Fig. 1 Wall trace (New York, 2011)

Date – Walking area
03 – Battery Park / One World Trade Centre
04 – Financial Centre / City Hall / Church Street
05 – Financial Centre / City Hall / Seaport
12 – City Hall / Chinatown / Tribeca
13 – Tribeca / Part Chinatown
14 – Tribeca
15 – City Hall / Chinatown
16 – One World Trade Centre / Wall Street / Church Street
18 – One World Trade Centre / Zucotti Park / Wall Street Protest
20 – Brooklyn Bridge / Chinatown
21 – Tribeca
24 – Staten Island Ferry / Seaport / One World Trade Centre
26 – Church Street / Broadway / Park Row
28 – Tribeca / Chinatown / Canal Street / Seaport / Broadway
Fig. 5  (Clockwise from top left) One World Trade Centre (1), Wall Street (8), Reflection & Shadow (10), (2011).

Fig. 6  (Clockwise from top left) Vending carts (6), Trinity Chapel (5) & FDR Drive (7), (2011).
1. WORLD TRADE CENTRE

Located in Lower Manhattan, the World Trade Centre site, now renamed One World Trade Centre (1WTC) is within the designated research area. Post September 11, the two collapsed office building towers continue to dominate the site despite their physical absence. In their absence, they are more present than ever. In a city where skyscraper ‘canyons’ dominate and define the haptic experience, the open space created by this absence is a haptic abnormality. The toxic dust (consisting partly of asbestos) emitted on the building collapse is a bodily presence that, despite being visually absent, continues to effect residents. Over ten years later, deaths resulting from the dust add to the official death count from the disaster. The focal point of the new development is the memorial ‘Reflecting Absence’, which opened on September 11, 2011. ‘In its powerful, yet simple articulation of the footprints of the Twin Towers, “Reflecting Absence” has made the voids left by the destruction the primary symbols of our loss.’1 Voids become primary symbols thus an absence becomes a palpable presence.

To some extent absence will be always be linked to this site simply because the site is a memorial. Absence is engaged through the process of ‘memorial messaging’. This entails decisions around how a highly politicised site should be managed and presented into the future and what methods should be employed to frame, and thus shape, the historical memory of the event for future generations (Watts 2009). It is also an absence that has had huge implications geopolitcally. The event has been the justification and basis for numerous US military operations in the Middle East. This in turn has necessitated the US forming strategic partnerships in the region, one of which is with India.

2. SURVEILLANCE

The surveillance throughout Lower Manhattan includes police operated street video cameras, subway cameras, night-club and apartment building cameras and those in retail and bank premises. Post 9/11 this location in the city is heavily surveilled due to the perceived heightened security risks. At the time of fieldwork, Lower Manhattan was also home to a number of ‘NYPD portable watchtowers’ or ‘SkyWatch’ towers. Typically used as a deterrent at crime hotspots, these towers were located at sites of current security importance such as the World Trade Centre site or Zucotti Park, the location of the October 2011 ‘Occupy Wall Street’ Protests. The absence-presence dynamic manifests in the concealment of the police officer within the SkyWatch tower observing and recording the crowd below, similar to Michel Foucault’s concept of the panopticon. ‘The Panopticon is a machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad: in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen’ (Foucault n.d). In this case of the SkyWatch tower and city pedestrian, ‘He is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication’ (Foucault n.d).

Arguably the presence of an invisible and arguably powerful overseer creates tension on the street and a hyperawareness of one’s movement through the site. Francisco R. Klauser argues, ‘the fact that CCTV has become banal challenges and reshapes sensory experiences of the city’ (Klauser 2007, 174). He writes ‘public space users can neither cognitively know nor sensually approach these hidden spaces, nor can they know or perceive the new urban boundaries between monitored and not monitored places’ (Klauser 2007, p. 173). Conversely, ‘operators in control rooms spend all their time in the realm of mainly one sense: sight... they cannot take into account the richness of public life that would also appeal to other senses – sounds, smells or other bodily experiences – which lack of information could considerably limit the efficiency of their work’ (Klauser 2007, p. 174). These operators are quite literally ‘out of touch’ with the world they are surveying.

The boundaries of private and public become fluid and the watch-towers become an integral and eventually invisible part of the urban built environment, accepted like any traditional building or permanent structure. Unchallenged, the SkyWatch tower, a structure more readily associated with sites of military enforcement or peacekeeping, ultimately becomes part of the city’s architectural vernacular.

3. WATERFRONT

Traces of the wharves that ringed Lower Manhattan until around 1950s are evident in the posts jutting out from below the surface of the Hudson and East River. Historical traces are evident along the waters edge, where the legacy of the waterfront industry manifests through the sawn timber pylons projecting from the water. These half submerged hand sawn timber pylons show the wear and tear of being constantly exposed to the elements and speak to a less industrialised Manhattan. The wear and tear of these materials drew attention to the material slickness of the surrounding environment. In contrast, these buildings exhibit minimal trace of time or history in their materials and conceal their occupants from view.

Despite the physical reality of Lower Manhattan ‘turning its back’ on the waterfront, the legacy of the waterfront industry and the city’s history of trade and ships is evident through these trace pylons. In contrast to the ‘virtual’ technological relationships and business dealings of the corporations in the nearby Financial District, these posts are visible and haptic connections to the city’s past as a trade port and to the global relationships that contributed to making Manhattan what it is today. In this instance, the absence-presence dynamic exists between historical and contemporary Manhattan, where traditional building materials and methods evoke the port history of Manhattan.
4. TRINITY CHURCH & GROUNDS

Trinity Church is the first Anglican Church in Manhattan (since 1697, current building 1846), located on Broadway, opposite Wall Street. Both the built environment and lush, green grounds are an oasis in this densely packed part of Lower Manhattan. There are two aspects of the absence-presence dynamic that manifest at this site. Firstly, haptic – leaving behind the traffic and crowded sidewalk there is a significant reduction in noise and temperature on entering the grounds and again on entering the church itself. Secondly, symbolic – the gravestones are primary markers of an absence.

Unlike the surrounding impenetrable skyscrapers, Trinity Church proclaims its reason for being through the senses. The building exhibits sensuous qualities – roughness of stone, smells of timber and incense, polished surfaces contrast with stone, subtle variations of light in the alcoves and the gentle creak of the pews emphasises the overall quietness. Arkette observes, ‘The Church as acoustic vessel tends to give the worshipper a multi-sensory experience of the sacred’ (Arkette 2004, p. 167) and I agree that these qualities contribute to my somatic memory of this site. Through this haptic experience, I was prompted to consider the impact of public spaces of sanctuary within the broader city dynamic and how death is memorialised through ritual, marker and/or object in each city. Lower Manhattan has two additional major gravesites, of both historical and contemporary significance, that are not traditionally marked. One block west of Trinity Church is the mass gravesite of the World Trade Centre, where there are no traditional markers but inscribed names in a wall monument. Two blocks north of this site is the ‘African Burial Ground’, labelled a ‘sacred space’, where the graves of approximately 15,000 free and enslaved Africans, from the 1690’s until 1774, were discovered in 1991 during construction works on the site.2

5. TRINITY CHAPEL

The boundary fence of Trinity Chapel is a site of absence in Lower Manhattan. The chapel and its grounds, including a burial ground spans the city block between Broadway and Church Street, bounded by two minor streets Fulton and Dey. The chapel is directly opposite the World Trade Centre site and, because of its location, it performed a critical role during the 9/11 event. Ten years later, the building and the community remain focused on these events through the exhibition of artefacts either directly or indirectly associated with this event. These artifacts are the focus of absence as it manifests on and through this site.

Many of the artefacts on display on the chapel are from the memorial that was spontaneously assembled on the perimeter fence immediately after the event. This fence became a focal point – flowers, cards, flags, missing people papers – all these objects were fixed or laid at the foot of the

2 See nps.gov/afbg/).
fence in memorial. This fence ceased being a barrier and became a rallying point and a focus of many of the photographs that defined that day. It is the relationship between the current fence, the fence as it ‘performed’ in the aftermath and the artifacts that perpetuate this function. The iconic photographs become inseparable from the firsthand experience of this site and like many iconic photographs of Manhattan, one feels like one has experienced the site prior to being there. At the site one’s experience is a calibration between these two realities – the visual memory, distant and remote, with the haptic experience.

A fence can be perceived as a barrier, a boundary, a control device. The trinity Chapel Fence is not a barrier – not in the negative sense. The grounds and buildings are open to the public – in fact, this interaction is at the core of their purpose / existence. It is permeable, though sturdy and functional but its appropriation as a memorial amends and extends this basic function. When all the artifacts are removed, what is its status ‘post memorial’? This fence is as much a ‘marker’ as the gravestones visible through its bars - both continue to mark and commemorate the dead. The difference being that one is a traditional marker whereas the other is always deferring to ‘marker’ as the gravestones visible through its bars - both continue to mark and commemorate the dead. The difference being that one is a traditional marker whereas the other is always deferring to

6. VENDING CARTS

The vending carts scattered around Lower Manhattan (and the city as a whole) can be considered in terms of absence. Within the permanent, static, physical structure of Lower Manhattan, the vending carts exist as a ‘pop up’ food service. Appearing every (week) day, in various locations across the grid. These carts disappear at night leaving the sidewalks empty. In contrast to similar networks in Varanasi and Shanghai these carts are highly regulated and provide a dynamic and essential service to Lower Manhattan community. They define particular sites through smell and taste as well as sight. These carts are not an integrated part of an urban plan and could be considered to have a supplementary or parasitic relationship to a larger ‘host’, the permanent city infrastructure. As the city transitions from day to night, the rhythms of the community are reflected in the absence and presence of these street carts.

7. FDR OVERPASS

The void under Franklin D. Roosevelt Drive (The FDR) presents as an absence, remarkable because it is an open, continuous space in a high density urban environment. As one transitions from high density residential area into an open space the experience of site is unsettling – it is almost too open, too free from (visual) stimulus. It is utilized for a multitude of activities – walking jogging, resting, reading but it ultimately has no specific function.

Its default function is to operate as a transition zone between high density housing and river. Although invisible, there are a network of relations that make this site possible and sustain it. Physically, it is only possible due to the FDR overhead. The fact that the land under remains vacant indicates that the space is actively policed. Its emptiness is telling of Lower Manhattan resident relationship to the river – not overly intertwined with social or recreational behavior, nor of spiritual significance. Though the site is owned / and or managed by government, their presence is only visible through the absence of any other social group claiming ownership. The physical manifestation of the underpass is purely functional – hard surfaces that are low maintenance and durable. The absent presence in this environment is through the traces of sound and smell. One can smell the cars, what Lopate calls the ‘burnt-rubber tire smell of the FDR Drive’ and hear their roar overhead (Lopate 2005, p. 243). Despite the visual absence of the car, they are always present through sound and smell, and therefore, inseparable from the haptic experience of site.

8. WALL STREET

A perception of Wall St in Lower Manhattan is arrived at through its portrayal in movies and news broadcasts as the hub of both North American and global financial markets. Prior to the global Financial Crisis (2007-08) and Occupy Wall Street protests this area was populated by a mix of bankers and brokers, tourist and residents. But since these events, its day to day functioning has changed, in turn altering our perception of site. During the Global Financial Crisis this particular street became the focus of worldwide media coverage when news networks employed the street facades as a backdrop to their broadcasts.

The words ‘Wall Street’ tend to evoke a place of unlimited resources and money, of centralized financial power and glamour. This perception has shifted due to the sustained anger from the broader community that now perceives ‘Wall Street’ the embodiment of qualities such as greed, risk and power. Despite the ‘Occupy Wall Street’ protests occurring in a totally different location, a few blocks away in Zucotti Park, the naming linked the protest to this financial epi-centre in peoples minds. These protests have left an indelible mark on Lower Manhattan through traces on this site. During my fieldwork these protests meant an increase in security to Wall Street. The street was barricaded and closed to traffic (vehicle and pedestrian) so that crossing from one side of the street to the other was impossible. Mounted horse police and visible patrol cars surveyed the crowds. A usually bustling, functional street was reduced to an unnaturally quiet site of surveillance, a site of absence. Tourist continued to be directed from the main thoroughfare of Broadway but the ‘spectacle’ was non-existent. The display of power now manifest through a police presence and was indicative of increased paranoia and surveillance I witnessed in other parts of the city. One registers absence through the change in the streetscape dynamics – an absence of the sounds of cars and traffic, of people and of normal daily life.
9. SUBWAY: ABOVE AND BELOW

In Manhattan, the underground rail (MTA Subway) is an essential element of urban infrastructure. The simultaneous above and below-ground activity supplies a multi-level and layered perception of the city environment. This duality of city experience, this slippage of absence and presence, informs one’s knowledge and experience of a city.

In standard subway maps, the graphic representation of the underground train route supplies a false reality, visualising connections of place and time that are impossible. Speed and time become factors, where transitioning from A to B is faster and more direct than walking or driving above ground. Despite each experience being concealed from the other, the pavement grates that rumble with the trains passing below and the street level steam outlets, alert us to the activity beneath our feet. The presence and efficient functioning of underground rail is often indicative of a modern and sophisticated city. Arguably, because of featuring in films and storytelling, the subway is inextricably linked with a particular New York city experience. To have travelled by subway, is to have experienced the ‘real’ New York.

10. SHADOWS AND REFLECTION

Shadows throughout the city are ephemeral, changing location from summer to winter, changing every minute. I propose that these shadows contribute to our haptic experience of the city. These shadows are extensions of adjacent structures, suggestive rather than descriptive, alluding to mass rather than describing it explicitly. The shadow presents as a pattern, a rhythm of elements where the massing and delicacy of components becomes graphic black and white silhouette. This layering - railing silhouettes over paving stones, fire escapes structures over apartment facades - are inseparable from our experience of the site. As we pass through these shadows we feel a change in temperature and for a moment our own shadow becomes part of the composition.

Monolithic, reflective glass panels reflect back the surrounding environment and facilitate the surveillance of the public streetscape from a private vantage point. The absence exists in the concealment of the surveyor from the view of the surveyed. Although a transaction by definition requires two parties, the public user has no idea or control over this transaction.
Fig. 11 Wall trace (Varanasi, 2012)

VARANASI
WALKING IN VARANASI

05 March, 2012 - 2 April, 2012.

Date – Walking area
05 – Assi Ghat to Dashawamedh Ghat / Arch in Old City / Mandapur Rd / Godaulia Crossing
06 – Godaulia Crossing to main GPO along Mandapur Rd
07 – Morning Boat trip
09 – Mandapur Rd. through to Bengali Tola / Old City
13 – Mandapur Rd / Dashawamedh Ghat
14 – Godaulia Crossing / Mandapur Rd. to Main GPO, Old City / return length of ghats
16 – Chowk / Old City / return length of ghats
17 – Godaulia Crossing / Archway / Old City / Bengali Tola to Kedar ghat
19 – Old City / Mandapur Rd / GPO, part Chowk
20 – length of ghats / Old City / along Durgakund / Harishandra ghat
21 – Godaulia Crossing / Old City to GPO / Bengali Tola to Kedar ghat
22 – Ghat walk / Harishandra ghat / Manikanika ghat
23 – Assi to Kedar ghat, Old City to Scindia, Chowk
Fig. 15 (Clockwise from top left) Architecture (18), Wall trace (15) & Incomplete maps (19), (2012).

© Singh and Rana, 2002

Fig. 16  Widows (Photo Credit: Andrea Bruce) (11) Religious structures (17) & Incomplete buildings (16), (2012)
11. WIDOWS

‘Sati’ is the Hindu tradition of a widow casting herself on her husband’s funeral pyre and ending her life. This tradition was outlawed during the British occupation of India, but continues to occur in rural areas. The Hindu treatment of widows is often called a ‘living sari’ or a living death.

Instead of committing Sati, many Hindu widows, when banished from their family home on the death of their husbands migrate to Varanasi and the ‘City of Widows’ Vrindavan - two cities that are auspicious places to die. Predominantly living on the streets or in widow ashrams, the widows ‘squat for alms’ at the entrance to the temples, Kedar temple in Varanasi in particular. They are banished from taking part in any meaningful rituals or celebrations due to their lowly status. Clad in white and devoid of colourful bangles and adornment they are visible in Varanasi. They are visible on the streets, their day is intertwined with the rituals of the community yet are ultimately absent from the community.

These women are not considered citizens of the city and in itself this is a legal absence of basic rights and protection. Hunched against the wall or crouched on the ground, these women are below the eye height of the passerby, they blend into the streetscape.

12. GENDER

Keenly felt during my stay in Varanasi was the gender imbalance on the streets, an absence that alters the dynamics of city space. As a foreign woman in Varanasi it was socially acceptable and safe for me to walk the streets alone, from early morning to dusk. Come dusk it was prudent to walk with a companion and at all times be conscious of the areas I was walking in, as in most unfamiliar cities if one is a foreigner.

Of Varanasi, Kumar observes that ‘any open urban space is not the provenance of the female at any age, unless they are professionals or otherwise have work’ (Kumar in Gaenzle 2008, p. 275). Private spaces and inside the home are women’s traditional place, while public spaces, the space outside and on the street are traditionally the domain of men. Importantly, during my walks I implicitly relied on other women. Their presence indicated a safe route through narrow passageways and around blind corners. I could assess my safety through their presence and their absence was often the first indicator that I had stumbled off the main route and was perhaps more vulnerable to unwanted attention.
14. DEATH

The communal rituals of the city and the cycle of life and death play out across the city, particularly at the two cremation ghats along the Ganges river Manikarnika Ghat, the holiest and busiest cremation ground and Harischandra Ghat in the south. As Varanasi is a sacred city and an auspicious place, Hindus come from all over India to die there. It is estimated that every year anywhere between 30000 (Singh 2002) to 90000 corpses, up to 250 per day (Fernandez 2010, p. 22), are cremated at the burning ghats, or stairs, on the banks of the river. The two burning cremation ghats play a central role in the city, functionally and aesthetically. Many aspects of death are experienced in a multisensory capacity – sight, smell, touch, sound. These religious structures and rituals shape the city, not only through the built environment but through the day to day activities on the street and the chanting related to the death rituals enacted on the city streets. Although death is the ultimate in confrontational activity, it tends to normalise other less desirable aspects of city living. Garbage, defecation, sewage, animal and sometimes human carcasses, and extreme poverty provokes an emotional response from horror to wonder, sometimes in the space of seconds.

Such extreme sites and experience raised a number of questions: What is concealed or minimised in other cities? What is invisible or absent because it is not socially or culturally acceptable? If the sick and the poor are hidden, what becomes of our sense of charity and inclusiveness? If the rituals of death are behind closed doors, what becomes of our attitude to life and, in turn, how does this affect the social fabric of our cities?

13. ABSENCE OF PHOTOGRAPHIC ADS

A contemporary western city street is jam-packed with billboards, chain store brand advertising and photographic models – a general colonization of public space by private or corporate interest. The retail / billboard vernacular has changed the urban environment, through the insertion of giant billboards, bus shelter advertising and flyposters in public space. One is constantly reminded of what one ‘needs’, what one does not have, what one doesn’t look like and what one will never be able to afford.

From my own (Western) perspective, one noticeable aspect of Varanasi - because of its absence - is the minimal intervention of photographic advertising in public space. There are advertisements, but they are rarely excessively large, photographic or dominant in the streetscape. Simple and basic advertising is illustrated or written using hand drawn techniques, usually on the side entrance to shop itself. On the ‘flip side’, the Varanasi ‘sales pitch’ is person to person on the street or outside a shop. It’s a bodily engagement demanding one listen and respond. This approach can often be a source of anxiety and annoyance for tourists, who may be more familiar with walking the city without being approached or bothered. This is a whole body engagement or interaction that can be quite confronting.

15. TRACES

The wall surfaces are textural in Varanasi and their construction primarily by hand shows traces of that method of construction. In contrast to Manhattan and Shanghai, these surfaces are not sleek, cold or reflective but indicate the wear and tear of daily life. The surfaces of the city show traces of the past – artwork, festivals, posters and advertisements. Artistic surface treatments are created by hand, in a specific local style that references the broader visual traditions employed to depict Hindu deities and gods.

Madalina Dianconu writes, ‘Patina makes visible not only the touching subject embodiment, but also a sensitivity (and thus vulnerability) of the touched material substratum: the matter reacts to the subjects gestures, recording them in the form of traces, spots and marks, scratches and fissures’. (Dianconu 2006, p. 133). She goes on, ‘Being a trace, patina represents (i.e. makes present) an absence, not however an abstract Nothing, but the concrete absence (of all the persons who have ever touched the object’. (Dianconu 2006, p. 134). Significantly, where foreigners have ‘decorated’ the ghats, these traces signal foreign presence (though physically absent) both through the subject matter and stylistic qualities. Through these illustrations foreigners have ‘claimed space’ on the ghats.
16. INCOMPLETE BUILDINGS

Throughout the city there are quite a number of unfinished buildings contributing to a general impression of disrepair and incompleteness. The locations of the buildings I have identified during my walks are in the heart of the city, and in particular the main tourist area.

Concrete slabs have been poured and the ground level, and perhaps even the first level are occupied and functioning, yet the upper floors of building remain incomplete. In the case of the area adjacent Dhashwamedh ghat, the pylons have been erected yet no additional slabs or construction has taken place. If a four storey building were to be completed on this site the streetscape, light levels and the way people traverse the area would completely change. This building remains an incomplete shell, yet it has a certain porosity that encourages temporary occupation by vendors. These buildings are a physical manifestation of a social or cultural dynamic, at times indicating a negligence for the environment and often lax health and safety conditions throughout the rest of the city. This absence-presence dynamic supplies a particular ambience to the streetscape, creating physical voids in high density areas and a perception of the city as incomplete or a ‘work in progress’.

17. EMPTY RELIGIOUS STRUCTURES

The banks of the Ganges river are occupied by various religious structures, either temporary umbrellas / awnings or permanent concrete platforms integrated into the promenade. During sunrise, these rudimentary structures are occupied by priests (or gurus) and visited by pilgrims offering puja. The absence of bodies, generates the absence-presence dynamic that exists between the busy morning rituals and the quiet that follows. In the afternoon these structures and platforms appear abandoned, voids waiting to be activated by a (spiritual) presence. In contrast with the churches of Lower Manhattan, the value of these structures lies not in their physicality, construction, scale or materials but in their location on the river and occupation by a particular guru or priest.

18. ABSENCE OF HISTORY IN ARCHITECTURE

It is recorded that Varanasi is one of the oldest continually occupied city’s in the world. Significantly, it is not the built environment that is historically significant , but the sacred land on the banks of the river and the myths embedded in the land. In navigating the city, the sites of significance are the (often very modest) temples and shrines and the river. These sites are not visually spectacular, in so far as they are not grand in scale or ancient in structure.

However, because of their record in the Mahatmyas, people make pilgrimages there. The absence presence dynamic exists between the city embedded in myths and the actual built environment. Throughout history the city has been destroyed and rebuilt numerous times, the (religious/ political) majority shaping the city through its rituals. Cultural and religious beliefs have a profound effect on the way locals value and utilise the physical spaces of the city.

In this city, the protection and value of ‘historical’ buildings, arguably comes second to ensuring a consistent power supply and maintaining basic hygiene and social stability. Even the spiritual significance of ‘Mother Ganga’ does not prevent pollution, both rubbish and sewage, being pumped daily into the river creating an incredibly toxic river that threatens both the health of the community and the long term economic well being of the city. Despite the sacredness of Manikarnika cremation ground, it is in disrepair, littered with rubbish and roamed by animals. The filth and chaos of this site could not be further from the well maintained grounds and serene interiors of Trinity Church in New York.

19. INCOMPLETE MAPS

In Varanasi, the maps I used to navigate the city revealed an absence-presence dynamic. Despite presenting as up to date and thorough, I discovered that many smaller alleys were not documented at all and others were on the maps but unnamed. The local tourist map I initially used appeared to have authority, being both professional and comprehensive. I bought it with confidence, believing I would be able to navigate in the same methodological way I did in New York. It was only because of my ‘walk every street’ methodology that its incompleteness and inaccuracy was revealed to me. Diana Eck, American scholar and writer of Banaras, City of Life (1982) argues that the maps created by James Prinsep in the late 1820s as part of a city census, are, even today, unsurpassed (Eck 1999, p. 49). This, to some extent, communicates the absence of development and / or major physical change in the old city. However this thoroughness is not evident in the maps currently in circulation.

I subsequently read a number of differently authored maps to gain knowledge of the city. Some places were mapped ‘out of existence’, others privileged a foreign perspective focusing on areas that would be of interest to tourists. Significantly, often what had been left out was as important as what had been left in. The current tendency to portray Varanasi as a predominantly Hindu city (Hindu centric), minimizes the Christian and Muslim presence and in turn their visibility, as the maps utilised by tourists are dominated by Hindu sites.

Historically, the graphic style of the map communicates a citys sophistication and something of its artistic life. The map drawn by local geographer Rana P. B. Singh is the most accurate and detailed, despite being the most ‘low-tech’. The method by which he divided up the city, illustrates...
the importance of particular sites from a locals perspective. If I asked for directions during my walks I was conscious of not referencing a map and putting a man ‘on the spot’ in front of his colleagues. Referring to a map seemed to only confuse and complicate the process of obtaining directions. In most cases he couldn’t read the map I offered or this method of providing directions was unfamiliar to him. I assume that the majority of residents navigate through landmarks and person to person verbal directions that allows for the absence of street signs. The thousands of pilgrims who visit the city rely on official guides to direct them along the pilgrimage routes. So, the ‘official’ Varanasi map, in its invention and design, is of use only to a foreigner.

20. PILGRIMAGE ROUTES

While the city of Varanasi is not conclusively mapped visually, it is the pilgrimage routes embodied in the ‘sacred geography’ of the city that are the absence in my experience of the city. Geographer Professor Rana P. B Singh describes Varanasi as a ‘faithscape’. He observes, ‘We are surrounded by sense objects but more by images that are invisible to everybody else but visible in the landscape scenarios. The symbolic expression of place, the set of symbols that gives the people of a culture orientation in space and time is pervasive in Hindu culture’ (Singh, 2014, 2).

As a non-Hindu and a foreigner, this sacred geography and the significance of particular temples and routes remains invisible and often inaccessible to me. A landscape dominated by shrines effects not only the layout of the city, which is determined by spiritual markers rather than urban planning principles, but also the ebb and flow of bodies throughout the city. Daily ritual and offerings determine that ‘peak hour’ and ‘busy days’ tend to be on auspicious days rather than working weekdays.
WALKING IN SHANGHAI


Date - Walking area
19 – Fuzhou Rd / Nanjing Rd / Peoples Park / Bund
20 – Bund / Old City / Yu yuan Park / Bazaar
22 – The Bund / Huangpu – Streets from Bund to Peoples Park
24 – Tianjin Rd (Huangpu) / W. Nanjing Rd / Peoples Park
25 – Huangpu / Streets between E. Beijing Rd and E. Yan’an Rd
26 – Bund / Xintiandi and surrounds / E. Jinling Rd and side streets between E. Yan’an Rd, and E. Huaizhi Rd
27 – Sichuan Rd / Old City / Fangbang Rd / Renmin Rd / Zhonghua Rd
30 – Ningbo Rd / Fangbang Rd / Peoples Park / Hangkou Rd
02 – Sichuan Rd / Old City / Anren Street / Xueyuan Rd
03 – Bund / Huangpu River cruise
04 – Through Huangpu / E. Jinling / Huaihai Park / Fangbang Rd and Old City
08 – Bund / Old City / Xintiandi / Shouning Rd / Daijing Rd / Old City
Fig. 24  (Clockwise from top left) Peoples Park (28), Bell on the Bund (22), Crickets (27) & Modern Compounds (25), 2012

Fig. 25  Pudong Skyline (29) & Old City Wall (23), (2012).
21. BUILDING SITES

Walking through the city centre, the scale and rapid development of central Shanghai is unavoidable. Each newly built site contains a trace of the demolished historical building and the relocated community.

Smaller scale housing is being demolished en masse and being replaced with high density, modern skyscrapers. These developments have little relationship to the landscape or the cultural / community life on the street as it currently exists. However this development is reflective of a broader Chinese imperative to bring the country into rapidly into the 21st Century and accommodate huge population growth in the city environment in modern, hygienic conditions.

These developments are not done piecemeal. Residents are relocated to satellite cities, ageing ‘Shikumen’ (traditional houses) are marked with a red paint ‘demolish’ sign and city blocks vanish overnight. Razed to the ground, they are temporarily substituted by huge swathes of concrete in preparation for new build. These sites are remarkable for their scale, the manifestation of (temporary) absence in such a high-density environment.

22. BELL ON THE BUND

The significance of the Bund lies in its historical role as a trade port with the French, British and Americans during the early 20th century. The buildings along the Bund can be considered a trace of foreign presence. Absence also manifests along the rivers edge, in the historical traces of the waterfront trade that shaped the city into what it is today. The current incarnation is removed from the water by a large split level promenade running the length of the Bund. This new viewing platform / structure eradicates any material evidence of the docks themselves. The split-level design is highly directive to recent developments along and across the river. Standing on the higher level, looking across to Pudong, one views the physical manifestation of China’s ambition and desire to compete on the international stage.

On the lower level one’s gaze is directed to the Bund - to the past. The art deco buildings are resolutely foreign and the Chinese flag flying on each building heightens this impression. The clock tower bells chime ‘The East is Red’ (reinstated in 2003) rather than the original Westminster Quarters, the ‘English’ tune that it originally played. The incongruity of a Chinese tune from an English clock tower highlights the absence of British colonial presence and the reassertion and reinsertion of Chinese culture in contemporary Shanghai.

The sound of the bells every quarter hour are aural trace of the history of this site. An intervention which can only be understood in relation to what is now absent from site.
23. OLD CITY WALL

The ‘old city wall’ is a remnant from a 5km circumference wall from 1554 that contained the Chinese city. This artifact is currently 50 metres long, 10 metres high and located at the intersection of Dajing Lu and Renmin Lu, within the Old City. It is integrated with ‘Dajing Ge Pavilion’ museum and ancient temple – the term encapsulates both the pavilion and the wall. It is both a physical and historical absence.

The layout of new roads in the modern city match the curve of the Old City boundary and as a result one senses the absence of the curved wall in other areas of the city. The change of architecture and scale of the roads demarcates the curve - larger multi lane roads outside the oval, small roads inside oval. Unlike the Berlin wall, which is a significant feature of Berlin for both physical and political divisions, Shanghai’s city wall has been dismantled as part of an expanding building process. Apart from the tourist hype around the Old City attention is currently directed to ‘modern’ Shanghai, Pudong and the 4th largest building in the world, the World Financial Tower.

Our attention and interest is diverted from a landmark which references when Shanghai was threatened to one which embodies Shanghai’s and more broadly China’s position of power / strength.

24. AIR POLLUTION - THE REVEAL

An outcome of air pollution, the visual fade in / fade out of the built city from morning to night, is an absence-presence dynamic that had a significant impact on the way the city of Shanghai revealed itself to me. In the early morning and often continuing into the day the iconic buildings of Pudong are absent from view, reduced to a distant hulking mass. These buildings are an absent presence, we can’t see them, but we know and sense they are there.

Madilina Diaconu writes, ‘The phenomenological concept of horizon, with its privileging of what lies in front of the subject, is specific to visuality; in contrast, atmosphere has breathing as its sensory model, and its “object” is more likely to be a surrounding milieu, in the midst of which the subject is moving and living...’ (Diaconu 2006, p. 136).

Pollution levels affect one’s haptic experience of the city due to the industrial smells and the effect of the poor air quality on one's respiratory system. In Shanghai, the pollution diffuses the light and mostly there is an absence of the graphic shadows and patterns that are inseparable from the city surfaces of New York.
25. MODERN COMPOUNDS

The high rise compounds, particularly adjacent to the newly upgraded and internationally focused retail development Xiantiandi, can be considered an absence. In the past, each Shikumen or small local housing compound had a tabac and a small grocery at each entryway, daily life was small scale and local. In the historical city and some parts that remain integrated within the new developments this ‘streetlife’ is maintained. People share space in the narrow communal alleys and pass each other going about their day-to-day lives. There is a direct physical and visual link to the public space of the street.

In contrast, high rise compounds are contained by security gates and monitored by guards. The built environment consists of hard and reflective surfaces, the scale and facade unrelated to the streetscape. The architectural form/vernacular is one that appears resolutely not Chinese, but more in common with a generic western architectural typology. These residential environments are perceived as modern and progressive, however, this style of ‘silo living’ manifests an absence of social interaction at street level.

26. OUTDOOR CLOTHES LINES

The quotidian status of the ‘outdoor clothes lines’ in Shanghai does not exclude them from being identified as a biopsy of absence. In Shanghai these lines contribute significantly to the city aesthetic and are a trace of the city’s residents. The shapes of bodies are scattered and suspended throughout the laneways. The personal is injected into the public sphere for the neighbours to see. Each shirt or jacket somehow animated by the poles that stretch through the sleeves, carrying a trace of a resident in the adjacent buildings. In these narrow laneways, walking under and sometimes through this washing supplies a connection to the surrounding residents. These clothes are supplement to the human body, they defer to an absent presence. In the recently developed parts of Shanghai (and also New York), there are few signs of ‘everyday’ life visible on the street. The slick, reflective buildings conceal all signs of inhabitation.

27. CRICKETS; BAMBOO BASKETS

The simple, tactile cricket baskets are a feature of a number of Shanghai city streets. Cricket fighting and gambling on these fights has a long history in the city. As it’s a hobby of older men, it also has a historical link, even a generational aspect. The baskets are typically strung on top of one another and the chain of baskets emits an incredibly loud chirping noise. Importantly, you cannot see the individual crickets through the basket weave, you can only hear them. The absence-presence dynamic exists in the sound being dominant yet the source invisible.
28. RACECOURSE TO PEOPLE’S PARK

An interplay of absence-presence exists between the iconic history of the site as a racecourse and its current status as city centre landmark, recreation zone and transport hub. People’s Park is located on the original site of the international racecourse, a ‘foreigners playground’ which played a key role in 1930s Shanghai social and cultural life.

This trace of past use makes it significantly different from recreational spaces and squares in the capital Beijing. The racecourse demolition and replacement by the ‘People’s Park’ (Renmin Gongyuan) after the revolution signals the reduction of foreign social and cultural presence in the city and an assertion of national party influence.

As a predominantly recreational park it’s primary function, is hosting of exercise activity, food services and carnivals. Yet importantly, it has the capacity to host large political gatherings, and is designed for maximum visual impact and surveillance. The park contains a cultivated and planned landscape, with a mix of cultural and government buildings on its perimeter. It is also a site for contemporary art, where the Shanghai Art Museum hosting the Shanghai Biennale from 1996 until 2010. Just as the old city wall dictates the current road layout, so too the shape of the old racecourse dictates both the landscape and extent of the park.

29. PUDONG SKYLINE

The Pudong skyline can be considered a site of absence. This skyline is important to the orientation and ebb and flow of this city yet in order to experience it one is necessarily absent, located on the opposite river bank. The Pudong skyline supplies an iconic representation of contemporary Shanghai and is a top attraction for both domestic and foreign tourists.

Standing for internationalism, sophistication and progressiveness it functions as a symbol, as well as accommodating business and residential communities. Similar to the iconic imagery of lower Manhattan from Staten Island and the view of the Varanasi ghats from the River Ganges, experiencing the Pudong skyline requires an absence from the very site that is supposedly being experienced. The haptic experience – specifically the sounds and smells – are of the Bund, yet the view is of Pudong.
The floating population – estimated to be about 10 million out of a 24 million population in Shanghai - is the migrant worker who comes in from rural areas, often to work on these massive building projects. These workers can be considered an absence in that they are essential to, yet invisible in the building process and undocumented in the city population registered statistics.

Though their access to basic services is slowing improving, particularly in Shanghai, their absence of citizenship and in turn legal status makes them particularly vulnerable. Wu explains, ‘On the one hand, the floating population flowing from other areas has contributed to economic development and urban construction therefore promoting Shanghai’s urbanisation. Yet, on the other hand, a new problem has arisen that asks how the floating population can be assimilated in Shanghai’s urban life’ (Wu 2008, p. 240). They ‘drift in and out’ creating a transience of population which has a knock on effect to street life - vending carts, temporary accommodation and general cohesiveness of social fabric.

The rapid development of the city and the floating population are interlinked, each requiring the other to exist in its current state. There is a noticeable contrast between the modern, often futuristic, buildings and the basic safety and clothing of the workforce. The old and the new Shanghai come together in one location - two biopsies of absence.
Studio notes

- African Burial Ground
- Death
- Church Fence Monkeys
- Shadows + Reflection
- Women/gender

- WTC Site
- Traces
- Vending Carts, N.Y.
- Absence Photograph
- Empty Religious Sites

- Wall Street, N.Y.
- Old City Wall
- Incomplete Maps
- Abandoned Boots
- Decks/Platforms

- Surveillance, N.Y.C.
- Surveillance St.
- Highrise Compound
- Absence in Buildings
- Half-Built Building
- Building Sites

- Underpass, N.Y.C.
- Occupy Wall St. Bldg.
- Floating Population
- Subway: Above + Below

- Pollution Revealed
- Pudong Skyline
Subject is absent - Las Marinas

Physical Void [Lasting] - Whitemead
- Benys
- Nairn
- Gill

Art created through removal - Heizer
- Dean

Absence of something - Pan
- Gonzales Tan

Absence in installation - TV M

Site/non-site

Concealment - Soft
- Man
- Christ

Abstraction - Full emph
The artists use of collage as form of map making illustrates that the present city is built on the ruins of the past, that the new and the old are inextricably entwined. (Hauptman 1999, p. 153)
REFLECTION & MATERIAL TRACE

* Leading into the project I had been interested in the link of abstraction to the depiction of urban environments. The concept of ‘full emptiness’ in abstract art and the communication of ‘quality of’ an experience rather than representation.

The content for these abstract collages came from my walks. Some images from iPhone ‘pavement facing’ walking footage and others from a digital SLR. I was interested to what extent the aesthetic of the site could be captured by removing all recognizable features and arranging the surface/pattern/shape in such a way to generate the actual experience – repetition and impenetrability. The concept that ‘it becomes part of living’ aligned with the haptic underpinning of my research.

Reducing the city to a surface, a pattern.
Quality of (New York) Sketch 4.
WALKING THE ‘URBAN SKIN’

* In the ‘walking video’ the audio component of the video records the transition from Broadway, with its multicultural mix of pedestrians to Chinatown, an almost exclusively Chinese community. Arkette observes, ‘City space has been and is constantly being carved up into communities defined by economic, cultural, ethnic, religious divisions and consequently acoustic profiles and soundmarkers are in constant transition.’ (Arquette 2004, p. 162)
Transcribed 'sound markers' of Tribeca Walk

the ambient hum, passing voices, tap tap on the pavement, accelerating cars, rustle of my jacket, hammering, passing cars, screaming child, passing voices, accelerating cars, kids playing, wind in the microphone, footsteps on the pavement, accelerating cars, beeping cars, megaphone voice, bus wheeze, sirens, drilling, drone over helicopter?, car door slam, purr of a truck, beeping, truck wheeze, hum, squeal beep of reversing truck, heels on concrete, accelerating truck, idling truck, stopping truck, wind in microphone, drilling and hammering, truck wheeze, voices on the wind, "it's a puppy, can I take her home?", accelerating truck, braking truck, passing voices, banging on metal, rustle of my jacket, echo of crates moving, truck idling, hammering, clatter on metal, hammer on metal, squeal of brakes, jogger running past, seagulls, wind in microphone.
SHADOWS ON THE ‘URBAN SKIN’

Ephemerality is simply the temporal dimension of absence.
(Shusterman, 1997)
DAILY WALK TEST, DOCUMENTATION

GOLDPATHS - THE HAPTIC TRACE
The term 'path' simultaneously indicates the act of crossing (the path as the action of walking), the line that crosses space (the path as architectural object) and the tale of space crossed (the path as narrative structure).

(Careri 2002, p. 25)
Test Install, Gossard Building

*The nose makes the eyes remember.*

(*Pallasmaa 2005, p. 41*)
CHAI MANDALA

Test composition, sound, smashing process, studio
CHAI MANDALA

Chai Mandala, detail (Varanasi) 2013

Chai Mandala (Varanasi) 2013, Clay chai cups, cinnamon, cardamom, black tea leaves. 180cm diameter.
Widows sketch setout, studio

Widows sketch setout, studio
WIDOWS

Widows, concealment tests (Video stills) 2014

Source image: cyclo metal finish / surface treatment

Gold boats, metal finish

Boats (sketch setout, trace)

Boats (sketch setout, trace)
Smoke Mandala (2013) 600 x 600mm, paper.
Smoke Mandala (2013) 600 x 600mm, ply.
Body Mandala (2013) 600 x 600mm, brass, velvet.

Boat Mandala / Array (2013) 600 x 600mm, brass, velvet.
BOATS

Boats (studio test) Plywood, brass embossed sheet.

Boats (sketch) Plywood, brass embossed sheet.
Banaras revels in contradiction. It is full of life, but its business is death. Death stains the air around Manikarnika and Harischandra ghats, and mixes ash into the green of the river. The city accepts and engenders everything, like a conundrum out of mythology; it welcomes death in life and the opposite, life in death.

(Thayil 2007, p. 175)
SMOKE SERIES

Studio notes

HOW CAN THE TWO D WORK ON PAPER
BE INHABITED IN A
PHENOMENOLOGICAL SENSE?
SMOKE SERIES

Smoke; flame source test, blowtorch on paper

Smoke; density test (1)

Smoke; test (2)
SMOKE SERIES

Smoke; boat sketch (3)

Smoke; density test (4)

Smoke; marks through removal (Detail)

Smoke; mapping marks through removal (Detail)
SMOKE SERIES

Smoke: line test (5)

Smoke: density test (6)

Smoke: text through removal (Detail)

Smoke: pyre marks through removal (Detail)
Smoke / tear; (sketch)

Smoke; biopsy mock up (3 / Zoomed detail)
Smoke biopsy mock up. Ash, petri dish, acetate.
Smoke 3 (Varanasi) Detail. 300gsm paper, smoke.
Here death is a celebration and auspicious.

(Singh 2002)
PINK SMOKE

Smoke 3 - 5 / Celebration (Test samples), 300gsm paper, smoke, gouache. Dimensions vary.

Smoke 6 / Celebration (sketch) 300gsm paper, smoke, gouache.
Smoke 15 / Celebration. 300gsm paper, smoke, gouache. 700mm x 1100mm.
STAIR TRACE

Stair (Varanasi) 80mm x 1800mm, concertina. Photo stock.

Stairs (Varanasi) Source images, test material.
Vending carts (Shanghai 2014)
Old city demolition (Shanghai 2014)
Floating Population (Test configuration 2, Building 50, RMIT)

Floating Population (Test configuration 2, detail)
Look at tourism for example. We have an idea of what a famous site will look like as we’ve seen the photos – but when you get there, the reality is usually different. This rub between mythology and reality is the inspiration – and the contradiction.

Martin Parr (www.artsmia.org)
Parks can be compared to lungs, veins and arteries to transport routes, circulation to roads, capillaries to laneways, expulsion of waste to drains and sewers and the nervous system to the city’s communication and information networks.
FUTURE / PAST - SKYLINE AS ABSENCE

Bund V Pudong, video still (Shanghai). Projection, Building 50, RMIT.

Pudong V Bund, video still (Shanghai). Projection, Building 50, RMIT.
I believe my experience of the city can be considered a personal palimpsest.

Before you travel to a particular city your experience or what could be termed your personal ‘manuscript’ is informed by movies and images and tour guides and other peoples accounts…. When you arrive in the city this manuscript is immediately altered. Your own experience is inserted into the story, your own experience informs the text. From then on, day in and day out as you walk the city, your manuscript is partially erased and rewritten.

When you depart the city your memories kick in, you constantly recalibrate the experience, privileging particular aspects whether for positive or negative reasons. Your photos fill in gaps, the visual supplants other sensual associations. The visual begins to dominate.

Your final (if it can ever be final) manuscript is a combination of physical evidence, memory communicated through the recounting of stories and ‘body memory’ triggered through sensual cues.

Significantly, the manuscript is never complete. It constantly shifts and changes. Past versions of the manuscript can be re-engaged through the body long after the experience.

A reworking of the text (in the memory) can be triggered by a particular smell (petrol, sewage, spice) and sound (the beat of the tabla or the screech of a rickshaw). The ‘body memory’ can be engaged through an experience in another city (Shanghai evoking Hanoi) or (hopefully through my practice) in the scale of an installation or materials used in a sculpture.

After this process and experiencing this work, a new version of the manuscript is written in ones memory – again and again. Over time the manuscript may settle, but it is never absolute / completely finalized.

The manuscript is ultimately abstract. The text consists of parts and views over time. It is cobbled together from bits and pieces either real or fantastical. The text is relational.

Each manuscript, as unique and changeable as the individual.
Each manuscript is ultimately an assemblage of shifting absence/presence.

The city as manuscript. We write the city as we walk.
FLYPOSTER

Flyposter > Postcard 2-8 (New York) 2014.
Flyposter > Postcard 2-5 (Varanasi) 2014.
Studio process 1-4 stages