and the inaccessible wall all began to inform my manipulation of the kit-of planes and the resulting continuous surface.
The mobile surface

Based on the kit-of-planes studies I built a series of scaled adjustable surface models. I then speculated on how they could relate to the various yard sites through photomontage.
In this next surface design study I explored the possibility of the surface materials being something other than removable materials and entertained the notion of the surface of the yard becoming more permanent. The sketch shows a grounded continuous surface intended to be constructed from familiar urban materials such as: bitumen, bluestone, concrete, and lawn. Their form resembled those of familiar elements of the urban landscape even more closely including the viewing slope and flattened pathway. I concluded that the materials I had used could not easily articulate the nuances of spatial experience I was interested in but generalized and neutralized individual yard experiences.

Although the experiments provided interesting possible outcomes for what a park design might be, it failed in its ambition to permanence and obliteration of layers of remnant pasts, to answer the question of what design of an urban yard might be. The proposition represented here was no longer focused on appropriation or the manipulation of form through occupation but provided a fixed, permanent and established solution. It had lost hold of the original characteristics of the urban yard and become a park. I had pushed the ‘parafunctional’ urban yard into a fully functional park type space.

These installations were not resolved to a technical level at which a reasonable conclusion could be made as to their success as manipulable objects by other occupants. For a fuller discussion of this issue I undertook additional investigations described in the following chapter. These studies describe two interventions in urban yards that I undertook deliberately requiring the cooperation of other occupants. Even so, the speculative and collaborative interventions drew very close to being over prescriptive and over designed by becoming singular dominating ideas of the site’s potential.

I would like to return to the work Cooper Marcus’ and Francis’ (eds. 1997) in the context of over-design. It is important at this time to use their work to contrast my initial desire to retain the ambiguity of ownership and use and to allow of patterns of use to shift. The objective of Cooper and Francis was to consolidate all the relevant knowledge on the design of recognisable ‘types’ of urban public spaces. From these types they describe two that are similar to my urban yards; ‘mini parks’ and ‘vest-pocket parks’. Many of the parks they survey have developed in a similar way to the urban yards of this study. They appear through a process of decay of the urban fabric where removal of buildings affords an opening that is spatially defined by the precise dimensions of the allotment it occupies.

Many of their parks have emerged in this way to then be adopted by the local people and used predominantly for passive recreation and children’s play. The urban yards of this study began life in a similar manner and some graduated to permanent and therefore established parks with a clear purpose and recreational function through a limited and unambiguous pattern of use. These functions are then further supported by equipment and furniture installed in the site that in turn cements the establishment of a specific park, similar to an earlier phase of the King William Street urban yard. The difference between the work of Cooper
Marcus’ and Francis’ in identifying their small parks, and the intent of this study is that they prescribe checklists and guidelines that oversee the installation of equipment and surfaces for permanent forms of occupation, whereas this study aims to maintain the uncertain qualities that encourage multiple readings of possible occupation. Their prescription responds to the predetermined uses it is hoped the space will live up to. For this method to work a use must be designated before the park can be built. I argue that this prescription begins to deny the ambiguity of the site that I am attempting to design with rather than replace. Mini parks and vest pocket parks are easily aligned with a specific use need, often driven by community action groups. This level of organisation then allows the local authority a simple way of designating the use of the clearly defined community space and allows the authority a concise scope for collaboration.

Within the authors’ descriptions of the parks, the prescribed uses are clearly assembled from the numerous community programs that have sought to define improved environmental quality through the delivery of appropriate function. The urban yards that I am investigating have no formal community programs requiring their transformation to serve specific functions. Almost all of the positive examples from Cooper Marcus’ and Francis’ descriptions are taken from places that have benefited from the coordinated efforts of the local government authorities and the construction of park-like facilities aimed at specific user groups. The installations of this study, while attempting to fulfill basic legislative and duty-of-care requirements, do not specifically seek to align themselves with a uses prevalent in the local area. The opportunity the urban yards provide must remain far more generalised and thereby inclusive.

If the local authority is a strong ally and, effectively, the elected representative of community groups desiring the establishment of ‘community parks’, then how could they be coerced into collaborating in an urban yard project? Through the remainder of this chapter I discuss how over-design becomes almost inevitable when the mechanisms of local government are called into action. I speculate that authorities can get involved, however only at a level relating to specific yards rather than groups of them. The process of urban planning needs to be understood as a process that colludes with other urban processes, such as property economics and local cultural values. By understanding and becoming involved with statutory planning the designer is able to influence, from-a-far, the opening of urban yards.

I have found that the reasons for each opening or opportunity for emergence of an urban yard differ greatly and any move to intervene in the opening of a space is best done through continual observation of the inner city environment. To a large extent this makes the use of many currently implemented tools of planning practice difficult to use correctly. Urban planning control devices such as development control plans, urban design frameworks and local planning schemes use an understanding of the city as a series of fixed conditions between eventual revisions to demarcate what functions happen in which locations. These plans are continually updated however the erratic nature of the urban yard emergence and the ever-developing overlapping patterns of use remain uncaptured by this regulatory process. I do not wish to enter into a critique of the philosophy of modern planning practice.
I do want to highlight the need for an additional level of understanding within local government regulatory systems that allows for the temporal and opportunistic nature of the opening of urban yards in terms of their operating parameters. Once again these yards need to be assessed simultaneously up close on an individual basis and as a greater urban phenomenon if the shifting uses within them are to be recognised and maximised.

The implications of not being able to predict the appearance of the urban yards means that they may fall within a zone or overlay designating a specific use. For example the use zone titled ‘Residential Zone 1’ (RZ1) under the Yarra City Council planning scheme states that events and happenings of the type described in the above chapter are not permitted in this area. Under the current legislated local planning scheme ‘informal outdoor recreation’ is not permitted in this zone. The planning scheme does allow for this type of activity in the ‘Public Park Recreation Zones’. In the case of the King William Street yard only part of this area has been designated ‘Public Park Recreation Zones’ (PPRZ) as the adjacent allotment still remains under the ‘RZ1’ designation that does not allow for informal recreation.

Different zoning designation is common amongst the urban yards with conjoining allotments of differing uses. Within inner-northern Melbourne there are many established ‘mini parks’ and ‘vest-pocket parks’ sitting alongside the unresolved and ambiguous urban yards. These parks become established primarily because they have been designated as ‘Public Park Recreation Zones’ (PPRZ) by the local authority. They have been furnished with play equipment, benches and lighting installed, and therefore they have their park like use reinforced. I argue that when this happens to an urban void the open space of the park may still remain as public domain, however, it has been disconnected from the collection of terrains vagues.

When acting within these established parks the local governments, the City of Yarra, the City of Darebin, and the City of Melbourne appear to have followed a similar method as Cooper Marcus and Francis and designated a predetermined function in order to design to these parks. The space can then be said to have been established when two things happen; physical infrastructure that supports the specific park use is installed and the designation of the space under the planning scheme as a park. These actions therefore deny additional patterns of use to develop within the park. The ownership is no longer ambiguous and the activities that are permitted in the space narrowed.

In conclusion then the designer must peruse two sets of methods when dealing with terrains vagues of inner-northern Melbourne; one at the legislative and planning level, and the other through active and repeated involvement with individual yard spaces. In this way the designer acts within the wider urban process and within the sites to influence the actual patterns of use. These methods do not then require the use of deterministic function and form setting. The design method then is one of cultivation of the patterns of use in a specific site. This cultivation by the designer can only happen if the site remains open. I would like to use two texts from Young, Daskalakis & Waldheim (2001) and James Corner (1999) to draw out this question of cultivation as a design strategy further.
First, ‘Stalking Detroit’ (Young, Daskalakis & Waldheim 2001) discusses the broader contextual urban processes that impacted on the city form of Detroit. The authors describe with text and photography ‘Detroit …as shaped by the city’s continuously and rapidly transforming economics, social, and operational conditions.’ In this way they begin to develop the idea of the urban voids as being generated gradually from broader processes. There is a sense of emergence and of cultivation over seen by these processes. In this way Young, Daskalakis and Waldheim’s descriptions of broad effecting forces and Solà-Morales Rubió’s ‘ambiguous, unresolved, and marginalized spaces in the urban landscape’ open up the idea of cultivation over time as a mode of operation for these small voids. The design methods for urban yards should then be investigated along these lines.

More specifically to the practice of Landscape Architecture James Corner wrote (1999), “to plot, to map, to dig, to set: are these not the fundamental traditions of landscape architecture?” Corner describes these ‘traditions’ as key elements of a cyclical process, allowing a constant layering and re layering of cultural projections on the landscape. He describes a system of traditions that are all dependant on each other. ‘To set’ means to return the beginning and ‘to plot’ once more; to revisit aspects not viewed or unprivileged in the previous cycle. It is within this understanding that I place the concept of cultivation as a design method within the urban yard.

Overall the design studies on surface interventions into the urban yards strongly suggested that the risk of over-design is always prevalent when a designer begins to intervene. Unlike the terrains vague photography and film explorations designers must in some way act within and alter the sites rather than spectate or create a frozen image of the existing. This appears to be a paradox for the question of design within the urban yards as I have described them. However the key difference between the over-designed space that has a use established through the creation of form and the urban yards is time.

The yard may have a predominant use defined for it by a designer as long as this use is able to be supplanted by others over time. The designers or authors of these other uses need not be other designers but can be the non-designing public occupiers who also cherish and are attracted to the terrains vagues qualities. The designer is able to intervene in this cycle of differing uses through the concept of cultivation of a set of desired uses over time.

In the next chapter I explore the points at which an urban yard avoids becoming established as a park, retains its ambiguous ownership and facilitates a genuine maximisation of its use for specific activities. This next chapter also focuses on how cultivation and encouragement of specific uses over time may lead to either a fixed single use becoming established, or a sustained cycle of shifting uses. To explore these issues I use recent case studies from inner-northern Melbourne and co-organise several events within these spaces aimed at inducing a short term pattern of use and an occupation of the urban yards for specific activities.
4 Demonstrating the Urban Yards

This chapter presents two case studies and three active studies demonstrating the limits and effects of different actions on urban yards. The case studies involved direct invitations to the public to use the site through their occupation and restructuring. The first two active studies were explorations of encouragement to see the site differently, made with artists employing ways to draw new attention to its existence. The final design study saw the coordination of a series of event in the King William Street yard which aimed to set a temporary pattern of use in the space.

‘What is to be done with these enormous voids, with their imprecise limits and vague definition? Art’s reaction . . . is to preserve these alternative, strange spaces. . . . Architecture’s destiny [by contrast] has always been colonization, the imposing of limits, order, and form, the introduction into strange space of the elements of identity necessary to make it recognizable, identical, universal.’

(Solà Morales-Rubió 1994)

As I am not an artist and wanted to peruse a line of inquiry other than the ‘imposition of order and form’ so I decided to collaborate with them. I also wanted to use the concept of cultivation. To do this I tested methods of influencing patterns of use and reflect as to how these may be defined with in a legislative framework. Of particular interest to me here is Agrest’s concept of ‘Design verses non-design’ (1976). As I am working with non-designers, both artists and the public, I am interested to define how the designer may utilise the other occupants as agents of change. By this I mean organise their efforts to effect change of use and form in the site.

4.1 Section 8

Section 8, Tattersall’s Lane, Melbourne, 3000
Opened January, 2006

I use this first case study of the ‘Section 8’ temporary laneway bar as a clear example of the combination of opportunistic use of ambiguous open space with a predetermined use without the complete loss of the terrain vague site qualities. ‘Section 8’ is a bar sited in a small urban void between two lane ways within the central business district of Melbourne. This void had previously been used as a storage yard and part time car park under the ownership of absentee owners. The original idea for this occupation came from a desire to start an outdoor café space that capitalises on the laneway culture of Melbourne. The operators sought an inner city open void to site their facility in such a way as to retain the functional and social ambiguity and physical enclosure of a laneway space. ‘Section 8’ uses two reconfigured shipping containers to act as the service area and storeroom and a collection of timber packing palettes for seating and tables. In addition there is some lighting; however the infrastructure does not go far beyond this. Originally intended as a temporary installation prior to the Commonwealth Games in 2005, the bar has become so popular it has been granted a renewed permit from the City of Melbourne and is advertised on the City’s tourist information web site.
‘Section 8’ was designed by the architectural and artistic cooperative known as ‘DireTribe’. This group dealt with the initial planning permit application to the City of Melbourne and designed the site and facilities to comply with the legislative conditions. According to the designers the requirements of the permit were not particularly strict as they were purpose written for a temporary installation.

As the bar has become more permanent it is now regarded as a conventional establishment that now is required to conform to conventional hospitably practices. To comply with this and retain the feel of a hastily put together temporary installation is a great challenge. Many of the materials used were not selected for their longevity and the cost of maintaining ‘Section 8’ may prove to be greater than its popularity. It cost approximately AUD$40,000 and took four weeks to construct; it has now been in operation for almost 18 months. Through direct negotiation with the local government ‘DireTribe’ and the operators of ‘Section 8’ have struck a balance between existing within the formal planning system and operating outside of the uses stipulated in the Strategic Planning Policy. The City of Melbourne has recognised this establishment as unique, however not large enough to require a specific overly in the planning scheme.

Such an installation is an important test case to the study of urban yards as it demonstrates what happens when a temporary occupation of the space becomes popular, the site established and the ambiguous nature of ownership reduced. As the intent came from the opportunistic occupation of an open void in the city and desire to play with terrains vagues qualities of the site it would seem to still be successful. The operating parameters that I have previously established for an urban yard are also at play here. Access is gained from either laneway allowing effectively three points of approach. A strong sense of enclosure is provided by both the tall adjacent buildings and the shipping containers. Size remains small, intimate and within the bounds of the property allotment. The final parameter, ownership, is diminished in its ambiguity as the use for the space is obviously prescribed. I would argue however that the installation of ‘Section 8’ as a freely accessibly outdoor bar has greatly increased its effect as a public domain, a site for public cultural and personal exchange. This then partly offsets the loss of ambiguity of ownership.

The level of organisation required to maintain both the financial viability and the legislative obligations have become greater than when the facility was considered a temporary. The establishment has then moved from an ephemeral happening to a conventional hospitality concern that retains much of the character of the ‘laneway culture’ of Melbourne.

Diretribe website
Junkyard Cinema
Rose Street, Fitzroy, 3069
Opened January, 2006

A similar undertaking to ‘Section 8’ in a different part of the inner city, ‘Junkyard Cinema’ began as the opportunistic use of a small urban void to screen movies for small groups. The space has previously served as dumping and storage ground. Amongst the items that had accumulated in the space were several abandoned cars, whitegoods and stored building materials. At the time of inception of the ‘Junkyard Cinema’ idea operators, Christian and Adam Ferrante, had been operating the Rose Street Artists Market in an adjacent vacant allotment for the previous seven years.

The artists market began life as an open space owned privately by an absentee owner. The Ferrente brothers invited artists from the local area to exhibit in the outdoor space, organised the publicity and made, at first, small infrastructural changes to the void space. The brothers then purchased the land for the markets and applied for a permit to the City of Yarra. The Ferrante brothers have now accumulated enough popularity behind both the markets and cinema that they have began experiencing problems with the newly installed local residence and business owners and the City of Yarra. It appears that the brothers’ enterprises attract many more people than the newly arrived local residence believe the streets can support. The level of organisation, which now includes public indemnity insurance and a liquor license, has become the brother’s worst enemy. As a result the City of Yarra is attempting to placate the local residence and business owners by revoking and limiting the operating permits for the markets and cinema.

It appears to be a case of people wishing to reside in an inner city area that is exciting and convenient to interesting events, however do not want them to happen too close to their newly refurbished apartments. Both the markets and cinema are located within a ‘Mixed Use Zone’ designated under the City of Yarra Strategic Planning Policy. This designation does not deny the operation of outdoor cinemas or markets. This then is a case of the urban planning guidance allowing for the ambiguity of urban yard operation in a wide area. The City of Yarra has then been forced to focus on a single specific case and to limit as much as possible the activities that have recently become undesired.

Both these cases demonstrate the how the occupation of a void for a temporary use has developed into a far more organised undertaking. The bar, markets and cinema all required the eventual purchase of the land that they now sit on by the operators. This is the primary point at which the urban yard becomes something else. The visual appearance of the ‘small urban void’ does not need to be altered when the operator purchases the land. In fact this appearance of terrains vagues in the city is the very thing that attracted the operators to the site in the first place. It is also the commercial ‘point of difference’ that allows them to compete with other bars, markets and cinemas.
Once the land is bought the ‘duty of care’ to all those who occupy the site transfers to the operator. The question of public liability insurance requires the operators to ensure that their occupation of the site is now economically viable. What began as a gathering of people with the intent to exchange and meet becomes a small business. The urban yard in these cases remains almost visually and physical unchanged throughout his process. The issue of openness is now a question of both the transfer of ownership of the site to the occupants and the desire of the local authority to allow the use dictated by those occupants.

These cases provide examples of design within the urban yard spaces. Additional infrastructure has been installed to facilitate the bar, market and cinema use of the space. These areas have also been designed and constructed in such a way as to use the parameters of access, enclosure and size to their advantage. To varying degrees each of the cases allows an ambiguity of use to creep back in to the void space. In providing nothing more than a group of timber packing crates as furniture the ‘Section 8’ bar’s open area can be quickly reconfigured to host other events. The nature and diversity of the events will be limited as the provisions of the liquor license require a greater control over the occupants of the bar space. The markets are less restricted. In essence they only require the works of art carried in by the artists and out again by the buyers. When the space is not in use it hosts performances and other staged events. The market space is restricted by what it can do as the storerooms require an additional element of security requiring the open space to be locked up over night.

The cinema however provides the greatest opportunity for additional uses to happen with in the site. As the infrastructure required to operate the cinema is far less extensive than the bar and market, and far more portable, the space reverts back to the small urban void space as soon as the cinema is dismantled and removed. The urban yard that hosts the cinema is then available to be occupied and facilitate various different uses. The cinema event becomes just another pattern of use. Therefore the role of the designer is expanded to proprietor, operator, even the visitor.

The use of projection and artistic installation as the basis for an occupation of an urban yard then becomes an excellent way in which I, as a designer, can actively become involved with the space to maximise its occupation. Projection offers a method of appropriation that does not compromise other emergent patterns of use.
Northern Exposure
9th June, 2006
Northcote Town Hall, High Street, Northcote, 3070

Northern Exposure is a visual arts festival that is operated in conjunction with Darebin City Council. The recent Northern Exposure festival made use of the vacant allotment adjacent to the Northcote Town Hall. This lot had been cleared over a year previous to the festival to make way for a new extension to the Town Hall. Within this void artists were invited to install works of art for public exhibition. The result was an outdoor exhibition space with the partially cleared building site ground as a floor and used the permanent brick and concrete walls to hang and support the works.

I used this festival as a catalyst to observe and collaborate with artists and work within a terrain vague site. The intent for this space was to create a temporary series of installations that promoted the exchange of ideas and cultural understandings. The function of the urban yard was to facilitate this and to also create a rich terrain vague atmosphere of unresolved and ambiguous spaces, materials and structures. The artists responded to these qualities with works that allowed the urban yard to progressively reveal and focus on specific terrain vague elements ingrained in the space. From the materials used such as, plastic bags, discarded building materials, to the themes chosen, urban archaeology, stencil art, the exhibition brought forth the qualities of the site without imposing use or fixed form. The process of working within the site allowed the forms to emerge from the site itself.

More practically the erasure or disconnection with terrain vague sites did not compromise the safety of the occupants as many of the physical hazards were simply taped off. This allowed for another layer of curation of the site as the occupants were led through the yard along a specific path.

Projection and Public Art forays
Various post light industrial locations around inner Melbourne

Again observing and working with artists I was able to explore the most methods of acting within urban yards and similar spaces in the inner city. A particularly useful technique I was shown is the projection of moving and still images into the spaces. The actual images play an important role; however, my focus here was on the occupation of the space by both the observers and participants. This sense of participation amongst those in the site was important and was facilitated through the use of a series of mobile projectors to broaden the number of active occupiers.

Working with projection in preference to physical installations allowed the problems encountered in the surface explorations and over-design. The over writing or sanitising of the site through the imposition of excessive physical form was replaced by the exploration of the site through pre prepared imagery and the active occupation of the site. This method attracted me as it was the perhaps the most simple and effective way of maximising the appropriation and occupation of the site by a larger group of people.
Using available materials
by various artists

Duty-of-care
Using found construction materials to make the site safe

Northcote Pussy
Work and images by Elaine Hogarty
‘Pussy’ was constructed from plastic bags and other recycled items

Archeology
by Barbara Worthington

Aerosol Stencil Art
by various artists
4.5 Urban Yard Projections

Projection ‘happenings’
September, 2006
King William Street urban yard, Fitzroy, 3069

To develop this method of designing image projection events within a yard further I organised and held a series of nocturnal events in the King William Street yard site. In addition to testing the previously established operating parameters of the yard during such an event I also used small designed objects to facilitate the viewing and participation by the occupants in the event. Through this I hoped to initiate a possible pattern of use for the site.

The equipment used during the event was supplied by me and public project artist Dale Nasson as part of his ‘M.A.V.I.S.: Mobile Action Video in Situation’ project. Multiple portable battery powered projectors were used and handed to other occupants to interact with and experiment with visual effects. The events naturally had a spectator element to them and to facilitate the passive viewing of the event disposable and portable cardboard seats were distributed throughout the space.

The images projected were based on the theme of terrains vagues and were aimed at experimenting with the surfaces that they were projected on as much as their content and subject. Discussions amongst occupants and my co-organiser during and after the events in the urban yard provided some of the more interesting moments of the evenings. The Ferrente brothers, operators of the Junkyard Cinema, saw economic potential in such events after a few adjustments. Public performance artists wanted to develop the event format further to involve a greater sophistication of coordination between human movement, vocal performance and the moving images. These conversations allowed me to appreciate first hand how the occupations of the space and the exchange of ideas between these occupants may be maximised through the designing of an event. The ‘public domain’ role of the urban yard then is heightened as the designer plays the role of curator. The repetition of these events also allowed for a development of interaction with the event as the occupants began to anticipate and more actively become involved.

As the section of the King William Street yard was under private ownership I would consider this an appropriation of space. During the events the multiple access points allowed a greater permeability of people to filter through the space. Many of the attendees had noticed the event as they were passing by one of the three access points. Had there been fewer access points this opportunity would have been diminished. The size and sense of enclosure of the space also played the role of concentrating the activity and numbers of occupants into a small space. The interactions that then happened were maximised.

A useful observation here is the limit at which the occupation and popularity of an urban yard rapidly increases its level of organisation forcing it to become something very different from the found urban yard. There are a number of specific organisational indicators to show when this happens. The transfer of the responsibility of public safety to the owner of the land, and therefore the requirement of insurances, that in turn requires the operation of the site to yield financial revenue that can pay for these insurances is a primary indicator. It is not my intent to discuss the legality and transference of liabilities, suffice to say that the advantage of appropriating an urban yard owned by another party, generally speaking, allows a freedom from this constraint. The obvious disadvantage in using a yard regularly is the reliability of the space remaining open for such occupations and event to
The mobile projector

Above is an image of the portable equipment used to project in the yard. A truck battery, 2000 Watt current inverter, lap top computer and projector comprised one of three mobile projection kits used during the evenings. (Trolley kit: Dale Nason)

The participants

As the projectors were portable people were invited to use them, bring along media for projections and interact with the materials, other people, light and the space.
take place. I discussed in this chapter how through local council involvement a third way may be sought. That is the local authority takes full or partial responsibility for the duty of care of the occupants during such an event, as was the case with the Northern Exposure exhibition. This happen only temporarily and the involvement and support of the local authority expires at a pre determined time. This however infers that all changes to site are un-made and the space left as it was found.

As a designer I am prompted to ask at this point, 'Where is the design'? Apart from a series of seats and other items there were no other physically manifest objects or surfaces required. I argue that the design of an urban yard space can not be considered in terms of physical manifestation of a created thing. The aim of these events was to maximise the use and allow emergent uses to also happen within the same site. By organising the projection event the use has been defined in such a way that other alternate uses may happen simultaneously or after the event. The occupation and involvement of people with this use of the space is the ultimate goal of the designer in these spaces. As I have discussed above the issue of over-design is a constant risk.

On critical reflection of this body of work and events I understand the conclusions of this research not to sit completely within Agrest’s concept of ‘Design verses non-design’ (1976). The methods I have demonstrated are not purely about a division between the practicing and educated designer and the opportunistic and whimsical interventions of the non-designer. I argue that the occupants of the urban yards are knowledgeable and respectful of the ways in which such places work legally, environmentally and socially. Their uses of the sites may appear random and vague however they appear to me to be predicated on a variety of specific and basic needs. The need I have sought to investigate here in this final design study is that of social interaction or exchange. This being the quality of a public open space that qualifies it as public domain.

An artist and author that aids in my positioning of the collaboration with artists and the allowance of non-designers to influence the design outcome is Steven Willats (1996). He describes the ‘collaborative process blurring the question of author’. He is not discussing the well worked theme the of ‘death of the author’ in work that requires collaboration, but the liberation of professional norms of practice and the designer or artists allowing themselves to engage in more than one approach to the work. The ways in which I have engaged with the urban yards brings the relationship of designer, user and site into a more unilateral relationship than is currently seen within small recreational space design in Melbourne. I liken this to the process of photography. The photographer’s eye, the lens of the camera and the reality of the subject must all combine to create the final image. Two of the three may operate without the other; however without the collusion of all the image could not be considered photography. The urban yards require the collusion of the designer, the site and the public for the site to be intervened with and considered terrains vagues.
The projections

The above image shows the eastern wall of the private allotment in the King William Street yard where the event took place. To the right are a series of images of the projections, extreme lower left shows a cyclist moving through the images.
By working at both the wider urban planning and the small scale single site intervention scales the designer is able to work with the prevailing urban processes to create an environment in which the urban yards may remain open to host many different types of use. The fact that the designer can not predict the locations of the openings nor all of the activities that may happen within them does not deny these methods consideration as design techniques. The designer must operate as opportunistically as the non-designer occupiers and seize a specific yard to work within. As well as promoting a wider understanding of opportunities for social interaction that more established public and private open spaces do not offer. I would like to counter position this in the words of Lynch and Hack (1984). I do not intend for the findings of my study to be opposed to the approach of Lynch and Hack, only offer it as a more appropriate set of methods when dealing with urban yards.

‘Design is the search for forms that satisfy a program. It deals with particular solutions, while the program is concerned with general characteristics and desired outcomes. Design begins in the programming, and programs are modified as design progresses.’  

(Lynch & Hack 1984)
perhaps the most important issue to confirm at this point is the need to consciously engage with terrain vague urban yards, when it might seem that because they appear and operate by themselves there is no need to do anything. It is true that the urban yards have existed and been used in many and varied ways before this study. I believe that the urban phenomenon that they represent is part of an important process that needs to be considered by all who study, design and construct the city. An engaged study of urban yards allows for the development of design methods that deviate from the widely practiced linear logic of design-construct-maintain, or the dig-set-plot of James Corner. It allows for an understanding of inclusiveness that acknowledges inherent privileging and prejudices within all design endeavour.

I further believe that given the opportunity to design in ways other than ‘imposition of order and form’ (Solà Morales-Rubió 1994a) allows the landscape architect to employ an understanding of urban planning and of ecological cultivation to grapple better the wider issue of equitably improving city life. Through the manipulation of the urban process to allow for the gradual emergence of varied patterns of different uses, in preference to the imposition of singular or limited function, the landscape architect can take a leading role within urban design and planning.

I am not advocating that this approach supplant typical dominant processes of design delivery. There is a requirement, both to produce physically manifest objects in response to specific articulated needs, and to standardise objects for more effective function and pleasing form. I offer this approach and these methods as an ‘additional’ understanding to the typical design delivery process. It can also be considered an alternative that is particularly useful to deal with the otherwise problematic potential of ambiguous open voids within the inner city. Not all voids are urban yards. However I wish to assist the designer to recognise, to value and to argue for the varied and changeable materials, diverse forms of use and infinite possible engagements that can evolve in such site and which would otherwise be obliterated. Without understanding a fuller history – past and possible – of the site, a pre-emptive determination of site function by designers and planners diminishes the richness of all life in the city. The usual design approach may create a public open space but it does not ensure the creation of a healthy public domain.

Another question that demands a response is, “how is this design?” I began this work with the idea that I would produce a series of fixed interventions that would better facilitate the many and varied uses of the interesting sites I had found. However I realised that as I ‘designed’ the sites and loaded them with more and more features, the pre-existing qualities I admired were erased. I had disconnected the urban yards from the very qualities that made them initially attractive. It seemed then that the process of ‘design’ must become one of creating circumstances for ongoing change, for encouraging engagement with a space, developing its fabric without disconnecting its ties to context, history or memory. The examples of Duisburg-Nord Park in Germany (1999) and the Thames Barrier Park in London (2000) given in the introduction allow for both the facilitation of nominal park use, active and passive recreation while allowing certain parts of the post-industrial heritage of the site to remain. I found that when dealing with far smaller spaces the simultaneous retention and erasure of the memory and materials of the site become far more difficult. This is partly due to the available internal space in which to affect change.
The scale of the yard is such that when you are within it almost everything it contains can be seen. In addition to this the essence of the previous history of the urban yards lay not in a post industrial heritage but with the current ambiguous occupations of the site. I have not simply been interested in the previous residential or other history of the site because the terrain vague qualities also require recognition that the post-residential site operates with yet other layers of daily occupation. Therefore the memory of the site is embodied not just within physical remnants of particular eras, but within all previous actions of local residents and other occupants. When working with the urban yards the designer must understand that they are working with a current form of occupation of the site that is not easily understood in terms of normative ‘types’ of urban space, as categorised by Cooper Marcus & Francis (eds. 1997). The intervention being sought will move into an active culture of occupation, ambiguous use and appropriation.

The questions of ‘why to design’ and ‘is this a design’ then coincide. If the motivation to design within the urban yards is to learn how not to erase site memory then the ready answer lies in resisting rather than enabling the imposition of physical order. Further, it is an attempt to preserve the prevalent yet shifting urban forces that created and sustain the phenomena – namely inclusive ambiguity. This must be done in such a way as to first allow the openness of the site to remain, albeit temporarily, then, to actively cultivate and manipulate a varied series of patterns of use such that none come to predominate and compromise the site’s future unpredictable evolution. This cultivation must happen in the midst of the yard and the manipulation of the wider process must happen from afar and through urban planning.

The question of cultivation forms part of the basis of the practice of landscape architecture. An obvious question to ask of the urban yards and the method of cultivation is, ‘why did the design studies not actually attempt the cultivation of plants, crops or other botanical elements’? When Ignasi de Solà-Morales Rubió spoke to Kerb magazine in 1996 he describe the idea of terrain vague as being appreciated by the city dwelling public in a way similar to that of 19th century parks. They provided a new form of open space that allows forms of use and experience not previously seen within the city. The parks of the 19th century allowed a ‘communing with nature’ that could only be found in rural areas. The terrains vagues allow a social interaction and freedom to commune in one place only partially found in public open space. My focus is not on the botanical perspective of cultivation but a wider social and programmatic understanding of cultivation as cultured.

My research offers an approach that seeks to work with current practices of administrative urban planning and design, to build on these and to work with a phenomenon that is already prevalent in our cities today. I aim to create a better understanding of how the landscape architect can create an open condition for testing the limits of social, economic and environmental interaction without creating a new administrative system to enable it.

‘The ‘open’ city can become the laboratory for an intensified experience that offers new opportunities for urbanity, as long as we do not keep insisting on standardizing it at all costs.’ (Lévesque 2002)
Through observation and analysis I came to understand the intensity of occupation of the urban yards is heavily influenced by the ease of access and permeability, the sense enclosure, the size, and the ownership of the site. These are the first things a designer needs to consider when intervening in the midst of an urban yard. This is not a prescriptive check list for ‘good design’ but rather outlines the issues that require investigation specific to each individual yard space. Such consideration needs to be tested within a framework of continual involvement with the specific yard, in the midst of the space and its occupants.

I have discussed how the emergence of urban yards is very difficult to predict and through my search for terrains vagues in inner-northern Melbourne I have demonstrated how these can be hard to find. What if they can not be found at all, or how can they be designed into a new development? The landscape architect then needs to become active from a far, using urban planning to manipulate the wider processes that create urban development and the voids within it. Specifically the forces of property pricing, public space legislation, urban planning policy, and the infrastructural requirements serving the wider city need to be used to admit the emergence of urban yards.

Neither acting from afar or in-the-midst need to deny the temporal nature of the urban yards, the wishes of the private owner, or the prevailing process of property development. They do require the designer to act simultaneously as planner and appropriator, director and collaborator, as visionary artist and pragmatic site manipulator. This does not generate a fixed end design or single formal arrangement as this can not either respond to the richness of the past or satisfactorily be predicted as a long-term future solution.

‘There should be no preconceived idea of the final solution but instead a structure which is capable of responding to changing social needs and biological requirements.’

(Ruff 2002)

I offer not a series of physical structures but a set of approaches with which the urban yards can encourage engagement of all sorts. It is this ‘designing with’ in order to ‘design for’ that landscape architects have always practiced as an essential part of their work. Perhaps Melbourne City Council’s ‘Places for People 2014’ will include an examination of terrain vague urban yards that, as Ignasi de Solà-Morales Rubió believes, supply an urgent and core cultural need for ‘alternative’ spaces and uses within the contemporary city.
“The 1961 NYC Zoning Resolution encouraged private developers to provide facilities for the public in relief from encroached certain building height and setback restrictions.”

I consider this conference and the topics discussed as a strong indication of what the major concerns of the profession are today. The conference focused on the theme of ‘Time’ which a highly appropriate topic for the urban yard and terrains vagues issue. The conference had only one speaker focus on this issue and even then this was more an overview rather than a critique of how to go about working in such territory; it left more questions than answers.

The speaker, Helen Armstrong gave more of an anthology of texts relating to the ideas that could be loosely related to terrain vague sites rather than direct descriptions as to how to design them. Her’s was an open question as to what do we do with them. And as she demonstrated there is no lack of texts and discussions around such a topic. The examples given in text, photography and project are gathered from a variety of cities and demonstrate the underlying ambiguity of where these ‘void’ spaces actually come to ground. The mish-mash of images, text and projects from various sources do not help the cause of defining these terrain vague spaces. It is this lack of public discussion on the ways in which the terains vagues are actively engaged with that I intend to discuss in this study.

**Places for People**


In 1994 the City of Melbourne Urban Design Brach and Strategic Planning Brach invited Professor Jan Ghel to assist in the compilation of a study on the central business district of Melbourne. The study aimed to find and define the ‘activities of the people in the public spaces of central Melbourne, and the places that support these activities.’ Using basic city making phi-
losophy such as, ‘make gathering spaces of excellent quality – and make more of them’ the study is set out similar to an audit
of what happens where. The study uses primarily quantitative data to define where ‘the people’ are being ‘active’ and where
these hotspots are. Unfortunately these studies not include an analysis or critique of what ‘quality’ of or within a space might
be.

Ten years latter the City of Melbourne invited Gel back to update the initial study. The issues are much the same and attempt
to build on and expand some of the findings in the 1994 edition. In the context of my master topic these audit studies provide
a good basis to understand and define the nominal operation of the city. They however do not seek to include the temporary
spaces, such as urban yards, that are very much apart of the active city and whose sites ‘support these activities.’ As many of
the emergent uses of the city take place in these sites perhaps the Places for People 2014 will include such sites.

People Paces

Cooper Marcus, C & Francis, C (eds.) 1997, People Places: Design Guidelines for Urban Open Space, 2nd edn, John Wiley and
Sons, New York.

Clare Cooper Marcus’ and Carolyn Francis’ (eds. 1997) objective in ‘People Places’ was to consolidate relevant knowledge on
the design of specific ‘types’ of urban public spaces, conduct research, discuss precedents, and to create a series of easily fol-
lowed guidelines and checklists for practical application. Many of the parks they survey have developed in a similar way to the
urban yards of this study. Through the decay of the urban fabric, removal of buildings allows an opening that is spatially defined
by the precise dimensions of the allotment it occupies. Many of their parks are then adopted by the local citizens and used in a
predominantly for passive recreation and children’s play. The urban yards of this study began life in a similar manner and some
graduated to permanent and therefore established parks with a clear purpose and recreational function. These functions are
then supported by equipment and furniture installed in the site that in turn signals the establishment of a park.

The research of Marcus and Francis is based on a series of projects and community programs that have sought to improve
the quality and functionality of these spaces, again based on other guidance from regulatory bodies. Almost all of the posi-
tive examples are taken from places that have benefited from the concerted and coordinated efforts of the local government
authorities and the construction of park like facilities aimed at specific user groups. The importance of legislation becomes key
again as their parks could not exist without the cooperation of the local government. The authors define a series of guidelines
and checklists that other government officers and corporate bodies may use to assess and create better public urban space.
Within their third chapter is an excellent description of the history of ‘small neighbourhood parks in the United States’, the work carried out by other groups previously and the processes used, spanning back to the early 1960’s (Cooper Marcus & Hilliard Greene 1997). It is relevant to my study to note that the size and planar form of these parks was easy to define and was commonly related to the prevailing dimensions and number of housing lots, either singly or in combination. However they report that the hardest elements of the definition of the parks were their function and a concise description of use. The appropriations that took place in these spaces were ambiguous and hard to fit into well understood categories of public space use, common with a terrain vague space. Another difficulty was the predictability of the locations of these sites and where the next ‘opening’ would occur. This highlights an important part of the definition of the small urban park. That is the opening and emergence of the small void within the urban context as distinct from the physical and spatial presence of the void as a space to be used.

The idea of the ‘small voids’ can then can be defined with more clarity as both a process of ‘opening’ of the urban fabric and as an end-sate similar to the small urban parks described by Cooper Marcus and Francis. The opening process relates more to the terrain vague condition including the ambiguous function and unpredictable location. As a description it is able to convey the temporal and changing nature of the site. While the end state relates more to the Cooper Marcus and Francis description of ‘types’ of space, and to the adherence of the small urban space to the predetermined structure of the street form, allotment layout and the division of land. Cooper Marcus’ and Francis’ parks are described as almost evolving within the urban context. However the prescriptions for design they give deny further evolution or cultivation of future use and form.

In setting out checklists and guidelines for ‘what to put where’ the park becomes established and fixed. Many of the urban yard’s that I have observed could not support such treatment as they are regarded as temporary openings and are soon to return to hosting a building.

New City Spaces


Ghel and his co-author Larz Gemzoe demonstrate how several cities around the globe have, since 1994, developed strategies to gradually remove the omnipotence of the motor car from the city heart. This is done with the aim of allowing people to inhabit more completely the city streets and places which it is argued facilitate the quintessential requirement of a strong city life, meeting and congregating, market spaces, and transport networks coexisting in balance. Gehl has also collaborated in the production of two audits of the City of Melbourne (1994; 2004). I specifically use the term audits as these documents do not go
much further than the presentation of quantitative research and focus on the immediately obvious spaces in the central business district of Melbourne. The strength of Ghel’s arguments are still present in these commissioned documents however they seem to leave the actual method of design to the local government.

Ghel’s work is relevant here as the model of city life he is advocating to return to is from an earlier method of city planning practiced at the time the inner urban areas of Melbourne were laid out. There are colonial overtones to this structure however for the purpose of the study will consider it the same. Ghel also seems to take a wider view than the currently in vogue ‘New Urbanist’ movement who also advocate to a return to the old ‘values’ of the city planning, rather than the design of spaces within a city. This is my only criticism of Ghel’s work, there is an excellent array of analysis that is useful for urban planning, but how does it give a basis for design?

An important part of the urban yard is its accessibility and connection to the local community, as demonstrated in the appropriation by the locals and their attraction of the incidental passer by. The behaviour I have observed in the spaces strongly suggests that these spaces are experienced and found on foot. There is then a strong relationship between the privilege of the pedestrian and the occupancy and appropriation of the urban yards. One of the major exponents of the reduction of the presence of the car is Jan Ghel. The work of Jan Ghel, and other collaborators, in ‘New City Spaces’ (2001) and the ‘Places for People’ series (1994; 2004) are highly convincing in demonstrating how the walkable city creates healthier and more robust city communities, ‘citizenship and the liveliness and humanity it stimulates’ (2001).

In Search of New Public Domain


‘In Search of a New Public Domain’ concerns itself with the analysis and commentary of the ‘preconditions’ that are required to establish a vibrant and viable public domain. The definition of public domain given here is very important to this masters study as it allows a distinction between space that has been made available for public use and space that is valued by the people who inhabit it. A seminal issue in this book is how the ‘exchange’ and communication of person interests and culture in general define a space. This concept of exchange is described to be an important part of the essence of a public domain space. This definition is very useful for the study of urban yards as it allows the recognition of the yards as true public domain sites within the larger city social structure.
Privately Owned Public Space


‘Privately Owned Public Space’ examines the public spaces created by New York City’s 1961 Zoning Resolution Laws. As a reaction against the over development of the city the Resolution sought to allow a new open space type, one that was owned privately with full access given to the public. These spaces were provided by corporations and land owners in return for planning consideration and bonuses. This book gives an excellent expansion on Whyte’s work as it provides a clear and concise understanding of the legislative framework in which Whyte’s spaces were able to either function or not function as public space. This understanding of the legislative and urban planning aspects of the public-ness of city space was important to this masters study.

Rethinking Urban Parks


‘Rethinking Urban Parks’ explores the concept contemporary understanding of ‘cultural diversity’ and uses it to critically analyse the success of well known and established parks. They use case studies from New York City’s Prospect Park, Orchard Beach in Pelham Bay Park, and Jacob Riis Park in the Gateway National Recreation Area, as well as New York’s Ellis Island Bridge Proposal and Philadelphia’s Independence National Historical Park. While the concept of ‘measuring’ and ‘promoting’ cultural diversity needs to be properly translated and fleshed out in the Melbourne context it is the way in which the authors dealt with a critique that used cultural values and observed use of the spaces, rather than the spatial and physical realities, to analysis the parks that interest this masters study.
**Good City Form**


In ‘A Theory of Good City Form’ argues for a strong connection between human cultural values and the spatial and physical forms of the city. He expands on this by setting forth prescriptive requirements for this ‘normative’ theory and applies this to examples of where these normative values were not considered and poor designs constructed. Lynch as a seminal author and was one of the very first to advocate for the inclusion of human values into the design process. As such this text is important in understanding the basis of this territory of theory in urban design and planning.

**Igansi de Solà Morales-Rubió and Terrains Vagues**


As the concept of Terrains Vagues is at the centre of my masters study I feel that I need to expand on how this term came into being. This explanation, as brief as it is, intends to provide more clarity to the concept in addition to the statements of my understanding of the term in the abstract and introduction. Solà Morales-Rubió took part in the ‘Anyone’ conference in Spain in 1994. From this conference a series of books containing essays and interviews from the attendees was produced by the Anyone Corporation in conjunction with MIT Press. It is these essays that Solà Morales-Rubió first began to discuss the concept of Terrain Vagues.
Two other supporting texts were also published under the titles of ‘Liquid Architecture’ and ‘Topographies of Contemporary Architecture’ in which a wider conceptual and theoretical territory is explored. This territory is where I understand Terrains Vagues to sit. Two years after the Anyone conference Solà Morales-Rubió travelled to Melbourne and was interviewed for Kerb magazine in 1996. His account of Terrains Vagues altered slightly in this interview. For example he discusses the idea of 19th century parks as the fore runners to Terrains Vagues of the contemporary city in that they perform a similar function of providing an alternative space in which new ways of using space can be explored by the occupants.

As many of the 19th century parks of our cities have become established in the hearts of our cities so too have the activities that can happen there. The urge to ‘commune with nature’ is still available in these parks today, however this desire to be closer with a perceived naturalness is not why Terrains Vagues are relevant to our society. He insists that they draw their relevance simply from being available for occupation.

**The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces**


In the ‘The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces’ for instance, Whyte (first edition 1980) and his multitude of assistants, filmed people in many of New York’s privately owned public spaces and were able to deduce very specific understandings of basic requirements of these spaces such as; seating, shade and access. Again Whyte’s New York plaza spaces and those of this study are obviously very different. The spaces of this study are not designed nor are they maintained by the private owners, and in many cases mere occupation of the space is against the law. The small voids are usually temporary, like their terrain vague big sisters and are waiting to be redeveloped into something less ambiguous. This temporary allows the void to hang in a limbo between redevelopment projects. They therefore can not be permanently established as an open space. The notion of time and change, and the rates at which this occurs, is the largest point of difference between the New York’s privately owned public plazas of Whyte’s studies and the small inner city voids of inner-northern Melbourne. The reason for this appears to be legislative and larger than the single site conditions.
**Stalking Detroit**


Young, Daskalakis and Waldheim’s ‘Stalking Detroit’ (eds. 2001) provides an example of the post-industrial urban condition that has not become established as a big park and allows examples of smaller voids in the inner-city context. They describe the entire city of Detroit as a city that is similar to a huge terrain vague site. This then allows an exploration of smaller spaces within the inner city context and is not exclusively set within the outer city post-industrial tracts. More interestingly the authors describe a method of interaction in these sites that requires meandering explorations of the city much in the same way the ‘Situationists’ (Sadler 1998) carried out their early forays throughout Paris. Further in the study I embark on a similar method of exploring and ‘finding’ the urban yard sites.

‘Stalking Detroit’ also discusses the broader contextual processes that impacted on the city form. They describe with text and photography ‘Detroit …as shaped by the city’s continuously and rapidly transforming economics, social, and operational conditions’. This begins to develop the idea of the urban voids as being generated gradually from broader process. There is a sense of emergence and of cultivation over seen by these processes. In this way Young, Daskalakis and Waldheim’s descriptions of broad effecting forces, Solà-Morales Rubió’s ‘ambiguous, unresolved, and marginalized spaces in the urban landscape’ open up the idea of cultivation over time as a mode of operation for these small voids. The design methods for urban yards should then be investigated along these lines.
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