The Practice of Feeling for Place:

a compendium for an expanded architecture

A Thesis submitted in (partial) fulfilment of the requirements of the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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Declaration

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

Kathy E. Waghorn

March, 2017
The Practice of Feeling for Place: a compendium for an expanded architecture

Part 1: An Account

Kathy E. Waghorn
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Signed:

Kathy E. Waghorn

Dated: 09-08-17
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Abstract

This practice of feeling for place proceeds from a hunch that a correspondence between art and architecture might expand the field of architecture through foregrounding the complexity of place. Activating knowing-through-practising, I fashion an experimental self as an agile figure who moves across and between art and architecture, amateur and expert, outsider and local. Through projects and encounters, this experimental self cultivates a practico-social-spatial energetics, catalysing situations and influencing others to invoke feeling for place as a political, ethical and aesthetic task.

This experimental self composes a formula of practice. Enabled by her stealthy inhabitation of a mathematical form, this equation acts as an operative guide, locating practice, place and self in a performative set of interdependent relations. Taking up the unexpected roles that emerge in this expanded field, she encourages a pedagogic disposition towards ‘paying attention’ and ‘piecing together,’ as she hones her receptivity to place assemblages.

This experimental self finds allegiances as the practice of feeling for place rubs up against the attributes and procedures of socially engaged art, and alongside those who pursue critical spatial practices. This research through practice draws broadly on forms of agency to intervene in or coalesce place assemblages, and identifies tactical ways that expand the architectural field by embracing time, process, ethics and subjectivity. This in-process mode of an experimental self, the performing text of the formula and the actions of the tactical ways are here revealed as modalities to practice place.
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An edgy discomfort stirs in my belly—the combination of fear and anticipation rumbling in my organs.¹

In a past life (20 or so years ago) I had a practice of site specific installation art-making. In this work I revealed the spatial, social and political constitution of places through the arrangement and manipulation of objects, images, sound and text. I was absorbed by the multiple apparatus of place identity and occupied by the ways in which places are composed through connection to larger cultural, social and economic forces. I used art-making as a critical method through which I could activate a place-based engagement for audiences and publics.

The architectural theorist Jane Rendell describes a “critical spatial practice” as one in which the work transgresses the limits of art and architecture, engaging with both the social and the aesthetic, the public and the private. She draws our attention to practices—to doings, actions, activities, operations, undertakings, and performances—that, while working in relation to dominant ideologies, at the same time, question them. According to Rendell, such practices tend to occur “more often in the domain of art, yet it offers architecture a chance to reflect on its own modes of operation” (Rendell 2006, p. 4).

Since moving into the field of architecture I’ve held a hunch that by pressing the modes and methods of my art practice up against the disciplinary edifice of architecture, I might take up Rendell’s gambit, using this particular art–architecture practice as a means to expand architecture’s modes of operation. Following this hunch has provided the premise of this doctoral research. In this practice between art and arch-

¹See Chapter 2: How do I know when the experimental self is in action?
The practice of feeling for place is a ‘critical spatial practice’ motivated by the transformation of places, however minor or gradual. The practice inserts itself across a range of encounters, formats and contexts including installation, participative spatial encounters, exhibition curation and design, publication, speculative urban research and through the design and activation of provisional public spaces. The doctorate research acts as a ‘meta project’ that intersects with and reflects on this practice between art and architecture, in which work is carried out with others in “hybrid research collectives”; 2 as part of a multi-disciplinary group of researchers and makers from a university; as a member of the collective Hoopla: projects for the Whau; as an individual working with other artists, designers, craftspeople, fabricators and clients; with community groups and public bodies; and as a teacher in ‘live’ studios with architecture students.

The enquiry undertaken in this PhD is directed towards a methodological investigation of practice. Through this research I’ve ‘felt about’ to locate the impetus of the practice, asking where it is oriented, how it is carried out and with whom, what propels it, what is its ambience and effects, and where do they take hold. In The Practice of Feeling for Place, the word ‘practice’ is taken up across its various shades of meaning. Already signalled is an attention to ‘architectural practice’ as one field that might be expanded through the research. My socially performative practice between art and architecture, realised in the formats and contexts listed above, is the way I go about this expansion. As I carry out the operations and actions of this practice, shifts and adjustments in mood, method and technique are generated as I ‘fine-tune’ practice through practice. ‘Practice’ is hailed in the title as a key term, and reflection on this practising is the primary mode through which the PhD research has been carried out.

[Note to self: objects, time and subjectivity coalesced in an abrupt fashion today as a very large truck, carrying parts of a crane to a building site, reversed over the front of my car. As if in slow motion the rear deck of the truck crunched over the bonnet and pierced the windscreen as we leapt from the car’s front seats. In that moment the object, material and process nature of the building industry became all very real].

Part 1

The practice of feeling for place

However this research is also indebted to another interpretation of practice, that is practice found outside of disciplinarity, located instead in the combination of thinking and using that habitually occurs in everyday life. Here practice, following Michel de Certeau, is the means by which thinking is “invested in a way of acting, an art of combination which cannot be dissociated from an art of using” (de Certeau 1984, p. xv). For de Certeau this everyday thinking/acting/using convergence is tactically employed as a means of engaging with place, and it is in this nexus, this ‘art of combination’ that much knowledge of place is created and enacted. I articulate ambivalence toward the motivations and agendas of ‘tactical urbanism’ and similar contemporary urban practices, yet I remain so fond of, so attached to and propelled by the power of creativity and inventiveness that de Certeau identifies in the tactical. In this research then, tactical practices are called out as the means of mobilising a correspondence between art and architecture in prompting feeling for place.

Let’s skip ahead now to the end of the title, to ‘place’. Approached across diverse disciplinary positions place is apprehended between an internally oriented stable origin on one hand, and as an outwardly connected, expansive and fluid entity on the other. Place is the field of ‘concern’ where my practice is employed—to be transformative of and in place. Following the geographer Doreen Massey, an ‘extroverted’ sense of place is sought in the practice of feeling for place, place “imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings” (Massey 1991, p. 28). I rub Massey’s social, extroverted, networked conception of place up against the assemblage schema, and in affinity with Massey’s cultural–geographic lens I select DeLanda’s (2006) social theory of assemblage as a ‘way in’ to this term.

In my practising between art and architecture, places are approached as assemblages constituted by spaces, materials, experiences, actions, reactions and meanings. Consequently placemaking (an action of architecture and urban planning) is conceived through ontological practices rather than instrumental approaches, prompting a sensitivity to place-becoming rather than placemaking.

In between practice and place, ‘feeling’ is introduced in an ambiguous state between noun—a feeling, as in attachment toward—and verb—to feel for, a somatic and performative undertaking, as in fumbling about and grasping for contact in

3 At one stage in the research I employed a metaphor of shoes to indicate ways in which the thinking of others might assist in positioning the practice. These shoe-theories could be tried on for size and if found to be a good fit they could be used; like the best pair of sneakers, carrying me a long way and seeming never to wear out (thank you, de Certeau), or as fancy heels to wear at a party, looking great with an outfit and drawing much attention, (mmm, who would this be?) They might be warm slippers bringing comfort and relief. They might be a glamorous pair, sensational, but not often worn, a huge investment and regretfully out of fashion in a short time. They might be wholesome sandals from a reputable brand that everyone seems to be wearing this summer, but that give me blisters. In this way the familiar terrain of footwear, through which we all gain movement, protection and comfort alongside image and identity has invoked a research attitude and method, a way of trying on and being with others’ theories.

4 In Chapter 2, in the section on ‘place’ I provide an extended footnote that outlines some of the notable protagonists of these positions.


6 In Chapter 2, in the section on ‘place’ I expand the resonance between Manuel DeLanda’s explication of assemblage and Doreen Massey’s version of extroverted place.
Introduction

a game of Blind Man’s Bluff. In both definitions of this word a network of relations is formed, and in both senses this ‘feeling’ is located in or between subjects. In this research it’s my ongoing practising, that both ‘feels about for’ and generates ‘feelings towards’ place, that is the locus of enquiry.

In this exposition of the practice of feeling for place I do not delve directly or deeply into theories of affect, though these certainly ‘shimmer’ in the background. This might be surprising as feeling for place certainly suggests an attention to “the troughs and sieves of sensation and sensibility” (Seigworth & Gregg 2010, p. 2), and to the compositions of body-worlds through forces of encounter, that an affective orientation would welcome. I dance around the edge of affect for a few reasons. Partly I am wary of the methodological and conceptual freefall where a deeper or more prolonged encounter with affect theory could propel the research away from questions of practice and from practising. More saliently though, in holding to the motive of place transformation, and of expanding architecture in ways that are sensitively tuned to the complexities of place, I’m more oriented towards a practico-social-spatial energetics, where feeling takes on a more social and active expression than the “pre-liminal, pre-conscious” phenomena of affect (Watkins 2010, p. 269). In hyphenating ‘practico’, ‘social’ and ‘spatial’, I’m associating this work with Lefebvre’s (1973/1991) conception of space as the ‘practico-social’ realm, taking the forms of encounter, assembly and simultaneity (Lefebvre 1991, p. 101). In the practice of feeling for place, feeling inhabits this practico-social realm, where it can be prompted, invoked and demonstrated through spatial practices and encounters.

To assist in sensing the desires, modes and methodologies of the practice of feeling for place I’ve coalesced a triad of thinkers who circle about each other in their positioning of theory or philosophy at the service of practice, agency and activity. I affiliate the practice of feeling for place with political theorist Jane Bennett’s call for the ‘artful’ cultivation of a disposition or feeling of enchantment, a mood of lively engagement with the world, in order to propel practices of ethical generosity. Her tutelage towards honing a sensory receptivity to the “marvellous specificity” of things in order to “render attachment more palpable and audible” (Bennett 2001, p. 4) has clarified the impetus of

7 Each of these three authors have cited each other’s work in various places. Their affinity with each other’s work is abundantly clear in their texts.
this practice while also gently steering the development of the work over the course of the research.

In imagining these new ethnically generous possibilities, the feminist economic geographers J.K. Gibson-Graham have provided the research with a valuable ‘experimental orientation’ geared towards “thinking connection, convening wider publics and enrolling lively matter” (Gibson-Graham 2011, p. 8). Gibson-Graham introduce to the research the idea of practice as a kind of pedagogy, in which as they practise they also train themselves to strategically question and remain self-aware. I have detected this sensibility in the practice of feeling for place and have grasped it as a way to motion towards the criticality of the practice.

Gibson-Graham in part draw their approach from the work of environmental philosopher Freya Mathews, whose careful travelling through the traps and pitfalls of the theorist, struggling to conceive a universal position but meanwhile failing to act in the world, resonated with my first few attempts to think through the practice of feeling for place. In contrast to the specular, distanced position of the theorist, Mathews proposes a strategic practice, grounded in sensivity and responsiveness to the fields of influences in which we are immersed (Mathews 2009). Grasping hold of this change in position has allowed me to investigate the practice of feeling for place from the inside out, finding its nooks and crannies, feeling where it is most elastic or most fragile.

In each case what attracted me to Bennett, Gibson-Graham and Mathews is their orientation towards what is happening or might be able to happen in place, over what is being thought in more abstract realms. Providing bearings for the ethical and political positioning of this research, they each convey the “sense of urgency that transforms the matter and matterings of affect into an ethical, aesthetic, and political task” (Seigworth & Gregg 2010, p. 3). It is through the practice-orientated thinking of Bennett, Gibson-Graham and Mathews that these affectual ‘matterings’ echo in parts of this text.

My ethical, aesthetic and political task in the practice of feeling for place is to influence the disposition of others in their relations to place, by invoking or conjuring feeling for place. From this, transformations of place may arise. The projects I carry out (with others) are a means of rendering this place attachment “more palpable and audible” (Bennett 2001, p. 4).

Let us begin by circling back to the opening gambit, to Rendell’s contention that the normative procedures of architectural production miss opportunities to embrace aesthetic values related to time, process, ethics and subjectivity. In response to this lack I locate this research as an expansion of the methodological norms of architectural practice. This thickened or fattened methodology is generated through a reflection on my particular critical spatial practice, in which opportunities of the temporal, relational and performative attributes of place assemblages are prioritised over an architecture of forms and objects.

8 J.K. Gibson-Graham is the pen-name of Katherine Gibson and the late Julie Graham, feminist political economists and economic geographers.

[Note to self 12–12–16: sunlight patch, glossy green, crunch of gravel, tail wagging, branch makes arch, vine fingers, wind in trees high up, pink jogger approaching, more greeny-green, broken sunlight, bird song, bird song, bird song... Is this being alive to Bennett’s enchantment or just the hyper-alert state of my anxiety-prone mind?]
Introduction

From this reflection, (a self-conscious act of storying), a mode and some ways of the practice are proffered and explored. I propose the mode of an experimental self as a means of escaping normative approaches and as the guise through which art and architecture might begin to correspond. Resonating with others who expand the scope of spatial practice, this experimental self seeks opportunities to act beyond the usual constraints of architectural practice.

The adoption of this experimental self widens the net to make room for different forms of knowledge, not only that claimed by the discipline, but also a refined-through-practice ‘know-how’ with an orientation towards ‘mutual knowledge’, performed in the practices of everyday life. This experimental orientation also allows the adoption of diverse roles as they crop up in unfamiliar, interdisciplinary terrains. In elaborating this experimental self I identify a kind of practico-social-spatial dexterity, a specialism of the distributed and adaptive, and I draw attention to issues of agency that arise as the experimental self composes and catalyses situations and events in which the dispositions and subjectivities of others are bought into play.

In this practice of feeling for place the experimental self acts tactically, and from this research four tactical ways, gelled through the reflection on practice, are identified and elucidated. De Certeau tell us that tactics are a mutable practice, where situations can be seized and taken advantage of, the tactical is a means to “constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into ‘opportunities’” (de Certeau 1984, p. xix). The Suite of Tactical Ways is set out here to expose and circulate the ‘on-the-ground’ know-how employed in the practice of feeling for place as I identify tactical and synchronous ways of operating that are situational, mobilised, ultra-locally oriented and sometimes stealthy. In so doing I acknowledge a bind in exposing these ways, which chafes against an abiding trait of the tactical as clandestine and mobile, resistant to categorisation.

Together this mode of the experimental self and these tactical ways gather the practice of feeling for place into a form that can be shared. Given the processual nature of this project, identifying these attributes of the practice as the research has gone along has made me more aware of their employment and attendant to their effects.
Part 1

The practice of feeling for place

The Compendium

Form of this Document:
Weighing things together

14 This experimental mode and these four tactical ways are conveyed in this Compendium for an Expanded Architecture.

From the Latin roots com (together) and pendere (to weigh), a compendium is a book that ‘weighs together’, stores or ‘saves’ disparate items within a single binding. A compendium is variously defined as:

1. a condensed representation, an embodiment of a larger work, giving the sense and substance, but within a smaller compass
2. a book containing a collection of useful hints
3. a selection especially of games or other objects in one container

You might be familiar with the old-fashioned Girl’s or Boy’s Own Annual, a pre-Internet-era compendium which presented a digest of adventure and mystery stories alongside short articles on handicrafts, hobbies, science, sport and travel, all packaged in an attractive hard-back volume. Often gifted for Christmas, the annual was designed to be both entertaining and enlightening. A compendium is an established format in which diverse forms of text and image are packaged for both enjoyment and erudition. [Fig. 1]
This *Compendium for an Expanded Architecture* is intended to coalesce a similar survey. Composed through the compilation of different modes of text, transcribed speech, image, artefact, ephemera and miscellany, the compendium allows a multi-faceted encounter with this creative-practice research. Through ‘weighing’ these different forms together I hopefully anticipate that *The Practice of Feeling for Place* is illuminated, or is perhaps ‘felt’, that the textures and peculiarities of the practice are given space, and that (a bit like with a mix-tape) 12 certain moods and dispositions of the work are conveyed.

*The Practice of Feeling for Place: a Compendium for an Expanded Architecture* is comprised of three parts, each taking up one compendium definition:

12 An audio-cassette tape on which selected tracks/songs have been recorded to make up what would now be called a ‘playlist’.
Part 1: An Account picks up the first definition of a compendium, a condensed representation, giving the sense and substance of the larger work.

The body of the text in this narrative account is at times interrupted by brief ‘notes to self’. These act as a reminder of the subjectivity of this research. They are an attempt to convey the angles and rhythms of the various encounters that I engage, convene or prompt. They also register my presence as the author in this account of the work as well as the temporality of this project, as they document an accumulation across its course. These short first-person texts allow space for an inescapable interior conversation, where the tangential wanderings (of yet another self) might just be worth the while. They also reveal that in working between disciplines in an experimental mode nothing is certain or unequivocal, and some things are left behind.

Part 2: The Work is separately bound and acts as a companion volume. Compendium Part 2 gives a record of the practice work undertaken on which the reflective endeavor of the PhD has meditated. Picking up the second compendium definition of a book containing useful hints, and acknowledging the partiality (in both senses of the word) that is inevitable in the documentation of works often centered on intangible social interaction, the work in Part 2 is ‘hinted’ at through image, text and ephemera. Part 2 acts then as a kind of notebook, accumulating material to convey a trace of the textures of the work and the assemblies convened through the work, as well as showing the contexts in which the practice of feeling for place has found fertile grounds.

Throughout the exegetical account of Part 1, I frequently refer to the intimate details of projects given that the practice work is the scene from which the reflection and contribution to knowledge emerges. When I refer to a project or work, to avoid tedious repetition I generally do not give a long description or explanation of the work. Instead a very short account is given and I insert the reference page numbers of Part 2, where each work is more fulsomely documented. In this way a particular work or project can be easily located and referred to in a synthetic fashion alongside this text-based account.
Part 3: The Exposition takes up the remaining compendium definition of objects assembled in one container. This will take the form of an exhibition and event in June 2017 at the RMIT Design Hub.

A note about location and language: Much of the practice work reflected on in this research has been undertaken in Tamaki Makaurau Auckland, New Zealand, in fact frequently in the very neighbourhood in which I live. This is a city perched on a volcanic field, strung across an isthmus between two harbours, threaded across by streams and creeks. Given that place is the ‘field of concern’ of this practice, much of the work engages with the specificities of this place, including its geography and contemporary urban forms.

Particular reference is made in this text to ‘The Whau’. Pronounced as in the English word ‘foe’, this is the name of the district in which I live as well as the estuarine river that flows through this area. The name is also lent to The Whau Local Board, the municipal authority that governs the area at a local level. To help situate a series of overlapping projects undertaken in this neighbourhood and on the river a more detailed description of the geography and significance of the Whau River is given in Part 2.

Given the location of this particular practice this text includes words in Te Reo Māori, the indigenous language of Aotearoa New Zealand. As a pākehā (New Zealander of European descent) I habitually make use of some Te Reo Māori words and phrases as they form part of the everyday lexicon in New Zealand. Where Te Reo Māori words are used the English translation is given directly afterwards, enclosed in brackets. Translations are all sourced from the Māori Dictionary Online (Moorfield 2017).
Compendium Part 1: The Practice of Feeling for Place: an account

Introduction to Compendium Part 1

This doctoral research is conceived as a ‘meta project’ in relation to research through practice. The practice exists as persistent thread, tracing a path from installation art-making to the expanded edges of architecture. The PhD research, as its own project then, is not structured through a series of practice case studies. Rather it has operated an ongoing reciprocal engagement with my practice, coinciding with particular instances and intensities, reflecting on these instances in relation to the longer thread. As a result the PhD research as its own project can be seen to prompt or buoy certain lines of enquiry. Fabricating this compendium, this ‘condensed representation’, has entailed the documentation of the meta project. Part 1 of the compendium offers a journeying account, my narrative of ‘thinking through’ the practice of feeling for place. The four chapters that comprise Part 1 are text-based and reference other writers, thinkers and practitioners in order to build a deeper background and context for the practice.

Chapter 1 titled A practice between art and architecture charts my movement into the research. It situates my art practice in the vein of others in leading away from the object and into the social and temporal. This first chapter also considers the motivation or ethic underpinning the research. It locates a desire to bring attention to the complexity of place with the aim that an ethic of place attachment and care might unfold.
In Chapter 2, Formulating the practice of an experimental self, I wonder about the role of theory and theory-making in this reflective project. I point to the trap identified by Freya Mathews who describes the limitations of theory-making as a means of understanding the world. For Mathews, in privileging the ‘inner theatre of the mind’ the theorist has “subtly removed itself from reality and became reality’s spectator, an observer of the drama” (Mathews 2009, p. 344). This dilemma chimed with me as, in order to ‘get to know’ the ‘practice of feeling for place’, I situated myself as spectator, an observer of the practice. In so doing I lost access to the nuanced and calibrated desires and methods of the practice as I attempted to make it ‘fit’ with a ‘universal picture’.

In response to this dilemma I have adopted what I call ‘formula thinking’. Inhabiting a mathematical schema, the mode of an experimental self is located with place and practice in the form of an equation. Though this formula proves troublesome (due to the way the mathematical symbols tend to alienate), here it is shown to have acted as a useful operative device, one that has also been used by others as a short-hand account, a concentration or condensation, a figuration of practice in an association with the wider world in which it operates. The anatomy of my equation arranges self, place and practice in a relational manner. This formula borrows the recognised form of an equation to bring spatiality and performativity to text. In so doing it figures my practitioner-self, not outside as a theorist or critic ‘looking at’ the practice but in a mobile relation with my subject and field. Importantly the formula introduces the ‘mode’ of an experimental self as a way of ‘being in’ the research, and the remainder of this chapter explores this repositioning or reinvention of the self (or selves) as perhaps an inescapable product of creative-arts research, one that might gather and mobilise agency in differing ways.

In Chapter 3, A Suite of Tactical Ways is introduced. Here the tactic is underscored as the primary methodological means through which the practice of feeling for place is carried out.

The four tactics, all phrased as actions, are: 
- Situationing
- Mobilising accessories
- Becoming ultra-local
- Plying stealthy masquerades

In this chapter each tactic is described in some detail, traced from examples and instances in the practice work. While figured here, for explication, as separate methods, the synchronous and synergistic use of the tactics in practice is underscored. Each tactic is also set in a broader field of reference, charting an affinity with a community of practice operating in this vein.

The final tactic discussed in this section, Plying Stealthy Masquerades concludes by proposing a potential future shape or ambience of the practice of feeling for place where disciplinarity, claims for work as art or architecture, or as activity in-between, might become dissolved, where work takes place in a different ontological landscape.

Chapter 4, ‘Afterwards’ is the final chapter of this account. Here we circle backwards, re-visiting the trajectory of the research, finding that this ‘correspondence between’ art and architecture has given its shuttling, sharing spatiality to the whole of the project. Here the experimental self arcs us back through her research, revealing her circuitous looping back and forth between practice and reflection. This motion gives traction to the research, generating feeling for place through things and events that act in tactical, relational and contingent ways. Here the performing text of the formula, the in-process mode of an experimental self and the actions of the tactical ways are revealed as modalities that respond to processual nature of place as extroverted assemblage.
Chapter 1: A practice between art and architecture

Part 1 The practice of feeling for place

[Note to self: Roaming around the emptied and derelict building you come across one office that seems to be in working order, as though the inhabitant has just popped out, leaving even her cardigan and coat behind. (Recollection of Josephine’s Office, 1993)]

The intersections of lived space and time

Throughout the 1990s I developed an art practice in which I revealed the spatio-social politics of places through the site-specific installation of objects, images, sound and text. This work mostly took place opportunistically in public spaces or redundant urban sites, and in devising each work I attended to the complexities of these place assemblages. Operating here was a kind of revealing, a sensitive-aesthetic-perceptive exposure of the specificity of places and the ways in which such specificity is composed through the effects of larger cultural, social and economic forces. The insertion and manipulation of objects, sounds and signs provided the opportunity to use art-making as a formal, conceptual and critical tool to point to the peculiar politics of particular spaces.

In one work from this period a group of artist friends took temporary custody of the Wellesley Street Telephone Exchange. A large Edwardian building in central Auckland, the Exchange was formerly staffed by hundreds of predominantly female telephone operators. Abandoned in the late 1980s due to the privatisation of the telephone network and changes in communications technology, the building was at this time caught on the cusp of gentrification and the recasting of the city as a site for the service and production of culture—caught in joining Koolhaas’s ‘generic’ wherein “the routine transformation of housing to offices, warehouses to lofts, abandoned churches to nightclubs, all authenticity is relentlessly evacuated” (Koolhaas 1998, p. 1249).

13 Soon after our occupation it became the new ‘contemporary’ wing of the Auckland Art Gallery. It is now populated by shops, cafes and offices.
Chapter 1: A practice between art and architecture

Finding the building in a derelict state and littered with traces of its prior use was a prompt to speculating on its past and future. In one part of this building I made a work titled *Stairway to Success* [Fig. 2 & 3]. Aphorisms, combed from popular contemporary business self-help literature, were placed on the stair risers. Ascending the staircase from ground to first floor you were immersed in a space full of snappy pieces of wisdom on how to get ahead: “the only place where success comes before work is in a dictionary”, “a messy desk is a messy mind” and “there is always room at the top”. The architecture of the stairwell provided the ‘upwardly mobile’ journey in which the market-savvy business person would supersede the civil servant in an era of deregulation and privatisation.

Fig. 2 *Stairway to Success*, 1993, first flight.
Fig. 3 *Stairway to Success*, 1993, second flight.
For another work in the same building, scattered detritus left behind when the telephone exchange was evacuated (as if in an emergency) was re-assembled to constitute a lone operational office. In Josephine’s Office [Fig. 4 & 5] desk, chair, umbrella, coat, cardigan, wallet and even Josephine’s birthday cards were arranged to temporarily and discreetly re-inscribe the place, personality and social world of a single former employee. Each of these works pointed inwards, to the specific architecture and former function of the building, but also outwards, to gather larger contexts such as global changes in labour and technology.

At times I interspersed physical and virtual spaces. In Blind Man’s Bluff [Fig. 6 & 7], voice recordings of men describing themselves and what they seek in a relationship were compiled from a telephone-dating platform. In what now seems an endearing mix of analogue technologies (presciently heralding the dating potential of the Internet), this platform used newspaper listing (text) and answerphone (voice) messaging to help strangers ‘hook up’. In the exhibition of this work the disembodied recordings of the men speaking played quietly through a small grill placed in the gallery wall. Around this wrapped a translucent booth. To listen required positioning your body awkwardly in the booth and pressing your ear close against the wall at waist height, while reaching for a timer-switch higher on the wall. In this arrangement the listener became a strange contorted body held by the shower cubicle-like booth. At work here for the listener–viewer was an apprehension of the collapse of public and private space. The desires of the men for connection, once voiced and made public through the phone–newspaper dating platform, became more public through their appropriation in the gallery. To access their voices and words however the listener–viewer had to make themselves bodily implicit in the exhibition, their own awkwardly positioned body appropriated as spectacle in turn.

Fig. 4 Josephine’s Office, 1993.
Fig. 5 Josephine’s Office, 1993.
Fig. 6 Blind Man’s Bluff, 1994.
Fig. 7 Blind Man’s Bluff, 1994.
The work I made at this time was always temporary, a decision to resist the value of art as enmeshed in persistent commodity fetishism, and the mantle of the ‘transcendent artist’ as the maker of rare objects. Instead I was interested in the very role that an artist might play in leading away from the object and into the intersections of lived space and time. Around this same time the curator Mary Jane Jacob pointed to the attraction of marginal spaces wherein artists were motivated by “the meaning that such places convey and contribute to the work of art, the freedom they allow for innovation, the potential they offer for public accessibility, and the psychic space they afford artists and audience” (Jacob 1995, p. 50). In this vein I sought to heighten micro-traces of occupation and to intervene in sites in such a way that taken-for-granted, ‘everyday’ boundaries, categories and vectors could become visible or experienced, registered and questioned.

Yet while I sought out such alternative spaces, curating projects for vacant shops, engaging with city authorities to make temporary work in public places or installing ‘guerrilla’ projects by night, I felt that much art produced at this time was irrelevant to most people’s lives, and exceptionally self-involved. By this time I was living in London in the era of the YBAs. This grouping of mid 1990s Young British Artists is collectively identified by art critic and theorist Nikos Papastergiadis as self-consciously withdrawing from the realm of the political, revelling in the “supposed obsolescence of politics and theory”, and producing what Papastergiadis describes as “vapid and superficial practices” (Papastergiadis 2006, p. 46). I was a young New Zealand artist and I couldn’t seem to connect with this celebrity art culture in which extraordinary capital and energy was available to embalm a shark in a glass tank, even if I could appreciate the refined visual qualities and ironic titles skilfully deployed in such work.

Of course many forms of more socially calibrated artistic practice were opening up. In the UK the value of art practice as a form of ‘open-ended industry research’ was being explored in artist residencies within corporations and through interdisciplinary collaborations where artists worked within cultural institutions such as the London Science Museum. Similar collaborations occurred across departments within universities. Alongside this, the terrain of ‘new genre public art’ was being extended by commissioning agencies such as Art Angel and the Public Art Development Trust in London, and in Europe through projects such as Skulptur Projekte Münster. I was particularly aware of, and enamoured with, the series of projects curated by Mary Jane Jacob as part of Sculpture Chicago’s Culture in Action (1992) in which projects were undertaken by artists in collaboration with community groups and social agencies. Developed over an extended period of time and directly challenging public art as monument or even landscape, the projects in Culture in Action appealed in that they resisted easy consumption, operating in an open-ended fashion with a “prevailing aesthetic trait of invisibility” (Scanlan 1993).

Back in London however, the ascendancy of the YBAs coincided with the rise of Britpop, music inspired by 1960s English pop culture, which was in turn productively tied by the public relations machine of Britain’s New Labour political party to the upward turn in the British economy, resulting in a rising mood of what became dubbed ‘Cool Britannia’. In the midst of this moment of emergent nationalism, although of Anglo-Saxon ethnic origin, I felt decidedly un-British and I began to pine for my pākehā (New Zealander of European descent) self and the Pacific geographies and post-colonial complexities surfacing at home.

14 I’m referencing the widely known work by Damien Hirst, The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living (1991).

15 See Bishop (2004, p. 77).
So you want to be an architect?

It was all very well making work about the politics of place, but however much I sought out venues and instances where the work could be freely encountered in the public realm, it seemed that both audience and outcome was narrow and fleeting. I wanted to work with a greater sense of agency in the actual, in asking strategic questions of the changing nature of the city and our roles as individuals and collectives in it, and in shaping it. So I decided to return to Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland to study architecture, and in so doing fell head over heels for this “Mother of the Arts”.  

The discipline of architecture manipulates the formal and material while attending to the social; it requires a passing understanding of the physical and metaphysical, it is intractably indebted to the past yet utterly invested in speculative futures; it operates across scales and has the capacity to be tactile, material and fully immersive. Architects care at once about the workings of the whole city and the shape of the coffee pot. 

What’s more, architecture has its own mysterious disciplinary language, to which I gradually became initiated—the coded drawings that, taken as a set, allow those ‘in the know’ to imagine and propose a future condition, to construct imaginary narratives in places as yet unbuilt. I was hooked.

In the final years of my formal architecture studies (in the early 2000s) I worked for a small practice. From this I discovered two things. The first is that the practice of architecture in contemporary Auckland is overwhelmingly a techno-economic pursuit, protected by a professional body and set in attendance to legislation, mechanisms of building control and market conditions, and actioned through the production of copious documents. Architects spend only a very small part of their time enmeshed in the potentiality of the social worlds of their clients. The client body tends to either be, or be represented by, the privileged few; it is a rare occurrence for architects, in Auckland at least, to work with a wider client body such as those who might occupy the more public spaces they design.

The second thing I discovered concerned the working life of the office. This particular office was entirely staffed by men who around 6:00pm somewhat surreptitiously picked up the phone and let the person on the other end know that they wouldn’t be home until much later. After that dinner would be ordered in, and somehow the tension would break as everyone settled into a long night of work, undisturbed by the messy intrusion of domestic life. I’m not critical of this version of practice—in fact I admire those who, with a set of relationships supporting the office, can wade through these technical and economic realities and yet craft good or beautiful buildings and public spaces. But I did know that this conventional practice model held no appeal for me, and as a graduate architect with a small baby, this particular work–life rhythm was never going to work.
Art to architecture—a practice between art and architecture

I had a hunch that by drawing my site-specific temporal art practice into a critical correspondence with the disciplinary procedures of architecture, I might find ways to engage the messy realm “between the lived and the built”,\(^{18}\) prioritising the relational attributes of place alongside the spatial. A project I carried out on the cusp of architectural graduation involved the close observation of Avondale Racecourse, a financially failing relic of the horse-racing industry located in my own neighbourhood. The racecourse is a contested site, a large open space squeezed by Auckland’s growing western suburbs. While physically decrepit, it has for many years quietly offered a fabulous model of a rich socially programmed space, supporting both sanctioned and illicit activities. Alongside horse racing and training, pigeon racers, bingo players, multiple sports codes, learner drivers, ballroom dancers, lunch-time poker players, film shoots, rough sleepers and Auckland’s largest flea and produce market all find a home within this distinctive arrangement of oval track, inner-field, grandstand, function rooms and parking lot. Resisting the normative architectural urge to ‘plan’, I instead uncovered the prolific social and spatial performance of the racecourse. Through the agency of spatio-temporal mapping I proposed an architectural intervention centred on an expansion of this fine-grained pattern of use, a socially performative architecture of time and place, rather than building. [Fig. 9].

From the singular and fleeting spectacle to recursive everyday practices, the city is a relational entity performed into being. The practice of feeling for place implicitly rejects the impoverished, abstracted architectural notion of ‘site’. Following my hunch, that site-specific and temporal art practice may have something to offer, and fascinated by the delicate self-organising nature of place assemblages such as the racecourse, I have speculated as to how architecture might operate through attention to place where the local knowledge is largely held by others. My sense was that, through ‘uncovering’ or disclosing place as I had in my art practice, I might generate an expansion of the modes and methods of architecture and develop a ‘way in’ to working with such place complexity. This PhD research documents these modes and methods.

\(^{18}\) I am indebted to Melanie Dodd for this phrase drawn from the title of her doctorate (2011), Between the Lived and the Built: Foregrounding the User in Design for the Public Realm.

Fig. 8 Untitled Wallpapering K’Rd, c.1994, a guerrilla project.
Fig. 9 Avondale Synchron(i)city, 2005, mapping of the Avondale Racecourse.
Incorporating contemporary art practices into their ways of working, muf architecture/art similarly value the ability of art practice to avoid a predetermined problem and solution-focussed paradigm by instead insisting first on “record[ing] minutely what is, while remaining unworried by what should be” (Ainley 2001, p.15). For muf, who concentrate on public-realm projects, this method offers a moment in which the propositional stage of a project might be suspended in order to prioritise a potential expansion of an architectural brief through an intimate encounter with a place. Their adoption of modes of contemporary art-making offers the disruption of normative architectural protocols, generating space for a more open speculation about place, time, people and pleasure. To work with the complexity of place in this way is to embrace the contingency and relationality of spatial production ahead of its material and object configurations.

An ethical orientation
(or why I think this matters)

The practice that I have developed and reflected upon across the course of this PhD is underpinned by an ethical orientation compellingly expressed by philosopher Jane Bennett. Contending that social representations are performed things, Bennett reminds us that “the cultural narratives that we use help to shape the world in which we will have to live” (Bennett 2001, p. 10). Identifying the dominant cultural narrative of contemporary culture as one of disenfranchisement and disenchantment, Bennett proposes an ‘alter-narrative of enchantment’ as a means of generating attachment to the world. For Bennett, this mood of enchantment may be valuable for ethical life, a life where we might feel more adept in pursuing our seemingly intractable problems of environment and social justice. She says, “I tell my alter-tale because it seems to me that presumptive generosity, as well as the will to social justice, are sustained by periodic bouts of being enamoured with existence, and that it is too hard to love a disenchanted world” (Bennett 2001, p. 10).

For Bennett, such an experience of enchantment might stem from “an uneasy combination of artifice and spontaneity” (2001, p. 10). In her philosophical practice Bennett champions the cultivation of a kind of ‘anticipatory readiness’ or a ‘perceptual style’ open to the appearance and experience of such enchanting engagements (Bennett 2010, p. 5). While moral codes might
form an important aspect of ethics, alone they are insufficient for the actual enactment of ethical aspirations, which instead require “bodily movements in space, mobilisations of heat and energy, a series of choreographed gestures and a distinctive assemblage of affective propulsions” (Bennett 2001, p. 3). In combination, such mobilisations and assemblages can foster an aesthetic disposition and a mood of lively and intense engagement with the world, hospitable to “an ethical comportment of generosity toward others” (Bennett 2001, p. 111).

The work that I carry out responds to specific sets of conditions as defined by the particularities of commissioning and inception. However, my practice viewed more broadly demonstrates the ‘combination of artifice and spontaneity’ through which such a moment of ‘seeing the world differently’ can emerge.

Water seen down the microscope is alive and full of creatures in *Fluid City* [Fig. 10], (Part 2, pp. 12–15), a street is transformed into a river with a paddling waka (canoe) in *Come Join the Circus* as a hidden water geography is re-enacted on the paved surface (Part 2, pp. 56–59), and a suburban park is imagined as a cloud-like atmosphere in *Here Now: re-imagining New Lynn* [Fig. 11], (Part 2, pp. 48–51). Each of these projects corrals the gestures, mobilisations and assemblages that Bennett suggests points us towards a generous ethical comportment.

I do not make the ambitious claim that, after participating in a flotilla on their neighbourhood river in the *Flotilla Whau* [Fig. 12], (Part 2, pp. 26–33), or experiencing the installations in *Here Now: re-imagining New Lynn* (Part 2, pp. 48–51), or by adding their own personal story to a collective mapping in *Kei Konei Koe: ōtapiwae ki Tāmaki Makaurau / You Are Here: mapping Auckland* [Fig. 13], (Part 2, pp. 72–75), the citizens of Auckland are overcome with generosity for each other, love for the planet and a will to social change! Less grandly I suggest that an expansion of architectural practice in this manner might allow new thinking about and knowledge of places to emerge through this gentle prompting of an expanded urban imaginary.

Bennett suggests that we can cultivate a capacity to experience enchantment through deliberate strategies, such as giving a greater expression to a sense of play, or by honing our sensory receptivity to the “marvellous specificity of things” (Bennett 2001, p. 4). Each of the projects I have mentioned here creates the scaffold for such a cultivation, whereby this potential enchantment with a place may come about through highlighting the complexity of a place—its messiness and unmoored nature—rather than through its ‘tidying up’ and reduction to symbolic inscription on urban surfaces. After all it was this very socio-spatial complexity that I had found so compelling, so enchanting, at the racecourse in my final year as an architecture student.

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20 Here I’m thinking about a number of civic projects in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland where an indication of the specificity of a place is attempted through the commissioning of an artist to design patterns applied to concrete walls or paving.
Chapter 2: Formulating the practice of an experimental self

As we research and work together, we draw circles around our work, around ourselves. The circles become larger and larger, like the ones we used to draw in the sand when we were children. The circles enclose us momentarily, they define us but are easily escaped, Abandoned and widened.

(Fitzpatrick & Fitzpatrick, 2016 p. 65).
Chapter 2: Formulating the practice of an experimental self

A ‘piecing-together’ method of knowing

The research carried out over the course of this PhD reflects on practice, simmering to the surface a mode and some tactical ways of the practice of feeling for place. What then is the role of theory and theory-making in this endeavour?

Part way through this inquiry it struck me that in reflecting on my practice, in constructing a discourse of it, I was following an orthodox pattern of Western thought. In each attempt to make the practice intelligible (to myself, to others) I sought to establish a theory of the practice by identifying some ‘universal truths’ of it. To carry this analytical project out I adopted a classificatory matrix, placing aspects of my practice in neat columns; forms, methods and theoretical alignments [Fig. 14 & 15]. I then sought to ‘map’ my projects across this grid, using the detailed exposition of projects to infer the efficacy and ‘authority’ of this universalising table. With hindsight this was all rather Victorian really—if only I could get the taxonomy ‘right’ the unruly practice would neatly ‘fit’ to the ‘model’ that I had constructed, yet this clear correlation between parts and the whole sadly eluded me. Michel De Certeau could have told me I was on the wrong track here; in his investigation of the practices of everyday life he shows us that such a matrix can only determine “the elements used, but not the ‘phrasing’ produced by the bricolage (the artisan-like inventiveness) and the discursiveness that combine these elements” (de Certeau 1984, p. xviii. Original italics and parentheses).

In carrying out this approach I was activating that which philosopher Freya Mathews identifies as the dominant structure of Western thought—a pattern of inference from universal to particular. Mathews is concerned by the failure of ecological discourse to effect any practical shift in addressing ecological crisis, and she locates this failure in the limitations of theory-making as a means of understanding the world. Her project then is to “highlight [the] defining characteristics of theoria, and to conceive of alternatives to it” (Mathews 2009, p. 349). In so doing she identifies a kind of removal, a distancing, inherent in the actions of theory-making. The theorist, Mathews argues, is concerned with the world as “a completed totality projected by the subject onto an ideal screen, where that totality is then perceived as external to and independent of the subject”
Part 1

The practice of feeling for place

"How do you develop a city-wide strategy when you are fascinated by the detail of things? And how can you make something small-scale in the here and now if you are driven by the urge to formulate strategic proposals for the future?"

Katherine Schonfield
Chapter 2: Formulating the practice of an experimental self

(Mathews 2009, p. 343). In projecting a mental reflection or representation of the world onto a kind of abstract screen—an ‘inner theatre’—the mind constitutes theory, and achieving such an ideal representation, model or doubling has, in the Western world, constituted cognition, knowledge.

In this manner, theoretical discourse operates as a lens through which we “look at the world and imagine it as spread out passively for our epistemic gaze” (Mathews n.d.). Mathews argues that through this structure we execute a specular arrangement and that this way of knowing is ineffectual for activating immersion in the world. This presents a problem when you want to promote action in the face of pressing environmental change. Theory therefore, should not be the “taken-for-granted vehicle of cognition” (Mathews 2009, p. 342).

Instead Mathews proposes that we might engage in a strategic project of knowing:

As strategists, we are concerned, not like the theorist, with the world as a completed totality projected by the subject onto an ideal screen, where that totality is then perceived as external to and independent of the subject; we are concerned rather with the immediate field of influences in which we are immersed and the way in which that field impacts on our agency. [...] Our focus has shifted from the world as an inner but nevertheless external-to-the-subject object of observation to the immediate field of active influences in which we are agentially immersed (Mathews 2009, p. 349).

What I am describing here is a super-condensed version of Mathews’ argument when in her writing she fully traces the emergence of ‘theoria’ in Western thought, traversing the sticky issues of subject and object dualism, rationalism, logic, universalism of scientific law, causation, etc. And I should point out that Mathews does not discount the value of theory-making in toto, rather she observes that “to posit strategia need not mean discarding theoria, but may rather be to situate theoria within a larger epistemological context” (Mathews 2009, p. 357). I should also note here that there is of course a palpable shift away from this abstract, distanced position of the theorist in the expression of theory-making under post-modern conditions, with subaltern, feminist and queer theory all offering a politically powerful recentring of the personal and particular over the universal.

In this light Mathews’ position can be seen as part of a more widely understood turn from theory-as-a-way-of-seeing-and-knowing to practice-as-a-way-of-knowing-and-acting. The geographer Sarah Whatmore for example, identifies a shift from discourse to practice, in which social agency is ‘relocated’ in practice or performance rather than through representation or discourse thinking (Whatmore 2006, p. 603).

As a practitioner I am not seeking a ‘big-picture’ theory but rather a way to proceed, to act. As an exemplar of the strategic practice that she proposes, Mathews points to the figure of the Chinese sage who proceeds, she says, by cultivating sensitivity to the “field of influences [...] in which he is immersed”. She calls this a conformational practice; the sage inhabits, she says, “a jigsaw world, everything shaped by and shaping everything else” (Mathews 2009, p. 351). In taking up this mandate of a ‘strategic practice’, Gibson-Graham regard this jigsaw-puzzle metaphor as conveying “an up-close, piecing-it-together, participatory approach to understanding (or performing) the world rather than a big-picture, spectator approach that captures and reduces everything via universal laws” (Gibson-Graham, 2011, p. 4. Original parenthesis). This piecing-it-together approach, they say, “is a way of being in the world; it’s improvisational and experimental” Gibson-Graham 2011, p. 4. My italics).
Mathews’ strategic practice offers an approach whereby the complexity of the practice of feeling for place can be addressed not as a ‘whole’, understood through a universalising theory, but as something in flux, in which I am (with others) adaptively immersed. The intelligibility produced through a strategic practice such as this is harnessed not to point to ‘truth’ but to move from intelligible knowledge back into practice. The difference between a strategic approach and a theoretical approach can be summarised as follows: 21

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic Approach</th>
<th>Theoretical Approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Immersed in fluxing field</td>
<td>Object as epistemically removed from subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowing emerges from action and folds back into action</td>
<td>Object lacks power of self animation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowing from practicing</td>
<td>Cannot include knower in contents, seeking fixed and external account</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I will circle back to this ‘agentically immersed’ strategic practitioner, and her ways and dispositions later on in this account. At this point in the research, when I was attempting to locate a way to ‘think through’ the practice, Mathews’ explication of theory-making rehearsed the predicament I was experiencing. In researching my own practice I was ‘ordering’ it as an external object. In seeking an ideal and universal view I had positioned myself in a space outside the practice. From this exterior position I then attempted to massage the practice to fit within this totalising view, losing parts that could not mesh. In so doing I lost, to use Mathews’ term, a ‘conformational view’. In so doing I lost hold of the agency of the practice; as a static object of consideration it was no longer lively, sensitive, mutable. I needed to find another way.
Chapter 2: Formulating the practice of an experimental self

Formula thinking

What I have sought then is a lever, a tool through which I can prise open the practice of feeling for place without setting myself aside as an observer, without rendering the practice a specimen, the ‘object’ of my PhD research. In fact what I sought was a means of casting myself ‘back in’ as a subject of the research. This desire is explored in some detail by Elizabeth Grierson who, in considering ‘creative arts research’ as a condition of knowing says, “implicit in the process or events of knowing are inevitable reflections on processes of self-making through creative actions and activities as one is mediated by, and opens up to one’s research process to the point that one ‘becomes’ a subject” (Grierson 2009, p. 17). For Grierson, researchers in the creative arts work with materials, technologies and bodies to reveal something about the world and themselves in the process: “as they construct discourses of creativity they are constructed by those same discourses” (Grierson 2009, p. 18).

This lever, as it turns out, has taken an odd and surprising contour as I propose a formula in a mathematical shape. The formula seen here [Fig. 18] acts as a gathering device that figures the parts in a productive operational relation. Rather than the matrix I had used earlier, which acts to locate, categorise and spatially fix the characteristics of practice, the formula acts as a procedural statement that figures the relation of practice to an experimental self, to situation, context, content, motivation, politic and ethic. Shortly I will pry apart the constituent parts of my formula but first, and to build my case for formula thinking, a few words on the efficacy of the equation.

Picking up the algebraic form to elucidate a relationship of self–practice–place has been a move in the PhD research racked with ambivalence. The appropriation of a mathematical appearance has acted in some ways as a red herring, and a lapse into this ‘other’ language has unnerved some of those who have tested it with me as they reach for their sometimes rusty mathematical knowledge. (Scant and distant would best describe my knowledge of maths.) Friction between the linguistic and the mathematical has been detected as the mathematical signs are ‘transcribed’ into a variety of words with shades of meaning that take the equation in differing directions.

22 It was suggested to me that the idea of a tool in this way is an instrumental approach. What I picture, when I use the word ‘lever’, is a tool held in the hand, prising open something, say a can of paint. Once the lid has been lifted, first from just one point on the circumference, then pulled up and away from its grip with the paint can, the other world of the slippery contents are seen and smell. The lever allows the seal to be broken and the contents become mobile and fluid. The levering hand is potentially tainted, stained, infected by the contents, which are most likely to spill over, escaping the can. The lever is the conceptual tool that ‘opens up’ and allows all this to occur.

Fig. 18 The practice-self-place formula.
Part 1

The practice of feeling for place

I choose to read the signs this way:
- \( x \) becomes of
- \( / \) becomes in
- \( = \) becomes results in
from which I get: the practice of an experimental self in place results in a shifted form of architectural practice.

I concede however that mathematical signs carry ambivalent meanings. The division sign has proved particularly problematic. Rather than ‘in’ it might mean ‘divided by’ or ‘apportioned into’, whereby the practice of an experimental self is ‘cut up’ by place. On the other hand it might mean place ‘goes into’ the practising of an experimental self. These shades of meaning have unsettled the formula in productive ways. The practising of an experimental self is at times disrupted by the specific attributes of a place. Working in public view in the centre of the Auckland Art Gallery, or with students on and in the ecology, topography and history of an urban river, or with a specialist cartographic librarian who’s too kind to let on that she’s appalled by my amateur’s knowledge, or with a group of kids to make a performance in a suburban town centre, or in a meeting room with Auckland Council staff discussing a multi-million-dollar park procurement, is to be differently placed. The practice bends and shifts, sprouts new limbs and is refashioned by the peculiarities of such placements. This is precisely when my experimental self is activated, and from this activation, new/shifted forms of Practice (capital P) emerge.

After considering Mathews’ discussion of the pitfalls in Western knowledge-making, the irony that I’ve reached for this ‘scientific’ form is not lost on me, and I’m not ordinarily drawn to mathematical equations; in fact the algebraic form usually sends me running for the hills. However, in concocting this self/practice formula I’m reminded of two instances where I have found a similarly contoured explication of practice helpful or provocative. The most helpful is an explication of the methodology employed by muf architecture/art, the other is a conceptual art work by the artist Martin Creed, which is more open-ended and provocative. First then to Creed:

Martin Creed’s artwork titled Work No. 232 consists of the equation:

\[
\text{the whole of the world} + \text{the work} = \text{the whole of the world}
\]

Considering this statement, and in light of Creed’s other works, Louisa Buck suggests that this equation sums up Creed’s abiding ambivalence, a desire to make “both something and nothing” (Buck 2000, p. 110). She says Creed’s art “is both of and about the world we inhabit, where options are open, decisions are difficult, and the most banal matters sometimes have the most profound impact” (Buck 2000, p. 110). From another direction Malcolm Quinn takes Creed’s equation as an intriguing model for practice-led research in creative arts, in which assumptions about context must be brought into question. While on first look this work seems to suggest dissolving art practice into sociality (the whole of the world), for Quinn it also offers “the moment when ‘the whole world’ is placed under question” (Quinn 2006). Quinn reads Creed’s equation as a way of configuring a relation whereby even though ‘the work’ can be discerned, ‘the whole of the world’ (or perhaps ‘worlding’ to apply a more affective term) is a figure (or process) that cannot be escaped, that is inevitable. Art work both comes from, and leads into, the world; through this shuttling they are not readily divisible, each contributes to the other.

24 Worlding Refrains is the title of Kathleen Stewart’s afterword in Seigworth & Gregg (2010).

23 In 2000 this statement was rendered in lower-case white neon letters and installed across the neo-classical facade of the Tate Britain in London. Work No. 232 is now part of the Tate permanent collection.
The second algorithmic distillation I’ve found useful is one that discerns the methodology of muf architecture/art offered by their late collaborator Katherine Shonfield. muf’s practice formula goes like this:

\[
\text{detail/strategy} = \text{DETAIL} \\
\text{(Shonfield 2001, p. 15)}
\]

Through this equation Shonfield identifies the muf methodology as moving from the particular (detail) to the general (strategy) and back again. Their method she says, emerges from a critique of the conundrum of the architect planner, from the double-ended question:

\[
\text{How do you develop a city-wide strategy when you are fascinated by the detail of things? And how can you make something small-scale in the here and now if you are driven by the urge to formulate strategic proposals for the future?} \\
\text{(Shonfield 2001, p.14).}
\]

muf’s schemes develop through an initial attention to the particular, from which a general strategy is devised, but then a scheme is realised—or made actual—through very particular design moves. Shonfield notes that this stands in marked contrast to the received methodologies of urban planning which (echoing Mathews’ critique of theory-making) invariably move from general themes to particular instances. She says:

\[
\text{muf try to tune into those aspects of the urban experience that the distancing and technical methods of analysis, concomitant with moving from the general to the particular, invariably fudge. They try, in other words, to be a lot more precise} \\
\text{(Shonfield 2001, p.15).}
\]

As an example of this approach, muf altogether reject the ‘master plan’ as a conventional urban-design method in which it is assumed that strategy and detail are “generically, qualitatively and aesthetically disjointed” (Shonfield 2001, p. 20). Instead of arranging space ‘from above’, muf are more likely to engage in forms of research that highlight and value ‘what is there’ in order to then ‘nurture the possible’ through events and small-scale interventions. From this up-close engagement they then ‘define what’s missing’, capturing this in an expanded architectural brief. \(^{26}\) (muf & J+L Gibbons 2009). The muf formula devised by Shonfield provides a memorable short-hand account of this method.
muf’s *detail/strategy* and Creed’s *whole world* + *the work* both demonstrate the perhaps unique value of formulae in construing an operational relationship between parts. In keeping with mathematical procedure, these parts are arranged in a mobile and active relation, the placement of nominators can be switched and the equation can be ‘worked through’, from which a result will emerge. In an equation, ‘things happen’; the legible form provides the distilled description of an event.

In this PhD research, the practice–self–place formula, ungainly as it may be, is useful because it does two things. In her book *Artful* Ali Smith points out the inherent difficulty with text: “The main problem with writing anything at all is that it’s inevitably always linear—one word after another” (Smith 2013, p. 31). Actually, writing doesn’t have to be linear at all, as I’m writing this I jump from place to place in the document, freely cutting here, pasting there. But reading, now that really is still more attached to the linear (as you can feel, following my words with your eyes along this very line). First then, and in light of this, the formula borrows a known form to escape the domination of linearity, instead bringing spatiality and performativity to text. The anatomy of the equation situates the parts, arranging signifiers in a relational manner. As a result, rather than probing from the outside, from the position of the theorist looking for a fit to the universal picture, the formula places my subjectivity ‘back in’, as the experimental self is a constituent part, an active ingredient in this performing text. Second, the formula suggests a recursive action, like practising—the formula can and is carried out, and in so doing things shift and change. The practice–self–place formula acts almost like an incantation or spell, wherein the words through being recited (chanted) cause something to occur. This idea of repetition also allows the formula to act as a mnemonic device, as a concentration of this entire project, a ‘private manifesto’ condensed in a formula in order to be shared.

27 A magic spell is a formulation of words that through its recitation causes something, often a change in state, to occur.

28 The idea of a ‘private manifesto’ is borrowed from Sand Helsel. In her PhD research she recounts that “by identifying my search for common pleasures, and establishing the foundations of an ethical awareness in my practice […] I begin to trust the legitimacy of my methods, and thus articulate them more clearly, and test them more consciously” (Helsel, 2009, p. 13).
Chapter 2: Formulating the practice of an experimental self

The parts of the self–practice–place formula

Place

Place is the ‘event in space’, operating as a ‘dislocation’ with respect to familiar structures and narratives. It is the unmapped and unmoored that allows for new moorings and mappings. Place, like the subject, is the site and spur of becoming, the opening for politics. (Gibson-Graham 1996 b, p. 39)

To ‘work through’ the parts of the equation I’m going to begin with the bottom line, with place. In an attempt to identify and rehabilitate a philosophical discussion of place, Edward Casey traces its importance as a concept through Western philosophy. He points to the difficulty yet sustainability of the concept whereby: even if it is by no means univocal, ‘place’ is not an incoherent concept that falls apart on close analysis, nor is it flawed in some fundamental manner, easily reducible to some other term, or merely trivial in its consequences (Casey, 1998, p. xii).

Despite this lineage, place will get a short shrift in this thesis as it is well beyond the scope of this PhD to traverse a fully-fledged discourse of this tricky subject. Instead I’m going to stick close to the reasons that I’ve landed with place in this research. By designating place as the denominator in the formula, I’m indicating the field of concern where my practice, working in the mode of an experimental self, is employed for ‘strategic’ purpose—to be transformative of and in place. To use concern, rather than say subject or theme, is to draw on Bruno Latour’s differentiation between matters of fact and “highly complex, historically situated, richly diverse matters of concern” (Latour 2004, p. 237). However it’s also to underscore the affective connotations of this word—concern as worry, solicitude or anxiety, a feeling for place.

Place, as I indicated in the introduction, is erratically apprehended between two poles: the essential, internally orientated and stable on one hand—which might lead to a higher level of place care and solicitude but also to a turn towards historicism, enclosure and exclusion—and on the other hand place is construed as unstable and fluid—the coalescing of trajectories and movement, full of possibility and potential, but consequently difficult to grasp.29

29 While there is a wealth of literature with place as a subject of enquiry there are a few specific texts that I have found useful in tracing the way place has been construed across different fields and epochs. Edward Casey (1998) examines place as a philosophical concept from mythological world-views, through the thinking of Western philosophy from Plato and Aristotle, through to modern and post-modern theories. Tim Cresswell (2002) gives a thorough overview of place as revived through humanist geography from the 1970s onwards. He notes that Yi-Fu Tan and Edward Relph, the two early adopters of place as a term in geography (over location) were influenced by Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. He then introduces critics of this place-centred view through the likes of David Harvey, Gillian Rose and Marc Auge, and sets this static place-view in contrast to one of nomadism and mobility through the philosophical writings of Paul Virilio, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, and the cultural theory of Edward Said, James Clifford, Edward Soja and others. Cresswell notes Massey’s view of place as one that captures this mobility through its attention to links to places beyond. In terms of place as a subject of architecture and art I have found Kim Dovey’s (2010) studies of place, urbanism and identity useful, while Nikos Papastergiadis (2000) and Claire Doherty (2009) both offer views into a number of ways that contemporary art has approached place over the last few decades, mostly since the rise of ‘post-gallery’ art-making. Lucy Lippard (1997) gives a personal account of her encounters with place and place-based art works as she champions contemporary artists whose work addresses place.
Part 1

The practice of feeling for place

Place is also a slippery word in relation to other terms including space, site and situation. This slippage between place and space is evident in de Certeau’s project. For de Certeau place is aligned with order, the institution, stasis, and the proper. De Certeau says of place: “The law of the ‘proper’ rules in the place: the elements taken into consideration are beside one another, each is situated in its own “proper” and distinct location, a location it defines” (de Certeau 1984, p. 117). De Certeau contrasts this with space, which, in his discourse, operates in relation to time and movement, activated by vectors of direction and intersection, by variables and mobile elements. According to de Certeau, space “occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it” (de Certeau 1984, p. 117). This is in contrast to many others who see place as fluid, as can be seen in the quotation at the opening of this section. Cresswell (2002, p. 25) notes this ‘flip’ of place and space as particular to de Certeau.

31Situation will be returned to in Chapter 3, in the first of the tactical ways of the practice of feeling for place.

My use of the word ‘place’ holds two motivations. The first is in response to the resistance I hold to ‘placemaking’ as an instrumental activity claimed by architecture and urban design. As a concept in city design, placemaking collects a wide range of disciplines, practices and agendas from which a large body of methodological and instructional material has been published. Placemaking methodologies often employ numbered ‘step-based’ approaches such as the “Power of 10+” (Project for Public Spaces n.d.) and Jan Gehl’s “Changing Cities in Five Steps” (Sorensen, 2016).


34 See especially the chapter ‘Bridges, graffiti, rivieras and sweetwaters’ in Ferreri & Lang (2016).

35 See Jacobs (1991, 1993) in which she interrogated time–space compression,

36 Placemaking New Zealand have extended an invitation to join their organisation.

Tying place to making in this way assumes an instrumental position, in which place and community are contrived, fabricated, manufactured. In taking up ‘place’ as a term, and being motivated by place transformation, I’m aware that the practice I undertake is construed by some as contributing to this ‘placemaking’ agenda, but what I’m more interested in, in using the term ‘place’, is a version of place conceived through ontological practices rather than these instrumental approaches, prompting a sensitivity to place-becoming rather than placemaking.

The second impetus propelling my practice towards place comes from my critical response to place as closed, as inwardly oriented and static. In the early 1990s the geographer Doreen Massey published two essays (1991, 1993) in which she interrogated time–space compression,
an idea articulated by David Harvey (1989) in which the relationship between time and space is altered through shifts in communication and travel technologies, and through the mobility of capital. Massey critiqued Harvey’s notion by examining how the experience of this ‘compression’ is determined by the differentiated ‘power-geometry’ produced by factors other than capital, such as gender, ethnicity and location. Following this thread Massey proposes that a ‘progressive sense of place’ is required, where place is not considered as enclosed, coherent and homogeneous but is instead conceptualised as process, conceived through an outward-looking ‘consciousness of its links with the wider world’ (Massey 1991, p. 28).

In resisting the “cozy smugness of Heideggarian notions of place” (Cresswell 2002, p. 25) Massey identifies four attributes of this “progressive” sense of place. First, place is not static. The material and non-material composition of places is in a constant state of flux. Secondly, for Massey, places are not enclosed within boundaries. She acknowledges that boundaries are useful for some studies in relation to specific places, but the boundary as a general concept is not useful for a conceptualisation of place itself. All places can be linked to others; places are in fact extroverted, formed by the constellation of such links. It is these links rather than any boundaries that are important to the construction of a place. Thirdly, places do not hold singular identities. Places are full of internal conflicts with each person in a place holding their own version of it. Finally for Massey, a ‘sense of place’ is important, but this specificity of place arises from a place’s external relations rather than from a turn to historicism—an internal set of relations portraying a singular and seamless contents and history. Massey promotes a “global sense of place” (Massey 1991, p. 28) in which the character or uniqueness of a place is constructed by the links that place has to many others beyond. She says:

> Instead then, of thinking of places as areas with boundaries around, they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings, but where a large proportion of those relations, experiences and understandings are constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself, whether that be a street, or a region or even a continent. (Massey 1991, p. 28)

When I came across Massey’s essays around ten years after their publication, this explication of place chimed with the motivations and forms of my art practice, in which I revealed the spatio-social politics of places through the site-specific installation of objects, images, sound and text. Her articulation of place also made sense of the critique I was forming of the instrumental and static architectural reduction of place as site.

In her essays, Massey’s wondering about place is not an abstract undertaking, it is derived from her own physical wandering. She describes the North London suburb where she lives, ‘reading’ it for clues to its various constructions through its links to multiple places beyond. These are evident in everyday space: in the posters pasted up on the wall for a forthcoming Bloody Sunday commemoration, in the sari shop that has been there as long as she can remember, in the traffic snarled up as it tries to join the London ring route at rush hour, in the aeroplane above on a flightpath to Heathrow, and in the presence of the Muslim shopkeeper “utterly depressed by the war in the Gulf, silently chafing at having to sell the Sun” (Massey 1993, p. 65). I had recently moved with a small child to the suburbs of Auckland and I too had begun to wonder about my neighbours and the trajectories that had brought us together in this place.

Cresswell says of Massey’s extroverted place conception, “Place in this sense becomes an event rather than a secure ontological thing rooted in notions of the authentic. Place as an event is marked by openness and change rather than boundedness and permanence” (Cresswell 2002, p. 25). Massey’s version of place acted as a spur for practice. This casting of place as process renders place mutable and opens up possibilities for practising in place wherein temporality becomes as important as object or space, something I had uncovered in the racecourse project at the end of my architectural studies.

Massey’s writing of an open, fluid and processual constitution of place also productively gels with the contingency inherent in assemblage thinking. In sympathy with Massey’s cultural-geographic lens I found DeLanda’s social theory of assemblage a ‘way in’ to this term. DeLanda (2006) highlights the assemblage as a schema of the social that avoids the intellectual habit of privileging either the macro view, looking at ‘society as a whole’, or the micro view, examining the routines, categories and behaviours that structure individual experience.
Assemblages, in DeLanda’s parlance, are wholes constructed from the interactions between multiple heterogeneous parts. The parts of an assemblage relate contingently, thus an assemblage (as Massey’s neighbourhood wanderings attribute) cannot be reduced to an essential notion, as the parts (sari shops, protest memorials, flight paths) are incongruous. The parts constituting the whole of the assemblage can be assembled in different ways and at different scales based not only on their properties but also on their capacities, that is, what the parts are capable of when in combination with other parts (in more or less numbers, denser or looser configurations, etc.). Moreover these component parts “may be detached from and plugged into a different assemblage in which its interactions are different” (DeLanda 2006, p. 10).

For Massey places are ‘extroverted’, constituted by the constellation of their external relations and links. In a similar vein DeLanda says that assemblages are “wholes characterized by relations of exteriority” (DeLanda 2006, p. 10. Original italics). Given this view of place as assemblage, as made up of heterogenous parts contingently relating, a ‘sense of place’ is not therefore ‘essential’, a reduction to a single ‘truth’, but is instead continually produced by the contingencies between the component parts. From an architectural perspective, Kim Dovey acknowledges this resistance to reduction inherent to an assemblage view of place when he says, “To see places as assemblages is to avoid the reduction of place to text, to materiality or to subjective experience” (Dovey 2010, p. 17).

This assemblage view of place provides a way to think about place that avoids the reductive ‘master narrative’ so often activated as the ‘master plan’ in architecture and urban-design terms.

Jane Bennett swells DeLanda’s human/social assemblage to encompass “an animal–vegetable–mineral–sonority cluster with a particular degree and duration of power” (Bennett 2010, p. 23). Locating her call for the cultivation of a disposition or feeling of enchantment through a close attention to assemblages of human–animal–matter has further enhanced my reflection on the practice of feeling for place through an assemblage attitude. Now in reflecting on the work, I pick up my art-making ways to look closer, and further—beyond the immediacy of those assembled humans—to see what else is in play.

Locating the contours or intensities of the assemblages convened in the practice of feeling for place I now include the protozoa and effluent bacteria viewed down the microscope in Fluid City (Part 2, pp. 12–15), and the bird species that seasonally inhabit the same river space as the Flotilla Whau (Part 2, pp. 26–33). I consider the crew of the container ship that carried the islands of Future Islands (Part 2, pp. 76–83) to Italy, and the Venetian canal outside the gallery where they were installed, connected as it is to the same global water-body as my local estuarine river. And I realise that through the assemblage convened in Rue des Islettes [Fig 19] (Part 2, pp. 90–97), Bennett’s ‘sonority’ is traced.

Through the fabrication of the strings of flags and their installation between apartment windows, this cluster includes an everyday lived history of Parisian interiors in the re-used domestic linens (themselves the result of a global cotton trade), the skill and labour of the recent-migrant tailor who sewed them together, the 18th-century urban architecture that formed the courtyard that they cross, the immigration policies of the French government played out in the social housing opposite, and the recent ‘disruptive’ technology of Airbnb that saw us inhabiting Sophie’s apartment, from where we observed and wondered about our neighbourhood.
Practice

Place as assemblage renders the version of place I had previously engaged through art-making and that I find ways to invigorate through this expanded practice of architecture. So, let's turn now to what sits above this, to the upper line of the formula, a line poised at both ends by the word practice. 37

In *The Practice of Feeling for Place*, the word ‘practice’ is taken up across its various shades of meaning. This title’s coda, *compendium for an expanded architecture*, already signals an attention to architectural practice as the field to which this particular practice contributes. In talking about an ‘expanded’ anything it is impossible not to draw a lineage back to Rosalind Krauss’s exploration of the ‘expanded field’ of post-object sculpture. Taking Krauss’s spatial configuration of the field seriously, the authors of *Architecture in an Expanded Field* invoke architecture as “a mobile discipline operating on the edges of other barely contained fields” (Treadwell & Treep 2015, p. vii). They point to the field of architecture not as bounded by the envelope of building (contained by the norms of the profession), but rather as the site of “fertile and vigorous edges”, full of horizontal actions with fissures, folds, overlaps, tears and rips (Treadwell & Treep 2015, p. vii). Here they cast architecture as I encounter it in *the practice of feeling for place*, as a field abundant with experimentation and inter-disciplinarity, as ripe for expansion. This expansion is not necessarily a factor of ‘growing ever larger’ so much as working into these fissures and overlaps, finding out what happens in the correspondence between art and architecture, with particular attention to place as assemblage.

The practice of feeling for place is positioned as a correspondence, a going-on, between art and architecture, and it is through practice that this expansion, or perhaps porosity, of architecture occurs. In bringing place as assemblage into play I’m consciously rejecting the more usually held architectural notion of space as ‘site’—an abstract realm in which the discipline holds ‘mastery’—to rather practise a socially performative architecture of time and place, experimenting with Rendell’s contention that architecture must engage with temporality, process, ethics and subjectivity (Rendell 2013, p. 125). The reflective project of this PhD has prompted a self-conscious ‘piecing together’ of the modes and tactical ways of this practice.

In so doing (and to pick up another shade of meaning of the word ‘practice’) I also take into account practice in its meaning to repeat a motion or performance so as to acquire or improve proficiency. As I carry out the actions of practice, shifts and adjustments in mood and technique are detected, and, as I opportunistically look for new contexts and platforms on/in which to practise, I fine-tune practice through practice.

37 This is in concert with the way that muf’s formula begins and ends with detail, and Creed’s with ‘the whole of the world’.

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**Agenda**

**What:** New Lynn Urban Park  
**Why:** Project Make Believes – Community Consultation  
**Where:** Henderson Central One L2 Large Meeting Rooms  
**Date:** 19th November 2013 2 – 3 pm

1. Introduction
2. Previous minutes
3. Update on New Lynn
4. Updating the new Whau Local Board/Local Board chairmen
5. Project Programme
6. Project funding
7. Engagement of a design consultant
8. Project team
9. Project lead
10. Other business
11. Next meeting: TRA

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*Fig. 20 Agenda for a Make Believe meeting hosted by Auckland Council.*
Sometimes I work with students, clients and publics as collaborators to invent and discover ways in which the practice of architecture might more fulsomely engage place as assemblage. Make Believe: imagining a new park for New Lynn, (Part 2, pp. 40–47), in which I worked with a local council and many others to garner the ‘park imaginings’ of a wider client body, proposed that installation and event might provide a spatial, material and performative approach to imagining a novel condition—a future ‘urban park’—and that through such a process we might expand or broaden disciplinary and institutional ‘expertise’, to encompass local knowledge as part of infrastructure procurement.

At other times I have found myself working directly with those that are charged with representing (and regulating) the practice architecture in New Zealand. In Future Islands (Part 2, pp. 76–83) I collaborated with others to curate and design the national exhibition of New Zealand for the 2016 Venice Architecture Biennale, a post awarded by the New Zealand Institute of Architects—the very body who hold legal jurisdiction over the practice of architecture in this country. In assembling Future Islands we chose to look and think hard about what the practice of architecture is in Aotearoa New Zealand, locating its edges but also the points at which it is stretched or thickened. Choosing to muster a view of its ‘fertile and vigorous edges’, we included work by students and collectives, and an array of projects (speculative and ‘built’) that self-consciously test the remit of the architect in various different directions. In doing this we insisted that architecture is not a closed or protected thing, but an already and always expanding field, re-invented as demanded by changing social, economic and ecological contexts and through the diverse and multiple desires of practitioners and users.

Oftentimes my expansion of architecture is more distanced from the usual contexts of the field, away from ‘clients’ or the design of urban forms, or from venues of architectural exhibition. In prompting feeling for place through the mobile operations of Fluid City (Part 2, pp. 12–15) or in the intersections of Rue Des Islettes (Part 2, pp. 90–97) or through the hospitality of Field Day (Part 2, pp. 34–39), I carry out a more discreet project in which I influence the disposition of others in their relations to place, from which transformations of place, however minor or gradual, may arise. This too can be seen as a
kind of architectural practice, one that is gently pedagogic and that might unfold over a longer duration. 38

There is one further shade of practice to be considered here. In his dogged commitment to the value found in the ‘practice of everyday life’ Michel de Certeau defines practice as “a way of thinking invested in a way of acting, an art of combination which cannot be dissociated from an art of using” (de Certeau 1984, p. xv). For de Certeau, this practising encompasses the multiple, varied and nuanced ways everyday creativity is employed to ‘reappropriate’ space organised by techniques of sociocultural production. De Certeau’s project underscores a new attention to practice in the social sciences, entailing a focus not on the realm of theory or ideas, but on the lived world, where knowledge has been “hidden in the thick undergrowth of the everyday” (Cresswell 2002, p. 21). This shift in focus “relocates social agency in practice or performance rather than discourse” (Whatmore 2006, p. 603). Such an understanding of practice loops us back to place, not as a static, a-priori entity, but as constituted through the iterative social practices that Doreen Massey describes. Place, when viewed as practised, is made and remade on a constant basis, with practice as the tactical art that engages the structures of place. For geographer Tim Cresswell, “place provides a template for practice—an unstable stage for performance” (Cresswell 2002, p. 25). Thus practice and place, the upper and the lower of the formula, are intimately linked through their reliance on actions and activity, making and knowing through doing.39

38 Expanding architecture across different trajectories, I’m associated with others whose practices are oriented towards opening this field. Here I specifically draw attention to the X-Field at RMIT, an informal grouping of practitioners who work across the art, architecture and design disciplines and who are interested in these inter-disciplinary intersections as “fertile grounds for intervention: places of becoming, transaction, negotiation and improvisation” (RMIT, 2013). Over the course of the PhD I have carried out this feeling for place research alongside a number of these ‘critical spatial practitioners’ whose work collectively exemplifies architecture expanded.

39 The authors of ‘Spatial Agency; other ways of doing architecture’ eschew the word ‘practice’, rejecting its connotations of habit and repetition “as if architectural practice is about refining particular stylistic tropes over time and applying them to any given context without real concern for the particular” (Awan et al. 2011, p. 29). While both ‘critical praxis’ and ‘spatial agency’, the terms they instead adopt, are useful (and ‘agency’ is a term that I will soon discuss in more detail), I suggest they miss the potency latent in practice that de Certeau points us towards. The practising of architecture might be about more than refining particular stylistic tropes at the behest of market forces; it might be expanded to include the refinement of sensitive methods for engaging a feeling for place. Following de Certeau this might include an immersion in the everyday as a rich seam of place-knowledge and know-how, and it might produce expanded modes of work that are tuned, like muf’s, especially towards the particular. Rejecting the specificity and singularity of practice outright because it has become dulled by an excessive attention to form and style over other spatial, social and ethical concerns is to potentially throw the baby out with the bathwater.
An experimental self

Experimental knowledge is artifactual. It is the product of human labour, of craft skill, and necessarily reflects the contingencies of the circumstances. It is because craft skill or tacit knowledge is such a fundamental component of knowledge production that accounts of its generation, transmission, acceptance and application cannot be given solely in terms of texts and inscriptions (Turnbull 2000, p. 42).

What is an experimental self?

On the upper line of the formula, between the two ends of practice, I’ve positioned the mode of an experimental self. This declaration of self-hood (or simultaneous multiple ‘hoods’) is figured to address the dilemma I’ve described in which I was examining my practice from the outside. Instead, the figure of the experimental self foregrounds knowing-through-practising, a form of research in which my own subjecthood is intractably part.

The fabrication of a ‘self’ in this way may in fact be the inevitable fallout of any research through practice. Grierson, considers the formation of a self as an implicit attribute of such research. She suggests that the formation of the subject occurs through social and cultural, material, textual, embodied, discursive, aural and kinaesthetic practices. Consequently this subjective position, this self, is not pre-given before the research takes place, “it is in the practices of the research itself that the creative subject is being constituted” (Grierson 2009, p. 18). In challenging creative-arts researchers to approach methodology as finding “the way” of their research, Grierson includes the ability or willingness of the researcher to expose their own lineage of beliefs and habits. She says:

Creative researchers work with imagination and insight, engaging knowledge of the histories of their field, as well as skills and technologies of practice as primary research tools. As they imagine, construct, read, write or perform, they work creatively with materials, technologies or bodies (abstract or physical) situating creative moments within the genealogies of practice, and revealing something about the world and themselves in the process. As they construct discourses of creativity they are constructed by those same discourses (Grierson 2009, p. 18).
Sarah Whatmore echoes this from the sphere of cultural geography. In calling for new research methodologies that are tuned to a re-invigoration of the geo–bio connection through ‘more-than-human’ styles of working, she identifies an “urgent need to supplement the familiar repertoire of humanist methods that rely on generating talk and text with experimental practices that amplify other sensory, bodily and affective registers and extend the company and modality of what constitutes a research subject” (Whatmore 2006, p. 606. My emphasis). Whatmore places significance on these nascent ‘experimental practices’ as a means to resist knowledge sedimentation, and through which the expertise, knowledge practices and vernaculars other than those of the academy might be mobilised.

In assuming an experimental self, I am (again) turning to Gibson-Graham who also advocate for an ‘experimental orientation’. In their project to develop an anticapitalist economic imaginary, they suggest that “if it were possible to inhabit a heterogeneous and open-ended economic space whose identity was not fixed or singular [. . .] then a vision of noncapitalist economic practices as existing and widespread might be able to be born” (Gibson-Graham 1996 b, p. 35). An experimental bearing allows such a persuasive vision to be ‘pieced together’ from both existing instances and imaginary extrapolations.

Fostering experimental subjectivities in themselves and in others, is a means to overcome certain conditionings and purely technical approaches. Gibson-Graham’s route is both experimental and pedagogic; they go about their project approaching the world by asking what they can learn from things ‘happening on the ground’. They follow a “pedagogy of strategic questioning”, posing questions that open up rather than close down, in combination with a “pedagogy of self-awareness” which entails observing their own resistances and objections in order to cultivate an experimental disposition (Gibson-Graham 2009).

An experimental self is suggestive of a ‘self in process’, potentially unstable, with the possibility of an unpredictable outcome, away from the surety of the ‘tried and trusted’ techniques and processes inscribed by disciplinarity. An experimental self is a way of being in the world. Without this part of the equation the development of my practice would have no ethical or political orientation; the practice would merely respond

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40 Scott Lash similarly proposes the metaphor of the ‘experimental’ as a way into a more relational approach than that taken by the theorist. He is careful to note that this is a kind of free-range experiment, an experiment ‘outside the laboratory’. In advocating for the “inventive re-stitching” of the symbolic, real and imaginary, all as malleable and equally important to the architect, artist, thinker, new-media activist, or political activist, Lash construes this as a different notion of experiment in which a politics can emerge from these equally important fragments. (Lash cited in Cupers & Doucet 2009, p. 14).
to each opportunity or project within its own terms and limits, and through normative approaches and procedures.

What does an experimental self allow and risk?

Activating the mode of an experimental self is a means of escaping a narrow definition of architectural practice attendant only to form and the exigencies of the market. Embracing an experimental orientation expands architecture by making room for the know-how of my art practice to ‘enter the equation’. For Jane Rendell, a design research practice is one where, through work, a practice engages a critique of normative disciplinary modes and thereby generates new actions, tools, positions and methods. (Rendell 2013). Crucial to this is an openness to interdisciplinarity, where individuals operate between, across and at the edges of their disciplines and in so doing question the ways in which they usually work. In working closely with others in an experimental manner, we “exchange what we know for what we do not know”, giving up the safety of competence and specialism to instead enter a destabilised terrain “beset with fears of inability, lack of expertise and the dangers of failure” (Rendell 2013, p. 119). In so doing, accepted modes of practice that often remain unquestioned are exposed and are then open to exploration and transformation. For Rendell, such critical practices offer the ways and means to engage with veiled power structures and for “new and untested experience, knowledge and understanding” (Rendell 2013, p. 119) to emerge.

Inverting the idea that disciplinary knowledge and expertise might reside in a singular and fixed body, (a body of knowledge) the experimental self relies on her tactical practico-social-spatial dexterity, seeking out opportunities to act beyond what it is the ‘architect’ does or should know. In so doing the experimental self is required to take on multiple roles in unfamiliar terrains, into, for example, assessing event risk with the harbour master, evaluating a new-media collaborative mapping platform with a museum board and inventing a new process of park procurement with council staff. As Rendell describes, this navigation of new roles and territories can be unnerving, as the experimental self risks being perceived as amateur, as under-skilled or inexperienced.41

Schneider and Till bring attention to this dangerous spectre of the amateur within in a professional field. Drawing on Giddens’ distinction of the agent as one who can ‘act otherwise’, they are interested in practices like those of muf architecture/art that open up the roles available to the architect. However it is in this experimental opening-up the danger of the amateur lurks: “To admit to the possibility of doing otherwise is counter-intuitive to the professional, who is brought up on the foundation of certain knowledge leading to certain solutions. The exchange system of professional service is based on exactly this premise of certainty, because merely to offer the potential for the ‘otherwise’ is to offer up one’s fragility, and this is the symptom of the amateur, a symptom that must be avoided at all costs” (Schneider & Till 2009, p. 98).
Fig. 26 Amateur portraits of the artist, drawn by gallery visitors from a police description. #1 Composite, London, 1995 (with Heather Galbraith).
Selected ‘out-takes’ of an
experimental-self-in-action

Sitting at the table with the council parks team to devise a
new procurement process for a park. The most acute sense of an
experimental self registered, the team was looking to create a
new process—thereby critiquing their current process. I was
an ‘outsider’, with no practical experience of infrastructure
procurement, suddenly cast in the role of ‘expert’—with the pen
in my hand I was drawing the diagram, and in so doing making a
new, untested process palpable. (*Make Believe*, Part 2, pp. 40–47)

Asking the principal of the local primary school if he would
be interested in ‘releasing’ a group of children to spend a
week with myself and a choreographer in order to workshop a
‘performance walk’ in the town centre, with the idea that this
in some way contributes to the design of a new park. “How?”
he sensibly asked. (*Come Join the Circus*, Part 2, pp. 56–59)

Arranging ‘cross-cultural’ catering for a meeting between the
Eco Elders (an elderly Chinese new-migrant group), The Suburban
Floral Association (an artist collective), translators and
council staff, in a way that would make all feel welcome.
Wondering what elderly Chinese people would enjoy as refresh-
ments, going to the Chinese supermarket in my neighbourhood and
stalking age-appropriate shoppers as a way to ‘research’ this.
(*Park for a Day*, Part 2, pp. 60–65)

Presenting the *Flotilla Whau* to councillors and council staff
at the monthly public Local Board meeting, sandwiched on the
agenda between ‘real’ issues of land re-zoning.
(*Flotilla Whau*, Part 2, pp. 26–33)

Talking (through a translator) with Helen who was showing me
images of the retirement home in Shanghai that she and her
husband have left behind to live with their son, their ‘one
child’, in the suburbs of Auckland. Realising that this elderly
new-migrant woman holds discriminating expectations of what
a well-designed community facility can offer and is able to
bring that critical understanding to the development of a
neighbourhood park in Auckland. Being elderly, disabled,
foreign and non-English speaking does not mean Helen has no
stake in the new and local. Wondering how new forms of
‘stakeholder’ engagement might access and include Helen’s
knowledge and desires, and those of others’ too.
(*Park for a Day*, Part 2, pp. 60–65)
Situating a university-run architecture course that examined the potential of re-engaging a neighbourhood with an urban river, in an art gallery as part of a much larger project. How to make this project, that looked at a distant and marginal part of the city, make the most of its placement in this powerful, central, civic art institution, AND how to re-construe the to and fro of teaching and learning within an art gallery in a way that didn’t recast students and teachers as a group of performers, available for consumption by gallery visitors? (*Muddy Urbanism*, Part 2, pp. 20–25)

Anxiously waiting for people to arrive for the flotilla (every single time!) It’s just like being an apprehensive host throwing a party. What if no one shows up? Then, when loads of people (and boats) do turn up I’m suddenly cast in the role of ‘expert’ performing the health-and-safety briefing, when I really know nothing about boating protocols and water safety. (*Flotilla Whau*, Part 2, pp. 26–33)

On a cold and rainy Saturday morning racing along to attend the monthly meeting of the amateur radio club, having to will myself to breathe and slow myself down to the pace of the club secretary who is reading the minutes of the last meeting at what feels to me a glacial pace. (*Field Day*, Part 2, pp. 34–39).

Visiting Clark, a fresh-water microbiologist, in his lab. Documenting step by step with photos and notes the process involved in preparing and viewing a slide down a microscope in order to devise a way to take this activity out of the lab and into the street (*Fluid City*, Part 2, pp. 12–15).

Standing in a grassy field by a river in a part of Auckland I don’t know, talking to people I don’t know (but know of because of their long history of artistic activism), about the *Flotilla Whau*. There are no props here, no AV set up, no lecturn, no slide show, just me, these people and their river. (Thankfully I had my whanau (family)—my mum, dad and sister—with me).

Deciding to ‘out’ my experimental self—suggesting in my presentation in the *Make Believe* review that we might all follow J. K. Gibson-Graham and foster experimental selves, so that our professional selves are not caught in conventional practices. (At the same time I showed an image of one of the council staff playing a ball game in our imaginary park at *Park for a Day*). There was silence, and perplexed expressions, it wasn’t that comfortable... so we quickly moved to the next bullet point on the list.
Part 1

The practice of feeling for place

How do I know when my experimental self is in action?

An edgy discomfort stirs in my belly—the combination of fear and anticipation rumbling in my organs.

Quite often there is a moment, such as presenting to the gathered members of the Western Suburbs Radio Club or during the *Flotilla Whau* safety briefing when I realize everyone’s eyes are on me. At that moment I have to suppress the thought, ‘What am I doing here?’ I could be at a cafe with my friends, or at the beach or in my garden at home... I’m an outsider here and I don’t know the protocols and practices, the lie of the land. I have no idea what these people gathered here will make of this or what they want. Perhaps someone will challenge me: What do you mean? Why are we doing this? How will this work? Why this way not that way? What will the outcomes be? I don’t have any actual answers.

I don’t necessarily leave the house in the morning with my experimental self badge on, nor do I anticipate that at this or that event I should ‘turn up’ as my experimental self. Nor did I commence this PhD research by proposing that a way to form a correspondence between art and architecture would be to construe an experimental self. This may simply be an extension of the seemingly inevitable trajectory of practice-led research that Grierson describes. But now that this position has emerged as part of the practice formula, it is useful to ‘piece together’ its attributes, as it has proved an effective means to coalesce agency.

A mobile facility

From where does my experimental self garner the wherewithal to be immersed in this fluxing field—to work situationally, with new networks, concepts, materials and tools? My experimental self embraces a kind of mobile facility, the capacity to circulate in some unfamiliar spaces and networks. It is also underpinned by an almost unquestioned orientation towards ‘getting a job done’. Where does this come from?

[Note to self: Is there a danger in making things more significant than they are?]

Fig. 27 Diagram of this PhD research. The wiggly line is the research, intersecting with projects along the way.
List of the ‘official’ roles that I can remember I have carried out since birth until the current day

un-born
daughter
sister
child
friend
gymnast
creative dancer
school student
class captain
class librarian
basketball team member
babysitter
dental records assistant
mall cleaner
bakery assistant
girlfriend
licensed driver
cafe worker
house cleaner
poultry abattoir worker
member of the public
adult
voter
tax payer
university art school student
tenant
pizza deliverer
pizza chef
beneficiary
waitress
flatmate
barista
artist
citizen
party host
window dresser
waitress
witness
art gallery director’s assistant
tourist
gardener
waitress
human resources admin temp
hospital ward clark
curatorial assistant at film archive
wardrobe department runner & buyer
partner
architecture student
kids art teacher
TV wardrobe ‘runner’
film costume dresser
architect’s intern
TV set draftsman (sic)
academic tutor
mother
sessional academic
academic
wife
committee member
steering group member
PhD candidate
I’m not claiming that my life experience is in any way extraordinary; in fact it likely demonstrates a relatively narrow band of experience, underscored and shaped by my situation—the epoch and nation in which I live, my gender and ethnicity, social class and economic circumstances. However these various roles and experiences have led to the development of a kind of ‘practico-social-spatial’ capacity that can be drawn on when in unfamiliar territory and unanticipated roles. Acknowledging these roles and experiences—carried out in overlapping temporalities and situations—as a kind of social learning, as contributing to an expertise, is in contrast to a normative academic understanding of expertise that prioritises high-level disciplinary-specific specialism within a narrow frame.

Instead, I’m pointing towards a kind of specialism of the distributed and adaptive. Priority is given over to a capacity to assess and identify the opportunities in a situation and to an enjoyment of the potentiality of the unexpected, of bringing ‘strange bedfellows’ together. What is sought is not in-depth knowledge of a discrete subject but a refined-through-practice ‘know-how’ that can activate transformative opportunity. In this way the idea of interdisciplinarity is extended from the relation between disciplinary ‘experts’ to a ‘motley’ assembly between ‘those who know things differently’, and a recognition that alongside a formal education or training we all hold and access knowledge within the structures of our own everyday lived practices. An experimental self widens the net to engage both these forms of knowing.

**Acting as an agent**

The mobile figure of an experimental self circles us back to Mathews’ proposition of a strategic practitioner, who is “agentically immersed” in a field of active influences (Mathews 2009, p. 349). A strategic practice makes room for knowledge imbued in a situation; it is concerned with the “coordination of collective or individual agency” wherein “cognition remains at the service of agency” (Mathews 2009, p. 357). What is agency and is it useful to follow Mathews and construe the experimental self as ‘agentically immersed’?

The idea of agency is variously articulated across the social sciences and moral philosophy, however a comprehensive investigation of agency as an concept is beyond the scope of this research. Instead, given my field, I’m going to focus firstly on the way this concept and term
have been applied by some to identify certain critical spatial practices. Then, as I’m following Jane Bennett’s call for the cultivation of a feeling of enchantment through a lively engagement with the world, tuned towards an ethical generosity, I’m going to briefly trace her expression of agency, which opens away from the agency–structure binary and into the more web-like ambience of the assemblage.

In identifying forms of spatial practice that “radically expand architecture”, Awan et al. (2011, p. 29) adopt the term ‘spatial agency’. They describe a spatial agent as engaging a praxis that “starts with an open-ended evaluation of the particular external conditions, out of which action arises with no pre-determined (material) outcome but with the intention to be transformative” (Awan et al. 2011, p. 29). In their framing of this agentic position they draw on Anthony Giddens’ social theory in which agency “presumes the capability of acting otherwise”. For Giddens, “agency means being able to intervene in the world, or to refrain from such intervention, with the effect of influencing a specific process or state of affairs” (Giddens cited in Awan et al. 2011, p. 31).

In promoting the figure of the spatial agent, these authors identify and champion forms of spatial practice in which (following Lefebvre) space is considered social, dynamic and inherently political. In pursuing this view, the production of space is a shared action, wrested away from the “clutches of specialists” and placed in a much broader social context. (Awan et al. 2011, p. 29). This happens as the spatial agent takes into account the specific social and economic conditions of a given project’s context “in order to engage better with them in a transformative and emancipatory manner” (Schneider & Till 2009, p. 98). It’s no surprise that muf architecture/art are included in the ‘spatial agency’ tableau, alongside a wealth of other historic and contemporary practices and individuals whom these authors have identified. 43

A spatial agent’s action is guided by an initial transformative intent, but because of the dynamics of a social-spatiality, that intent has to be responsive and flexible. “Spatial agency sees the whole process as a continuity, motivated in the first instance by intent, and then open to adjustment, ‘acting otherwise’, as it unfolds in time” (Schneider & Till 2009, p. 99). To operate in this sphere the spatial agent (like the experimental self) draws on forms of knowledge other than

43 There are just over 120 ‘spatial agents’ or agencies listed on the Spatial Agency Database, (Awan, Schneider & Till, n.d.).
Part 1 The practice of feeling for place

those circumscribed by the mastery of normative architectural procedures. Consequently the spatial agent activates ‘mutual knowledge’, a term used by Giddens to describe knowledge founded in exchange and negotiation and that can encompass more somatic or embodied ways of knowing, such as acting on hunch and intuition. (Perhaps we could even extend this to include feeling.) The spatial agent accesses and utilises knowledge “based on one’s experience in the world, as both professional and human” (Schneider & Till 2009, p. 98). In contrast to the distanced theorist, or the disciplined architect, the spatial agent’s self is more fulsomely implicated in knowing and acting, hence my attraction to this figure!

Mutual knowledge is ‘practical’ in character and it can be drawn on alongside discursive knowledge in carrying out the role of the agent. “The discursive realm allows the development of knowledge away from the immediate demands of the everyday; mutual knowledge is about the practical deployment of knowledge within the everyday. Each needs each other” (Awan et al. 2011, p. 32). Mutual knowledge is another way of describing the practico-social-spatial capacity mobilised in the practice of feeling for place that I sketched out in the previous section. The spatial agent fractures the professional–amateur divide, in that this practiced mutual knowledge might reside in, and be generated between, non-experts and experts alike.

In proposing a ‘strategic practice’, Freya Mathews does not draw out her use of the term agent but she hints at her meaning in associating the strategic practitioner with the ‘conformational’ being of the Chinese sage, who actions cognition “at the service of agency” (Mathews 2009, p. 357). Scott Lash, (who is also influenced here by a Chinese fabric of knowing and being), replaces the term ‘agent’ with that of ‘activity’. For Lash, agency is implicitly tied to a ‘goal-directed actor’, and for him this emphasis on a preset goal (or intent) precludes a truly relational approach. ‘Activity’, the term he instead suggests, is “much less goal-directed, it is much more situational [...] you put yourself down anywhere, and see where it takes you” (Lash cited in Cupers and Doucet 2009, p. 8). This is

44 In line with this thinking David Turnbull suggests that all knowledge is the result of work, “the work of negotiation and judgement” that each of the participants (in this case experts and non-experts) has to put in to “create the equivalences and connections that produce order and meaning”. Turnbull claims that this considerable social labour is denied when knowledge is universalised, “yet it is precisely this social labour which must be celebrated if we are to find ways of changing the world and maintaining diversity” (Turnbull 2000 p. 15).
to put relationality ahead of a goal or intention; “it is not just that the relation comes before the individual, but that our relation comes right before you and me, and does not come out of your or my intention. The intentions will come from the relation rather” (Lash cited in Cupers and Doucet 2009, p. 19). Lash’s idea of activity and situation is another way of putting Mathews’ ‘conformational approach’, where “everything [is] shaped by and shaping everything else” (Mathews 2009, p. 351).

Mathews and Lash do not specifically address the make-up or extent of their ‘situational’ or ‘conformational’ milieus, whereas Bennett, in keeping with her assemblage ‘sonority cluster’, makes a compelling claim for agency to extend to both humans and things. In the practice of feeling for place I’ve already aligned myself with Bennett’s ‘attachment through enchantment’ approach towards generating an increased ethical generosity. Bennett is clear that this enchantment is figured in two directions: first, towards humans who can ‘feel’ enchanted and whose agentic capacities may be thereby strengthened, and second, towards the agency of the many things that produce effects in human and other bodies (Bennett 2010, p. xii).

What this suggests is that in the milieu of the assemblage, the efficacy or effectivity to which the term ‘agency’ has traditionally referred “becomes distributed across an ontologically heterogeneous field, rather than being a capacity localised in a human body or in a collective produced (only) by human efforts” (Bennett 2010, p. 23). Given the heterogeneous nature of the assemblage field, there is no agency of an assemblage proper, rather only “the effervescence of the agency of individuals acting alone or in concert with each other” (Bennett 2010, p. 29). Bennett cedes that there are differences between things and humans, but that these differences should be read horizontally rather than vertically (as a hierarchy), and that to embrace this horizontal relationship between humans, materials and things is to step towards a more ecological sensibility.

There is one other attribute of the agent that is important to highlight here. Awan et al. note that agency is intractably tied to power as, following Giddens, the agent might intervene or not intervene but with the “effect of influencing a specific process or state of affairs” (Giddens 1984, p. 14). To be positioned in this way is clearly to hold a powerful place within a given structure/situation. For Awan et al. the spatial agent is “one who

46 Bennett notes that Latour’s ‘actant’ and Deleuze’s ‘operator’ are substitute words for “what in a more subject-centered vocabulary are called agents” (Bennett 2010, p. 9).
effects change through the empowerment of others, allowing them to engage in their spatial environments in ways previously unknown or unavailable to them, opening up new freedoms and potentials as a result of reconfigured social space” (Awan et al. 2011, p. 32).

I have difficulty with this ‘empowerment’ model for two closely entwined reasons. The first is that it assumes an asymmetric relationship between the powerful agent and the powerless others, which seems to echo the conventional expert–amateur dialectic. To counter this asymmetric view I would return to de Certeau’s explanation of the practice of everyday life wherein tactical, lived practices are powerful in disrupting the overarching order, where power is appropriated through such practices, rather than apportioned or given over by an agent. The activity–situation approach of Lash and the ‘conformational’ milieu of Mathews suggest this more tactical mode, where, while those ‘in the mix’ might not have equity in terms of their apparent agency, power might emerge through their capacity for tactical ways and relational activity, rather than being ‘bestowed’ by an empowering agent.

My second reservation of the ‘empowering agent’ is that it reverberates a residual paternalism wherein the agent can “help those lacking economic, cultural or political opportunities and entitlements without giving up any of her own privileges” (Adajania 2015, p. 29) and where the power relations are taken as given rather than tested through the practice. This is sticky. I know I hold forms or moments of agency for many reasons, and that I can activate this in multiple ways. At the simplest this means asking myself which signature to use in signing off an email: just my name, my name plus my Hoopla: projects for the Whau affiliation, my name and full university job title and qualification? Which name activates power in which ways?

In Bennett’s rendition of the assemblage milieu, the confederacy of human and non-human parts disrupts hierarchical power structures that place humans in command. (Her prime example here is a massive North American electricity blackout, the root of which turned out to be distributed across multiple sources and sites). If this is the case, if as part of multiple contingent assemblages we can only go with the flows of energy and matter, do we just throw our hands in the air and say, “I’m not to blame” (for ecological degradation and lack of social justice and equity) and “There’s nothing I can do here!”. On the contrary, Bennett suggests that an assemblage view and a notion of ‘confederate agency’ broadens the range of places (and scope of time) in which we might look for the sources of these persistent and complex troubles (Bennett 2010, p. 37). And, she suggests that the ethical responsibility of an individual human might now reside “in one’s responses to the assemblages in which one finds oneself participating: Do I attempt to extricate myself from assemblages whose trajectory is likely to do harm? Do I enter into the proximity of assemblages whose conglomerate effectivity tends toward the enactment of nobler ends?” (Bennett 2010, p. 37).

This implies that we might exercise agentic power through choice, as in Giddens’ view, to enter and to leave assemblages. However this is unevenly distributed, as Doreen Massey reveals through her concept of power-geometry whereby “different social groups have distinct relationships to this anyway-differentiated mobility: some are more in charge of it than others; some initiate flows and movement, others don’t; some are more on the receiving end of it than others; some are effectively imprisoned by it” (Massey 1993, p. 61). And, returning to the tactical ways of de Certeau, we see that such choices might be expressed through the more obvious gestures that Bennett describes (moving away from or into) but also through more insinuated tactical ways, through ‘microbe-like operations’ and ‘clandestine forms’ (de Certeau 1984, p. xix).
As an individual human, who has reformed her subjecthood here in this PhD research in the mode of an experimental self, I exercise agentic power in this entering and extricating, this assemblage give and take, as well as through tactical ways. In the practice of feeling for place I try to access Mathews’ ‘agentic immersion’ to compose or catalyse assemblages. Following the choreography of the spatial agent I begin from a ‘transformative intent’ to set things (with unknown outcomes) in train. Then, cultivating Gibson-Graham’s pedagogies of strategic questioning (opening up rather than closing down) and self awareness (observing my own resistances and objections) I try to place cognition (the knowledge gleaned) as with Mathews’ strategic practitioner, at ‘the service’ of that agency.

Acknowledging the labour of others

Here she sits, my experimental self, writing this while another woman, a new-migrant woman with little English language, cleans my house. Earlier in the day Elisha, my dog-walker and part-time student, came by and took the dogs to the beach so that I wouldn’t have to stop working. Later my daughter will come home from school where she is educated five days per week by a troop of passionate and intelligent teachers. I’m an artist-architect-academic-researcher fully employed by a public university. My livelihood is derived through my university salary; my critical spatial practice is usually (though not without some difficulty) construed in terms that allow it to be carried out as part of my academic role, often ‘on the clock’. The agency I am afforded to carry out a practice, and to write-up this PhD, to ‘untangle’ and make intelligible the knowledge and know-how of my practice, is dependent on the labour of many others. Yet their labour is invisible in the assemblage that supports this project. My experimental self, while tuned to ‘worthy’ projects seeking opportunities for transformative change, is a luxury undoubtedly afforded by the labour of others.
Introduction to the Suite of Tactical Ways

This section of the *Compendium for an expanded architecture* gives an account of four tactical ways the experimental self carries out practice. This is to expose the ‘on-the-ground’ know-how employed in the practice of feeling for place: actions and undertakings, pieces of knowing, made through doing. There are overlaps and slippages between the tactics; they are hard to detach and separate. Nevertheless here they are rendered through instances of practice work, set in discussion with others, from a variety of fields, who use or consider similar approaches.

The suite comprises:

1. *Situationing*
2. *Mobilising accessories*
3. *Becoming ultra-local*
4. *Plying stealthy masquerades*

[Note to self: Am feeling ambivalent about these titles, such as the ‘Suite of Tactics’ and ‘Plying Stealthy Masquerades’. Ali Smith saw this too; in her novel *Artful* an un-named character says to her/his dead academic lover, “These headings of yours for the different sections of your talks... they were very like you. They were corny, a bit tentative, a bit bullish; they were kind of awful and it was as if they knew this about themselves and were vulnerable to it” (Smith 2013, p. 75).]
Chapter 3: A suite of tactical ways

The first tactic, *Situationing*, applies the analogy of recreational camping to identify a tendency in the *practice of feeling for place* to assemble and connect, to bring people and things together in carefully calibrated situations. Here I coin a strange verb to emphasise the activity of this tactical approach and I point to a practice of ‘weak authorship’ as the means of navigating the conflicts that sometimes emerge in such assemblies.

Affiliated to this, the second tactic, *Mobilising Accessories*, elaborates the robust dimensions of objects and items that support these assemblies and situations. *Mobilised accessories* are used in two ways: first, to generate a certain space or loose identity, demarcating a temporary place of assembly; and second, to act as ‘boundary objects’ assisting in bringing together the incommensurable forms of knowledge present in such assemblies.

*Becoming Ultra-local*, the third tactic, turns attention to place as assemblage through means of developing a pedagogical project of sensitivity and intellectual receptivity. *Becoming ultra-local*, while necessarily incomplete, in process, is a tactic tuned to gathering place knowledge through various intersections of places, bodies, voices, skills, practices, technical devices, theories, social strategies, and collective work (Turnbull 2000, p. 43).

*Plying Stealthy Masquerades*, tactic number four, identifies forms of underhand behaviour. Carried out in two different ways, the first takes place through ‘borrowed authority’, that is the appropriation of symbolic forms and language from other fields. Employed to cast an air of legitimacy, this proves useful to coalesce the strategic intention of projects that often reside in the temporal or seemingly trivial. The second avenue is the tendency to adopt various roles or guises in projects that require expertise beyond my own. This adoption of guises allows me to inhabit different and unanticipated parts of a project. Slipping across and between these different guises brings about different allegiances and alliances. This is revealed as a tactical response to an interdisciplinary position between art and architecture, in which roles and relationships, definitions and designations become quite fluid, and perhaps disappear altogether.

A suite is a number of things that used together form a set. I picture a lounge suite—a three-seater couch and two easy chairs, ottomans upholstered with matching fabric and a side table varnished in complementary tones. In this example, the individual pieces of the set, while not the same, share a visual and material language—they fit together and complete each other. A suite, as a set, is aligned with the idea of a repertoire, another set or stock, but this time of skills, techniques, pieces or ‘moves’, frequently carried out in sequences and combinations, repeated at different scales and intensities (in for example music, dance or martial arts). In the same manner these four *tactical ways* are not used in isolation but are instead employed in the *practice of feeling for place* synchronously and in complementary ways, more, or less, obviously or self-consciously. First I’m going to introduce the tactical as a means of operating then I will outline each tactic as I sniff out their presence in the practice work.
**The practice of feeling for place**

The tactical way of operating

The tactical as a way of operating holds popular currency. Indicative of this is the rise of ‘tactical urbanism’, a movement in which small-scale temporary interventions in civic spaces are employed to both broadly advocate for and specifically test the potential for urban realm change. Tactical-urbanist projects and methods, while generated locally, are extrapolated and promoted through open-source manuals, encouraging decontextualised application in multiple, distant locations. Discussion of this mode of city-making is often celebratory, tied to a “kind of consumer-driven innovation” (Matchar 2015) and an urban imperative to attract and accommodate the so-called ‘creative class’ (Peck 2005). It is also easy to see how this do-it-yourself form of city intervention is lauded as a form of ‘bottom-up’, place-based democracy, an urban-space extension of the ‘user-generated’ capacity of Web 2.0 and the connectivity of app-based social media. Further, under austerity economics, it’s not surprising that civic authorities have in many instances embraced such enterprise as a means of low- or no-cost city ‘regeneration’. For policy-makers and planners, tactical urbanism and temporary use are now considered valid tools for transforming the city. However others note an implicit and problematical tie to processes of gentrification, and a certain ‘pop-up disquiet’ wherein “temporary projects seem to draw on and drive an insatiable appetite for the new at the expense of the values of the ordinary and the everyday” (Ferreri 2014, p. 5). In unequal and polarised cities, where there are large and uneven disparities in what Massey has termed ‘power-geometry’, (Massey 1993), it remains important to critically question the narratives of tactical urbanism and temporary use as ‘activating vacancy’ and ‘bringing creativity’ to neglected neighbourhoods. Ferreri and Lang warn that such ephemeral interventions are valued by city authorities in so far as they promote prosperity by offering a spectacle of an ‘active frontage’ for streets needing injections of vitality. Such interventions, they argue, “are mainly valued as a symbolic act simulating wealth—to attract economic development” (Ferreri & Lang 2016, p.41).

47 Other aligned terms include ‘guerrilla urbanism’, ‘pop-up urbanism’, ‘city repair’, ‘DIY urbanism’, and in Britain, ‘temporary use’.

48 See for example Lydon & Garcia (2015), volume 2 of which is available as a free download, and also the international spread of Park(ing) Day

49 While I have no actual evidence that the tropes of relational aesthetics have seeped into the burgeoning of such urban practices, it is interesting to note that these same contexts and compulsions are proposed as the root of this movement in art-making. In Bishop’s reading of Bourriaud, relational aesthetics is posed as a response to the virtual relationships of the internet and globalisation “which on the one hand have prompted a desire for more physical and face-to-face interaction between people, while on the other have inspired artists to adopt a do-it-yourself (DIY) approach” (Bishop 2004, p. 54).

50 See for example the much cited case of the changes made to Broadway Boulevard in New York city where temporary low-cost treatments were first installed to both test and promote the permanent changes that were made later (NYC Department of Transportation n.d.).
Chapter 3: A suite of tactical ways

Given this ambivalence I’m a little reluctant to join the tactical zeitgeist, which is rife with tensions concerning these differing agendas and outcomes. However I’m still so very much attracted to de Certeau’s project on the everyday, which, in his study, is characterised by creativity and inventiveness, where tactical acts of re-employment and appropriation are carried out to re-form culture. If I wish to ‘expand architecture’ through a correspondence between art and architecture, and in the mode of an experimental self, then the tactical offers a sensitive model that, despite these hesitations, has proven too valuable to discount.

The cultural theorist Ben Highmore characterises de Certeau’s project on the everyday as that of championing the “clandestine tactical arts” of the weak over the “strategic and powerful” projects of institutions (Highmore 2002, p.147), and de Certeau draws out this useful distinction at some length. Strategy is possible when “a subject of will and power (a proprietor, an enterprise, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated from an ‘environment’” (de Certeau 1984, p. xix). Strategy is proprietorial, it “assumes a place that can be circumscribed as proper (propre) and thus serves as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it” (de Certeau 1984, p. xix). The strategic is the model for political, economic, and scientific rationality. In contrast, the tactical does not rely on such placement but depends instead on time. Tactics are mobilised ‘on the wing’; they are a mutable practice, where situations can be seized and taken advantage of, where “heterogeneous and mobile data” can be used to make decisions and take actions (de Certeau 1984, p. xix). The tactical is a means to “constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into ‘opportunities’” (de Certeau 1984, p. xix).

This tactical way of operating includes:
- clever tricks
- knowing how to get away with things
- hunter’s cunning
- manoeuvres
- polymorphic simulations
- joyful discoveries
  (de Certeau 1984, p. xix).

[Note to self: I really enjoy this list, is that because it upsets the ‘proper’ methods of academia, and it harks back to the ways and means we used back in the ’90s, when we were post-art-school kids trading on our youth and naivety to get away with things. I need to find more joyful discoveries in my everyday life.]

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51 I should note here that just as with space and place, where the properties that de Certeau ascribes to space are designated by others to place (see footnote 30 p. 38) the same ‘flip’ occurs between de Certeau’s and Mathews’ versions of the strategic. Mathews designates the mobile and temporal aspects of the tactical (as described by de Certeau) to her ‘strategic practitioner’. For Mathews a strategic practice entails “tailoring one’s own ends to those already in train in one’s environment, and using the energies already at play therein to further one’s own goals” (Mathews 2009, p. 350). This of course sounds very similar to de Certeau’s tactical practice as a means to “constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into opportunities” (de Certeau, 1984, p. xix). This is unfortunately confusing, so just to be clear, in chapter 2, when I’m talking about a ‘strategic practice’ I’m using Mathews’ conception of the strategic, not de Certeau’s.
De Certeau does not position the tactical as counter to or opposite the strategic, instead tactics continually fold out of strategic projects. Tactics are within but other, they “escaped it without leaving it” (de Certeau 1984, p. xix). Tactical practices are therefore inherently relational, they are not planned in advance, they emerge in response to, in the midst of, situations and events. In this way tactics demonstrate “the extent to which intelligence is inseparable from the everyday struggles and pleasures that it articulates” (de Certeau 1984, p. xx).

As such, the suite of tactical ways given here is intended to make intelligible the everyday knowledge employed in the practice of feeling for place. However, as we have seen, de Certeau also insists that the tactical is a makeshift way of operating, taking clandestine forms, insinuated and concealed within situations and details. De Certeau’s project is to uncover the cultural legitimacy of the tactical but he notes a difficulty in that “this kind of research is complicated by the fact that these practices themselves alternately exacerbate and disrupt our logics” (de Certeau 1984, p. xvi).

This suite of tactical ways is elucidated here as a means to self-consciously stimulate and circulate the practice of feeling for place as fashioned through a critical correspondence between art and architecture. In considering the exposition of knowledge in practice-based research Robin Nelson advises “breaches of established traditions and conventions in ways of working, otherwise concealed, might be made discernible if it were brought out” (Nelson 2006, p. 113). But here then I acknowledge the bind this causes, whereby this ‘bringing out’, this exposure for the sake of explication, works against the very idea of the tactical as insinuated and clandestine.

This suite of tactical ways has gelled through the reflection on practice undertaken through the ‘meta-project’ of this PhD, from the perspective of hindsight. As such I’m now more aware of their deployment, and more self-conscious and critical of their effects. While this feeling for place tactical repertoire is foregrounded here to expose the know-how employed in the practice, and for this to be situated in such a way as to contribute to both my own knowledge and to a community of scholarship more broadly, there is always the danger that this might flatten the heterogeneity of the practice, that the explication of these tactical manoeuvres might solidify the practice of feeling for place in unhelpful ways. After all, the magician would never expose the workings of her clever tricks, neither would the hunter tell you of his cunning ways. Such are the dangers inherent in scholarship of this sort. However I reiterate that the purpose of articulating these tactical ways is not to classify them and separate them from each other, but rather to appreciate that they operate synergistically with each other in projects, and it is through such ‘phrasing’ or bricolage (to again use de Certeau’s terms) that the practice of feeling for place operates.
Chapter 3: A suite of tactical ways

Tactic 1: Situationing

Each summer my family and I go camping. We take one full day to load a trailer with items ‘essential’ to making a home ‘in the wilderness’. On arrival at the campground a site to pitch the tent is chosen for practical, aesthetic and social reasons; taking into account sun and shade, prevailing wind direction and shelter, topography and potential for flooding, proximity to others and to the camp’s facilities.

Once the essentials of shelter and food are taken care of, small extra comforts are recognised and arranged—lines are strung up on which to hang dripping togs and towels, mats are spread over the grass, extra small tents are pitched at just the right distance away for teenagers who need their own space, folding chairs are placed to catch the last rays of evening sun, and everyday implements like bottle openers and BBQ lighters are hung from just the right tent pole or tree branch, in just the right, handy, place.

This tactic identifies a tendency in the practice of feeling for place to assemble and connect, to bring people and things together in ‘situations’ (Doherty 2009), or to put this as an action of the practice, to carry out situationing. In recreational camping (as a privileged leisure activity) select equipment is employed and combined with a chosen setting and group in a kind of domestic performativity. The ‘camp’, though foreign to the site, makes a temporary space of sociality and comfort, though one that must be maintained through continual close observation and contingent response to the situation—to shifting local conditions: weather systems, atmosphere, campsite rules and procedures, the comings and goings of others (human, animal and vegetable), and their effects on and claims to the place.

The practice of feeling for place does not generally proceed through literal occupations, although this is not out of question in the future, and both the mobile arrangement of the bicycle-driven Fluid City (Part 2, pp. 12–15) and the tidal tenure of the Flotilla Whau (Part 2, pp. 26–33) certainly claim a fleeting occupation of the city from time to time. Instead what I am pointing to in this analogy is the considered calibration of projects that gather and connect previously unconnected individuals, groups, agencies, institutional bodies (and their materials, tikanga (cultural practices), and ways of knowing), and that take place in diverse settings, operate in a

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53 This is as distinct from making camp as a form of occupation, of protest, which is also a tactical practice. And of course this is also connected to the many situations in which people are forced against their will to occupy a camp, to live in precarious and contingent circumstances as prisoners of war, refugees or as an itinerant person. I was hesitant to draw on this camping analogy as I do not wish to make light of the fact that camping in my life is a pleasurable activity because I choose to employ it as a contrast from more secure circumstances, where I can come and go between these differing conditions at will. While I recognise the ambivalence of recreational camping I also see that camping across these modalities is clearly attached to the tactical, and to the irruption of this within the everyday that de Certeau describes.

54 This selection of equipment is akin to the selection and design of mobilised accessories, the second tactic, to be discussed next.

55 One summer a spectacular bloom of jellyfish took claim, preventing swimming and bringing a different dimension to the holiday.
similar contingent fashion to that I’ve just described with camping. This way of working through a *situationing* tactic, underpins much in the practice of feeling for place where the intention is to remain adept and mobile, to be contingently responsive. However tied to this then is the potential to be a little unsettled, even perhaps insecure.

To identify its properties and capacities I’m going to expand on the *Flotilla Whau* (Part Two, pp. 26–33) as it is a project where this tactic has been employed for some duration.

The first and most impulsive manifestation of the *Flotilla Whau* was as part of *Rosebank*, a programme of art work produced through artist collaborations with industries, businesses and community organisations located on Auckland’s Rosebank Peninsula. This first flotilla, on the river into which the peninsula protrudes, navigated a provisional assembly between the aspirations and audiences of the Auckland Art Festival (of which *Rosebank* was part), the local rowing club, from whose riverside facility the flotilla was based, and some other river users such as a local troop of Sea Scouts and an environmental restoration group. Hoopla: projects for the Whau, brokered relations between these groups heretofore external to each other, forming a temporary assemblage based on the properties and capacities of these various groups in combination with each other. What is at stake then in this kind of *situationing*, and what are the fine-grained ways of operating that come to the fore?

Given the highly specific nature of this tactical practice, to answer these questions I first need to briefly set the scene. This first flotilla consisted of a small parade of boats belonging to various clubs and individuals. Activity began in the early afternoon from the rowing club’s rooms, with the art-festival audience arriving on foot and bicycle, gathering to watch the rigging of various boats, then progressing to the pontoon where rowing skiffs, cutters and other small boats took to the water. We had also pre-arranged for some audience members to join the flotilla in a larger powered boat belonging to an ecological restoration agency. Those on the water then journeyed upstream and back, looping past houses and riverside parks, under power pylons and behind factories. At the conclusion of this on-water part of the event, rowing-club members provided afternoon tea in their clubrooms, where the art-walk audience

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56 The word ‘whau’ (pronounced as in the English word ‘foe’) refers to both the Whau River, on which the flotilla occurs and the Whau Ward, which is the municipal area surrounding the river governed (at a city level) by the Whau Local Board. The whau is also a native tree species, which grows well in the area.

57 The 2017 *Flotilla Whau* will be the 5th iteration of this annual event.

58 *Rosebank*, curated by Marcus Williams, was commissioned for the 2013 Auckland Arts Festival.

59 Auckland’s Rosebank Peninsula is a piece of land that protrudes into the upper Waitematā Harbour, forming the eastern bank of the Whau River. Bisected along its length by Rosebank Road, an arterial route providing access to the motorway network, the peninsula holds a mix of light industry, residential homes and public amenities such as schools, churches and parks.

60 This is my collective with Nina Patel. For a full description of Hoopla see Compendium Part Two, pp. 18–19.

61 Noting de Landa’s description of an assemblage (deLanda 2006).

62 The *Flotilla Whau* has grown in scale with around 80 vessels and 200–250 people on the water in 2016, although I cannot vouch for the accuracy of these figures as on the day we do not tend to focus on gathering numerical data.
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purchased refreshments and where Hoopla had arranged for club memorabilia to be displayed. This provided a much appreciated and convivial revival for audience members and a small source of revenue for the club. At the conclusion of the day, once the festival audience had left, Hoopla provided beer and pizza for club members and other flotilla participants, and some brief thank-you speeches were made as individuals were recognised for their contributions.

Examining some tendencies in contemporary art-making Doherty proposes ‘situation’ as a rubric under which the “impetus of place, locality, time, contact and space” provide a “more urgent set of coordinates” than a fixed and exhausted notion of site (Doherty 2009, p.13). Such a situating approach requires navigation of the dynamics and peculiarities of the assembly. In the Flotilla Whau this encompasses awareness of, and contingent response to, the following aspects:

--- **Temporal:** weather, tide, season, our placement in the schedule of the larger project and city-wide festival

--- **Spatial and material:** considering the jurisdictional authority over the physical space, access to the river, route of the flotilla, water quality/toxicity and aquatic life forms, the appropriate distance and duration of the event for different craft and participants of differing capabilities

--- **Spiritual:** the relationship of iwi (local Māori) to the river and its mauri (life force)

--- **Social:** the practices and sensitivities of the rowing club cast as hosts and those of other participants; the differing attitudes of individual rowing-club members; the aspirations of Hoopla, the Rosebank Project curator and art-festival commissioners; the ways in which this ‘art work’ was articulated in event media

--- **Practical:** the handling of valuable boats of various types and sizes, accessibility to the project (both physical and visual), concerns around keeping audience and participants safe in and near a body of water, the variable speeds at which different craft and crews travel, and the physical effort required for such motion.

Some of these dynamic characteristics were anticipated in advance but most were discovered through the process of assembling the project. Through subsequent iterations of the flotilla

--- **63** The West End Rowing Club claims to be the oldest sports club, of any sporting code, in New Zealand. They hold an extensive and unsorted archive of photographs and other materials.

--- **64** This first Flotilla Whau operated on a zero budget; it has since attracted city funding.

--- **65** The Flotilla Whau has occurred annually since 2013 although the launch and land-based events have moved to a different part of the river. The fifth Flotilla Whau will take place on 4 March 2017.
some of these contingent aspects have become quite settled, such as the development of an on-going relationship with a local surf live saving club who now attend to safety considerations. Other aspects are still fluid, and some will remain in flux as they are not ‘problems to be solved’ but instead form part of the ongoing complexity of any spatial practice in a colonised country where access to land and water remains under negotiation.

In this first flotilla tensions arose between groups, mostly as their specific nautical practices came into co-location. In this instance, and in ongoing iterations of the Flotilla Whau, Hoopla operate a situationing tactic in the following ways:

— By trying to be sensitive to very localised, almost-invisible and mostly un-articulated practices held by each group or party
— Through finding instances of transaction where differing value in the project can be found for various parties
— By operating a kind of soft diplomacy whereby the rowing club’s role as host could be sensitively acknowledged
— By identifying and activating opportunistic interventions where they emerge.

I have drawn out this example but many similar situations have been coalesced in the practice of feeling for place, such as in Field Day (Part Two, pp. 34–39), Hoopla’s one-day-long project with an amateur radio club, and in Make Believe, imagining a new park for New Lynn (Part Two, pp. 40–47), a longer project with Auckland Council involving many more groups, locales and situations.

In his helpful précis of the materials and methods of ‘socially engaged’ art-making, Helguera suggests that such art functions through a temporary “snatching away” of subjects into the realm of art-making, moving them into “a space of ambiguity” that can bring new insights to a problem or condition (Helguera 2011, p. 5). Through such situationing, the artist provides an armature on which experiences can form. For Helguera, this is precisely the value of such a practice, in which artists are understood as “free agents” who can “insert themselves into the most unexpected social environments” (Helguera 2011, p. 34). However, he also warns of the difficulties that can emerge in such work, suggesting that “conflict will often result if the parties each have different information or ideas about the situation and, therefore, different motivations” (Helguera 2011, p. 32).

I differ from Helguera in that I assume the understanding of a situation varies across parties and that variable motivations are at play, that the impetus to engage will likely come from these differing sources, even if these remain unspoken. In works such as the Flotilla Whau Hoopla recognise that our motivations may not be shared by all who assemble in a situation, and we tactically attempt to address the motivations of other parties, or we might locate a source of motivation as an impetus to enter a particular assemblage, (such as through the fundraising opportunity created for the rowing club).

Rather than bringing the motivations of different parties into unity through situationing, Hoopla operate with ends and means that co-exist but that do not need to totally cohere. This ‘looseness’ regarding a shared motivation means that our sense of authorship, that in an art context might usually entail higher levels of aesthetic and performative control, is not especially strong. Art theorist Nikos Papastergiadis highlights the value of “small gestures in specific places” (Papastergiadis, 2008). In the ongoing Flotilla Whau (and in other feeling for place projects) we similarly operate through such
small gestures, through a kind of ‘weak authorship’ in which our aims to transform a place, through fostering Bennett’s ‘enchantment’, might operate in quite covert ways, ways that can be subsumed within the situated needs, desires and aesthetics of other parties. In situationing it’s the small and subtle shifts that really matter.

This ‘weak authorship’, and the motivation to not so much claim work as art but rather to persistently, if quietly, prompt or bolster transformative change in specific places, comes close to Nancy Adajania’s (2015) articulation of a devolutionary approach to socially engaged art practice, one which disrupts Helguera’s notion of the artist as free agent operating in a ‘special’ ambiguous space. Adajania observes that the socially engaged artist is frequently construed as ‘empowering’ her collaborators through her work with them as she brings “a higher level of awareness or a special infusion of skills to a situation that lacks or needs these” (Adajania 2015, p.21). Instead of this bestowing of power, a devolutionary approach seeks the development of a more symmetric social relationship in which “the artist gives up some of the privileges and claims to expertise that reside with her [. . .] after which redistribution, in full awareness of the potential for failed communication as well as for productive mutuality, she collaborates with them in an as-yet-unmapped space of praxis” (Adajania 2015, p. 29). I’m drawn to this ‘as-yet-unmapped space’ as it suggests that in situationing work, (as with camping), the goal might in fact be to remain mobile, to keep the practice contingently responsive and therefore unsettled.

I finally want to tie this situationing tactic to the ‘piecing together’ approach described by the feminist economists J.K. Gibson-Graham. Alongside their advocacy of an experimental position Gibson-Graham suggest that we think through connection and inter-dependence. Invoking a kind of sensory and intellectual receptivity (akin to that employed in camping), Gibson-Graham propose that “we sense the importance of thinking connection, convening wider publics and enrolling lively matter in the ‘hybrid research collectives’ that we hope will emerge” (Gibson-Graham 2011, p. 5). What they describe here is the importance of multiple situated, yet highly connected, assemblages and the capacity these have as ‘research tools’ to teach us new ways to be.

The Flotilla Whau and other situationing projects in the practice of feeling for place instigate such ‘hybrid research collectives’ with this intention. Convened and catalysed by an experimental self these situationing assemblages can provide steps, however gradual, towards new place imaginaries.

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66 Their position is informed by both Bennett’s Vibrant Matter (2010) and Mathews’ ‘strategic practice’.

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Fig. 33 Sea Scouts participating in the first Flotilla Whau.

Fig. 34 Mapping the situationing carried out in the first Flotilla Whau.
Tactic 2: Mobilising Accessories

An accessory is supplementary, an auxiliary object, yet powerful in adding completeness. The accessory holds a performative dimension too—in criminal terms an accessory is one who incites or assists. In everyday life it’s the addition of the scarf, cap or earring that turns the practical wearing of clothes into something more replete—an ‘outfit’ that powerfully performs identity, social status and group allegiance.

Ancillary to the previous tactic of **situationing**, this tactic of **mobilising accessories** is concerned with the crafting of objects so that they speak in a certain way, making a gesture towards placement or action, and assisting in the assemblies and situations of the **practice of feeling for place**. In this tactic **mobilised accessories** are used in two ways: first, to generate a certain space or loose identity thereby aiding a transaction; and second, to assist in enabling incommensurable forms of knowledge to become apparent.

Firstly then, the mobilisation of these accessories acts to prompt or support the performative dimensions and quality of a transaction. As such, just as with clothing, careful attention is paid to their aesthetic contents and material properties. The ‘Island of Rest’ seat in *Future Islands* [Fig. 35] (Part Two, pp. 76–83) is black, large and lumpy. Its bulk, like a rock warmed in the sun, affords the ordinarily upright exhibition-viewer a change in position, one where they are brought into a closer proximity to fellow visitors as they nestle into its curved surfaces. Then in *Rue Des Islettes* [Fig. 36] (Part Two, pp. 90–97) the flag’s shape, repeated along the coloured lines strung between the apartment window boxes, mimics the small metal flag that’s just visible above the courtyard. And, in *Fluid City* (Part Two, pp. 12–15), it’s no accident that the round cushions, aprons, clipboards and canisters are all made in yellow, generating an association between the family of parts, and drawing attention to the project in the visually over-saturated commercial realm of the street. [Fig. 39] The translucency of the *Fluid City* vehicles is also intentional, their contents available only as an X-ray, a shadowy presence, until the interior is revealed (or not) by the operator. [Fig. 38] The three vehicles, their contents and costumed operators, are visually and materially peculiar—the seats deployed as an invitation to sit are not chairs but cushioned buckets, the...
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filmic content viewed not on a visible iPad but through pressing your face into the rubber lip of a diver’s mask. [Fig. 37]

Some *mobilised accessories*, such as those I have described here, activate a strangeness, an ambiguity close to that which the artist/designers Gaver, Dunne and Pacenti invoke through their ‘cultural probes’, a design research method that uses tactics of ambiguity, absurdity, and mystery as a way of provoking new perspectives on everyday life (Gaver et al. 1999). These cultural-probe kits, sent by mail to their elderly research subjects, contain open-ended prompts—a postcard asking for a joke, a disposable camera to document the objects engaged with that day, stickers to mark up an un-labeled map. “Delightful but not childish”, these objects are deliberately “abstract or alien in order to encourage [...] a slightly detached attitude”, as they invoke “aesthetic and conceptual pleasure as a right rather than a luxury” (Gaver et al. 1999, p. 25). The accessories of *Fluid City* afford a similar attitude, drawing attention to the project through their peculiarity—odd, utilitarian, yet considered and intriguing, and not quite at home in the slick urban design of Auckland’s Wynyard Quarter (the site of their first deployment).

Turning now to the second attribute of the *mobilised accessory*, that is to assist in bringing disparate forms of knowledge together. In his investigation of the spatiality of knowledge production David Turnbull (2000) considers how discrete knowledge practices, imbued with their disciplinary specificities, can be assembled into fields of knowledge. To answer this conundrum he proposes the idea of the ‘boundary object’.68 Boundary objects are certain social strategies or devices that operate as the means through which differing viewpoints (consisting of local knowledge and practices) are aggregated. Both physical and conceptual, boundary objects are devised to deal with heterogeneous problems and inconsistencies in open systems (Star 1989, p. 45).69

Boundary objects are “both plastic enough to adapt to local needs and constraints [...] yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites” (Star 1989, p. 45), and they work by providing a “powerful abstraction” that “both respects local contingencies and allows for cross-site translation” (Star 1989, p. 51). Systems of boundary objects include repositories such as libraries and archives (that can take heterogeneous and asynchronous material into

68 Turnbull borrowed the idea of the boundary object from Susan Leigh Star. Star proposed boundary objects as an appropriate structure for distributed artificial intelligence. This idea emerged through Star’s advocacy for a social rather than psychological metaphor for distributed artificial intelligence, and through her work analysing organisation-al problem solving in scientific communities (Star 1989). The description of boundary objects that I use here came from Star’s text but it’s through Turnbull that I appreciate their contribution to a spatiality of knowledge. This point is taken up in the next tactic, *Becoming Ultra-local*.

69 This echoes de Certeau’s positioning of the tactical as making use of “heterogeneous and mobile data” (de Certeau 1984, p. xix).

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(Fig. 38) The translucent vehicles of *Fluid City*.
(Fig. 39) *Fluid City*’s yellow accents.
(Photo James Hutchinson).
a singular platform), maps and atlases (that are abstracted to the point of vagueness, but which through this vagueness offer adaptability and a means of communicating and cooperating symbolically) and forms and labels (which offer “methods of common communication across dispersed work groups” (Star 1989, p. 47). Despite the obvious colonial dimensions tied to this concept (given that it arises from an analysis of Western scientific communities), the idea of the boundary object is usefully analogous with the mobilised accessory, and with the cultural probes mentioned earlier.

One role of the mobilised accessory then, much like the boundary object, is to assist in enabling disparate forms of knowledge to ‘gel’ in the assemblies, situations and transactions of feeling for place; that is, for local and amateur knowledge to come to light and be brought into play with that of other structures such as municipal bodies, public institutions and disciplinary expertise. The practice of providing morning or afternoon tea could be considered as actioning a boundary object in this manner. In the context of local practices such as those of sports clubs, the afternoon tea is plastic (in its contents and contexts) yet robust in its form. In Field Day, Hoopla’s project with an amateur radio club, (Part Two, pp. 34–39) the morning tea as a practice of ritualised hospitality provided a reason to enter the normally closed clubrooms and a means of gathering visitors and club members together around this shared activity. The imbibing of hot tea also instigates a robust temporal dimension as it cannot be undertaken in too much of a hurry. A situation can be thought of as an open system full of inconsistencies; routines and gestures of sharing food can act as a system of boundary objects that can produce a common identity in a particular site.

Hoopla’s fleeting Bird in Hand project (Part Two, pp. 52–55) enabled various forms of knowledge to surface through the familiar boundary object of the newspaper, a common-place media format that, in a twenty-four-hour cycle, positions heterogeneous material in a single, known platform. [Figures 41–43] Bird in Hand is at one level an everyday object, the newspaper is robust and well-understood in both form and distribution (in this case by a ‘paper boy’ at the train station), but plastic in its contents. This one-day-only newspaper took this known form but unsettled knowledge of place and time as it telescoped events from past eras into a single issue. On Friday, 11 October 2013, train

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70 Noting that the physical newspaper is now outmoded and almost nostalgic.
passengers read about the 1913 train crash as they cross the very same bridge on which it occurred, thus bringing their own commuters’ local knowledge of place into an abrupt collision with past events, and at the same time highlighting the fact that public transport by train in Auckland has a longer history than is commonly recognised. As part of the Auckland Heritage Festival, *Bird in Hand* doesn’t point at and reify specific incidents from the past, as the common structures of exhibition and publication do. Rather, *Bird in Hand* mobilises the newspaper as a boundary object to bring the experiential place-knowledge of commuters into a correspondence with past events, and in the actual place where current tensions around the lack of public-transport provision in Auckland are felt in the very bodies of commuters.

Sometimes the ambiguous reading of *mobilised accessories* that are deliberately odd or strange can unsettle. The accessories that supported *feeling for place* transactions in the *Fluid City* that I described earlier in this section, worried the collaborative group that devised this project. Some felt that the university’s role as commissioner and funder should be clearly identified through the application of the university’s logo as signage on the vehicles’ exteriors. As the designer I advocated for deliberately maintaining a plain surface, trusting that the ambiguity of these vehicle/objects would allow them the plasticity of boundary objects, gathering meaning from the interactions that they might instigate in-place. Rather than pre-inscribing identity through the non-plastic figure of a logo, in my role as designer I instead sought an open-ended, evolving identity, emergent for each ‘participant’ from an amalgam of differing perspectives and experiences propelled by the project as it unfolded in the city streets.

In deploying *Fluid City* this tension, between announcing an explicit identity and activating a more ambiguous figure (in the manner of the cultural probes described earlier), came to the fore as the prescribed research practices of the academy collided with the incommensurable knowledge exchange we hoped to prompt by taking the scientist to the street. Through the carefully designed material and performative gestures that the *Fluid City* boundary objects prompted, we invited the contribution of individually held city-water knowledge. Participants were invited to write (or draw) a short text on a post card (another boundary object in its robust form) which they could then choose to pin up.
with a clothes peg to a line, where it could flap in the breeze like washing drying in the sun. [Fig. 46] Placement in this choreographed fashion was intended as the visible gesture of handing the text over into the viewable space of the public realm.

Some of the collaborative authors of this project felt that to make any further use, in an academic context, of this text, this activity should be preceded by the completion of the university’s research ethics permission form. This form is a four-page-long document, densely printed on white A4 paper and stapled in one corner. On the last page it requires the participant’s signature. The process of dissemination and collection of this permission form was never tested in Fluid City as it quickly became evident that within the transaction we wished to stimulate this document could not find its place. Its failure in performing the role of ‘permission-giving’ highlighted the mobility of the more finely tuned accessories and the capacity of these to activate a different kind of knowledge exchange from those generated via the usual practices of the academy, which was the very point of the Fluid City project.71

In this operative tactic, the calibrated aesthetic properties and contents of these mobilised accessories provide a means of performing a visual identity, drawing attention, marking a project or event out from its surroundings, and facilitating in transactions. Alongside this they also carry out a crucial role in mediating the aggregation of knowledge from diverse sources. Often riffing off robust and well-known boundary-object forms, such as newspapers and hospitality rituals, these accessories are mobilised in a situation or assembly in a supplementary way, adding extra dimensions to projects by assisting in the mechanisms, atmospheres, and temporalities of transaction and exchange in the practice of feeling for place.

71 The situation I describe here caused quite a level of friction among the collaborative group who authored this project. From this disagreement it became clear to me that as an academic staff member at a university we are asked to navigate dual roles in a project such as this. On the one hand this was funded as a university research project, in which the authors are cast as ‘researchers’, replete with the titles of ‘principle investigator’, ‘associate investigator’, etc. As such we are bound by the university’s policies and procedures. On the other hand, the intention of this project was to invent new ways of circulating knowledge beyond the academy through ‘creative practice’. In this light we are cast as practitioners—as designers, choreographers and performers. In this discussion it seemed that the way a member of the collaborative team construed oneself in the project, as either tending towards researcher or practitioner, shaped our expectations of the procedures the project should follow. An emerging awareness of the need to navigate these differing roles adds further agency to working in the mode of my experimental self.

Fig. 44 Postcards from Fluid City.
Fig 46. Postcards given over to public realm through the choreography of a washing line.
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Tactic 3: Becoming Ultra-local

Becoming ultra-local, the third tactic, turns attention to knowledge drawn from everyday life. Local knowledge is in and of itself a form of tactical practice as it emerges from the intersection of things, processes and relationship and these come together in a local’s knowledge of recursive patterns, where habits and temporal routines persist. To be foreign, an outsider, is to lack the utility and power of such specific knowledge. We all ignore local knowledge at our peril.

Local

The idea of the local oscillates between positive and negative constructions. The local is caught in a reciprocal relation, both a product of and belonging to a particular place, district, neighbourhood, rohe (territory), parish, town or city. A local will always know some version of the myths and stories of their place. From this same intimate sense of belonging however, insularity and parochialism might emerge, and in this vein cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard warns against the local as a “shabby thing”; “there is nothing worse”, he says, “than bringing us back to our own little corner”, denying the “risk of the universal” (Baudrillard 1990, p. 110).

Valuing local knowledge in the practice of feeling for place might seem a parochial move, a reactionary rejection of the vigorous qualities of the universal Baudrillard identifies. However, in his exposition of the social practices used for scientific knowledge-making, David Turnbull closes the gap between the universal and the local by affirming that all knowledge is in fact the product of labour carried out in a particular place; it is therefore, first and foremost, local (Turnbull 2000). Turnbull argues that the prevailing element in all knowledge systems is their localness and that the differences between them can be found “in the way that local knowledge is assembled through social strategies and technical devices for establishing equivalences and connections between otherwise heterogeneous and incompatible components” (Turnbull 2000, p. 13). (For Turnbull this is where the ‘boundary objects’ I discussed in the previous tactic Mobilising accessories come into play).

Attending to the performative nature of knowledge production, Turnbull adopts Deleuze and Guattari’s assemblage schema to provide the contours of this ‘knowledge space’, in which

72 Ultralocal was the title of an exhibition curated by Mike Davis and Carl Douglas at St Paul St Gallery, AUT University, Auckland, 2011. They commissioned an early draft of Becoming Ultra-local for the accompanying publication. I chose to hyphenate their compound word as I find the arrangement of letters without the hyphen hard on the eye.

73 This is something the homestay network Air BnB understands, trading on the value of a local’s perspective to differentiate their platform from international hotel chains that favour the universal product, which flattens local experience.
knowledge comes about through the intersections of places, bodies, voices, skills, practices, technical devices, theories, social strategies and collective work. Being grounded in the specificities of local conditions and practice, it is the combination of diversity, complexity, vagueness and imprecision which gives local knowledge a flexible and dynamic character (Turnbull 2000, p. 32). Becoming ultra-local then, is a tactic tuned toward brokering knowledge from such assemblages in order to prompt the transformative intent of the practice of feeling for place.

Ultra-local

I’m suggesting that to become ultra-local, that is to become extraordinarily local, does not rely upon the amplification of an enclosed, inward orientation. Rather, and paradoxically, attending to an excessive sense of local-ness requires attention to exteriority. This follows Massey’s call, discussed earlier, for a global sense of the local, an outward-looking ‘extroverted’ sense of place which includes a consciousness of any place’s links with the wider world (Massey 1991, p. 26).

To get to know a place as an ultra-local then is to know a place’s interiority, its material, spatial, temporal and social components, and its exteriority, its linking and overlapping with multiple locales beyond. Ultra-local knowledge comes from noticing a place at scales between the micro, (the minutiae of the everyday) and the macro, (how the place is connected to a myriad of other places). In Tamaki Makaurau Auckland, an ultra-local disposition might require knowing about the means by which the land of the local park was procured through colonising processes, as well as noticing the seasonal shift in flora or sport codes played in that park. It could include knowing something of the indigenous fish species in the creek, as well as the political situation in Sri Lanka, which has prompted your Tamil neighbours to seek a new home. Becoming ultra-local is suggestive of a process, one that can never be fully realised but is always in train.

The tactical practice of Becoming ultra-local revolves around two positions that here I will provisionally label ‘outsider’ and ‘insider’. Sometimes the focus of this tactic is in revealing aspects of a place to the outsider. It’s an attempt to help myself and others, often students or ‘experts’ from other fields or municipal agencies,
Chapter 3: A suite of tactical ways
to locate, to ‘feel around for’ a more finely
nuanced, empathic understanding of a place.
At other times this tactic is employed to bring
about a more enmeshed experience of a place
for an insider, to generate or bring to the surface
a feeling for place for the locals. In some specific
instances these aims converge. In both cases,
while the means are different, the intent is to
bolster an increased sensory and intellectual
receptivity as championed by Gibson-Graham
(2011), who (as noted in Tactic One Situationing),
suggest that we think through connection and
inter-dependence, and Bennett, who (with an
amalgam of Thoreau, Spinoza and Merleau-
Ponty in mind) proposes that we approach the
world with “a certain anticipatory readiness”
(Bennett 2010, p. 5).

The ultra-local outsider

Architect Mel Dodd notes, “perceiving the every-
day, modest and fragile aspects of a place is
almost impossible for an outsider, but this is
rarely acknowledged in the domain of main-
stream urban design and planning” (Dodd 2011,
p. 29). Becoming ultra-local for the outsider
often begins with the critical use of instrumental
techniques such as the production of archives,
diagramming and critical mapping. As with other
critical practices, this entails an awareness of the
procedures and methods used and an attempt to
account for the biases and predispositions they
hold. In the Muddy Urbanism research studio for
example (Part Two pp. 20–25), our investigation
of the Whau River began with the compilation of
an archive—the collection of recordings, sam-
plings, accounts and representations from many
differing sources. [Fig. 47]

Acknowledging that documentation is always
partial and that the archive is by nature incom-
plete, this was followed by a process of critical
mapping. Our attendance to the specificities of
place included such things as locating seemingly
incidental urban elements—the height, construc-
tion materials and location of property boundary
fences in neighbourhoods along the riverbanks,
and the volume, variety and constitution of
rubbish dumped along these boundaries.76
Once property-ownership information was
overlaid in this mapping it became evident that
the government social-housing agency routinely
erects solid boundary fences that dislocate a
dwelling from its environs, creating the inter-
stitial ‘no-mans-land’ spaces in which rubbish
readily accumulates. [Fig. 48]
Part 1

The practice of feeling for place

Dodd (2011, p.41) underscores the local as a “dynamic and relational structure” where routines and habits, such as the dumping of rubbish, provide a “temporal choreography of quite trivial yet public rituals”. For Dodd, immersion in this choreography can bring forth a knowledge of place that takes into account lived realities, whereby even “illicit and undervalued aspects” (Dodd 2011, p. 39) come to light, allowing for a more nuanced re-consideration of a designer’s brief. For the designer primed with the ‘anticipatory readiness’ that Jane Bennett describes, this approach can evoke a “deep collaboration with a place and its inhabitants” resulting in a “peculiarly precise response to a situation” (Dodd 2011, p. 52).

In a similar vein Teddy Cruz suggests that the artist, architect or academic practised in bringing a perceptual receptivity to such place assemblages, might then serve as an interlocutor, a representative or a translator of these kinds of spatial and social issues in local contexts (Cruz 2013, p. 62). Cruz advocates for a more critically proximate architectural/artistic practice, in which “we can become facilitators of the transference of knowledge from the bottom up to the top down and back, but also [become] representatives of that knowledge towards the institutions of planning” (Cruz 2013, p. 61). This dual role of ‘bottom-up place collaborator’ and ‘top-down institutional translator’ was taken up in the Muddy Urbanism studio, and this mediating capacity continues to persist for our collective Hoopla: projects for the Whau (Part Two pp. 18–19). As other agencies and organisations continue to pursue projects of place transformation on and along the Whau River, Hoopla have become cast in the role of ‘expert locals’, navigating the exigencies of these two poles.

The ultra-local insider

Turning our attention now to the ‘excessively local’ ultra-local insider. Local knowledge, being of everyday life, is more likely to be performed, enacted and used rather than (or at least ahead of) any recording or inscription. Consequently, the methods employed in Becoming ultra-local for the insider tend towards the tactile and performative over the instrumental.

The Flotilla Whau (Part Two pp. 26–33), for example, provides an occasion for locals to collectively enact their knowledge of the river in tactile and immersed ways—to be in the river with muddy wet feet, feeling the humidity, wind

Fig. 48 Rubbish accumulating in interstitial spaces along the Whau River. (Photo Antonia Lapwood).
and pull of the tide, smelling the mud and salt, noticing the way sounds travel differently across the river’s surface. For many locals their regular contact with the river is by crossing over it on a wide bridge as part of their lengthy daily commute. From this position the river is not really present; from the hermetic temperature-controlled space of the car it’s certainly not available to their sensory receptivity. In the *Flotilla Whau* a quite different experience of this place is poised. By gathering together in a temporary moment of spectacle (which is then re-circulated in local media), the flotilla prioritises a performative engagement with place, an experience through which the very presence of the river in this neighbourhood is affirmed.77 [Fig. 49]

Such tactile and experiential actions towards *Becoming ultra-local* are evident too in *Come Join the Circus* (Part Two, pp. 56–59).78 In this project a group of primary school students devised a performance walk79 that meandered through their suburban town-centre. Workshop-ping in public places, the students responded with their own physicality—posing on jutting concrete curbs, vaulting benches, dangling off glass walls by their fingertips, placing wet hand-prints to mark sun-heated concrete columns—generating a kinaesthetic dialogue with the material and spatial attributes of this specific urban field. [Fig. 50] Each student brought their own culturally and socially formed sense of propriety to the work; some were comfortable to lie fully stretched on the ground while others preferred to remain in an upright position. At times the group worked as ‘place detectives’, piecing together a social history, responding to cues such as architectural remnants, street names, public artworks and the symbolic attributes of the civic war memorial.

In alliance with Bennett, Freya Mathews proposes the use of “addressive modes” to generate close attention to shifting patterns in a localised field of agency (Mathews 2009, p. 349). She suggests that this might proceed through forms of “onto-poetics”—ways of listening to reality which are “invested with meanings of its own, or can be called into such meaning through invocation” (Mathews, n. d.).80 In *Come Join the Circus* an ultra-local knowledge was thus invoked. Performance-making opened an opportunity in which things—benches, road embankments, low rock walls, war memorials, anti-graffiti glass, networks of drainage and transport, lost gardens, bike racks, archeological sites, water

77 One participant has quite directly used the *Flotilla Whau* as a platform to express his feeling for this place, adorning his boat with a hand-made banner reading ‘Love the Whau River’.

78 *Come Join the Circus* was one part of the larger project *Make Believe: imaging a new park for New Lynn*, which aimed to broaden the capacity of Auckland Council in imagining, prompting and leveraging desires for the public urban realm.

79 A performance walk is a form of site-specific choreography used by Christina Houghton, my collaborator in this project. In a performance walk pieces of performance occur in public space with the audience joining the performers in walking between sites and where the line between performer, audience and passerby is intentionally blurred.

80 Mathews, F. *Art as Ontopoetics*. Unpublished conference address, received via personal communication.
courses and migration routes, rusty industrial machinery and photographs of forgotten circuses—were invoked to speak. Turnbull emphasises that a knowledge assemblage results from “the work of negotiation and judgement that each of the participants has to put in to create the equivalences and connections that produce order and meaning” (Turnbull 2000, p. 13). In this case of Becoming ultra-local, such ‘onto-poetic’ tactics gave the students the means by which to ‘listen’, and their collective work produced order and meaning. This speaking-listening place conversation eventuated in the choreographic work shared with their school peers and teachers, and those who encountered the performance by chance.

An ultra-local pedagogy

In navigating the inherent contradictions and difficulties between expert/outsider and amateur/insider in the practice of feeling for place, I’m buoyed by Pablo Helguera’s notion of transpedagogy. Helguera notes that “contemporary art has adopted, in a selective and unorthodox way, some basic notions and principles of education [. . .] that implicates audiences and criticism in a particularly tangled way” (Helguera 2010, p. 100). For Helguera, transpedagogical art practices activate collective learning with an emphasis on the local, with the work instigating “an experience that specifically leads to the construction of knowledge, or, in a larger sense, to the production of culture” (Helguera 2010, p. 105).

Without now opening a full exploration of pedagogy, practice and place (that is perhaps best left to a post-doctorate project), to me, Helguera’s transpedagogical modality chimes with Bennett’s exposition of the pedagogy within Adorno’s philosophy (where his negative dialectics act as a set of practical techniques) (Bennett 2010, p. 14) and with Gibson-Graham’s use of a twinned pedagogy of ‘strategic questioning’ and ‘self-awareness’ (Gibson-Graham 2009) (as I have discussed earlier in more detail). The practice of feeling for place might be understood then as a pedagogic practice wherein the various tactics of Becoming ultra-local activate a pedagogic experience as Helguera describes and which leads to an ethical tuning to place.

In this light the projects Montreal Garden Mapping (Part Two, pp. 86–89) and Rue Des Islettes (Part Two, pp. 90–97) which both served as the means for me to overcome a tourist gaze (without the underlying impetus of prompting place transformation), might be seen as my own technical training in the tactics of feeling for place.

Becoming ultra-local is not without problems and complexities. Consider for example what the projects I have discussed here are not doing that a local orientation might insist upon. The Flotilla Whau is not directly ameliorating the ecological degradation of the river, neither is it retrieving rubbish, orreviving ‘historically important’ stories, as some other projects and organisations aim to. Becoming ultra-local is always incomplete and in the case of my work on the Whau River there is an obvious lack in that the river’s place in Māori knowledge and living/being in Tāmaki Makaurau is still mostly absent. While the flotilla perhaps prompts some experience of the mauri (life force/vital essence) of the river there persists in this work a lack of an indigenous place ontology.

The openness of becoming in Becoming ultra-local however, in combination with the assemblage constitution of place, insists that there is always the possibility of more to converge and emerge in the practice of feeling for place. As Bennett says, “to become is not to achieve a final state of being; it is to give more of a chance to that which rumbles in you, but you are not” (Bennett 2001, p. 26). 81

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81 Here Bennett is tangling with Deleuze and Guattari’s attenuated assemblage, body-without-organs.

[Note to self 27–09–14: knowledge emerges through “invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world and with each other” (Freire 2000, p. 68). It’s so tempting to reframe this whole project as one of pedagogy but where would that leave practice?]
Chapter 3: A suite of tactical ways

Tactic 4: Plying Stealthy Masquerades

*Plying stealthy masquerades*, the fourth and final tactic identified here, admits to forms of underhand behaviour, some gentle skullduggery. To be stealthy is to be furtive, while a masquerade is a pretence, employing a guise. I have borrowed the term ‘stealthy masquerades’ from Steven Pile who, in tracing mobility as a potentially radical act in the regulation of spaces, notes that not all such acts need to take the form of grand gestures; there are also “tiny micro movements of resistance barely perceptible, even invisible or covert—quite stealthy masquerades resistant to categorisation or definition” (Pile & Keith 1997, p. 29). (The emphasis is mine.) In this way a stealthy masquerade sides with the crafty and discrete orientation of the tactical practices outlined by de Certeau (1984).

Recognising the obstacle posed by both this furtive quality and this resistance to definitive categorisation, I have nevertheless detected hints of stealthy masquerades in the practice of *feeling for place* from two different angles. The first takes place through a ‘borrowed authority’, that is, the appropriation of symbolic forms and language from other fields, employed to cast an air of legitimacy over temporal or seemingly trivial actions. The second avenue of *Plying stealthy masquerades* is the tendency to adopt various roles or guises in projects that require expertise beyond my own. This adoption of guises allows me to inhabit different and un-anticipated parts of a project.

Turning then to the first application of this tactic of *Plying stealthy masquerades*, which captures the idea of borrowed authority and takes place through the sneaky appropriation of symbolic modes or language from other fields. This purloined language is then inserted or overlaid into the project materials. Borrowing authority in this way is a means to convey a sense of coherence and legitimacy, even though the work undertaken might be quite experimental, temporal or seemingly trivial. Borrowed authority is a stealthy tool of persuasion.
The operation of this tactic is seen in the borrowed form the newspaper in *Bird in Hand*, in the ‘official’-sounding tenor of the title “Hoopla: projects for the Whau” and in the use of a formula arrangement (in the practice/self/place formula discussed in chapter 2) where the authoritative mathematical language is appropriated for persuasive reasons. Borrowed authority can be detected in our opportunistic use of the high culture status of ‘The Lab’ at the 5th Auckland Triennial, as a venue in which to circulate schemes produced in *Muddy Urbanism* that are provocative and utopian, and critical of the status quo. However this ‘borrowed authority’ is best elucidated through considering this image [Fig. 52], from *Make Believe: imagining a new park for New Lynn.* (Part Two, pp. 40–47)

83 The title for our small collective was nearly ‘The Whau Agency’, remembering that the pronouncing of Whau is as in the English word foe, which makes Whau a homonym for faux.
In *Make Believe*, a project with Auckland Council, a spatial, material and performative approach was employed to imagine a new suburban park. A series of episodic live events and installations were proposed for the park site, currently a filled clay quarry, invisible and inaccessible behind a factory. Each event, we suggested, would allow for a fleeting and propositional manifestation of this future park to emerge, with each bringing together a distinct group of constituents. In so doing *Make Believe* applied performative means to generate exchanges of local knowledge in regard to public urban space, how it might be shaped and used, what importance and meaning it might hold for specific communities.⁸⁴

I produced this diagram to convey this performative-design approach to stakeholders and funders. The diagram borrows a mathematical spatial logic, with the X axis denoting the progression of time and the Y axis the scale of the events. In the abstract space between, 26 possible events are then arranged across four phases (winter 2013 to summer 2015). Coloured text is used to map a relation to ‘real’ space (coding events as on or off the site) and symbols are used to indicate ‘real’ time (day or night). This use of a borrowed abstract language allows disparate elements to co-exist as equally probable—dogs, badminton players, remote-control-plane operators, ponies, kites, fire crackers, markets, bmx-bike riders, seedlings, lanterns, white elephant stalls, beaches, bonfires, old soldiers, children, elephants, movies, hot rod cars—and by extension an assemblage of fire, light, speed, flight, food, dung, heat, photosynthesis, decay, commerce... converge in the act of imagining the possible.

The method employed in this document aligns with that of the landscape-urbanist move away from the picturesque conception of landscape in favour of a relational approach. Landscape urbanists also make use of mappings and diagrams in their “search for the hidden pockets of potential” through which the urban surface is re-imagined as a “site of new and unexpected events” (Mostafavi 2003, p. 8). It’s in this manner that this drawing does work, proposing the park site as potentially populated by such events, assembling these disparate activities, objects, actors, scales and temporalities through a borrowed mechanism of a spatial and temporal plotting.

This diagram therefore performs a *stealthy masquerade*, a sleight of hand. Embraced by the authority of the X and Y, and ordered by the flat, abstract space of the page, the drawing evades the messy material realities and the inequalities and potential conflicts of objects, actors and relations, the instability of re- or de-territorialising elements, in favour of a propositional illustration of neat and possible co-existence. The representation of the world in this diagram borrows an authoritative system in an attempt to manipulate and control the dialogue of this park, lifting it out of a scenographic and technological realm and into one of the performative and social. The park I would like to see eventuate from this process would act in the same manner—a park conceived as some kind of assembling and enabling infrastructure, a place where anything goes but, unlike the drawing where things are held apart, a place where material and social collision might occur. This drawing therefore defines an agenda—unlike a master plan that privileges and sets down the ‘proper’ spatial arrangement, in this projective diagram the park is instead construed through a temporal ordering.

Edward Robbins, who studies the practice of architecture from the perspective of anthropology, identifies two roles of architectural drawing. In his analysis drawing is both a powerful conceptual tool and a social instrument. On the one hand drawing provides the ability for the designer to “conceive, test, and realize the best possible design” (Robbins 1994, p. 297), while on the other hand drawings can operate to exclude,
Borrowing authority in this manner is tactically used to convey a sense of coherence and legitimacy, even though the work undertaken might be quite experimental, with outcomes unknown. In so doing the weight or authority of these languages or forms is sneakily transferred into a project in order to act in a persuasive manner. Given that an experimental self cannot always know what the outcome might be, this tactic is geared towards generating documents that persuade, that produce verisimilitude by tilting projects towards known and more certain frames of reference. Borrowing an air of authority in this way is useful to coalesce the strategic intention of projects that often reside in the temporal or seemingly trivial.

The second appearance of the tactic of Plying stealthy masquerades (or perhaps non-appearance given the clandestine nature of the stealthy), is a tendency to adopt or act in alternative roles, to take on a guise. This is not specifically to cheat but simply to respond to the exigencies of specific projects that sometimes require expertise normatively understood as beyond that of the architect; by adopting a role or guise I can locate a foothold in a situation. In the practice of feeling for place I have taken up the roles of negotiator, provocateur, teacher, maker, consultant, archivist, investigator, performer, ethnographer, designer, event planner, health and safety officer, host, location manager, caterer, researcher, academic, curator, editor, artist, facilitator, budget holder, kayak paddler, member of a collective, documentarian, leaseholder, project manager, community broker, communications manager, technician, advocate, stakeholder and ‘expert’ panel member. These different roles or guises are often employed synchronously and at times their boundaries are ambiguous. (Often I do not quite know how to introduce myself.)
Chapter 3: A suite of tactical ways

A masquerade suggests pretence and this idea was fully played out in the (publicly funded) ‘Make Believe Headquarters’, where one might wonder if anything was in fact ‘for real’. I enjoy this kind of playfulness, ‘getting away’ with this ‘polymorphic simulation’, this aping or mimicry of an official and serious ‘centre of command’ thereby invoking traits of the tactical suggested by de Certeau (1984, p. xix). This cheeky approach breaks through the earnest ‘worthiness’ that can at times threaten to overwhelm the practice of feeling for place.

This adoption of different guises may be the upshot of activating a correspondence between art and architecture. In inhabiting this space of correspondence, confining myself to a singular and defined role or identity would be to neglect the assorted tasks, and risks, that arise in such an interdisciplinary practice. Architect Mel Dodd reflects on this adoption of multiple modes as she too proposes a practice of ‘ambiguous personas’ activated both within the give and take of an interdisciplinary practice and through the necessity to form different relationships with the public (Dodd 2011, p. 11). For Dodd, activating the persona of a ‘double agent’ allows her to work across apparently contradictory modes, inhabiting the position of the professional but also the critical role of activist or outsider. The adoption of this persona allows her to “sit on both sides of the fence” (Dodd 2011, p. 12).

The position Dodd describes, of the ‘double’ occupying both sides simultaneously (and stealthily), comes close to the space that is opened by the socially engaged artist. In addressing the critique that such an artist acts as an ‘amateur’ anthropologist, sociologist, community worker, etc., Pablo Helguera (2011, p. 5) claims a “space of ambiguity” which the socially engaged artist inhabits. This slightly extends Dodd’s ‘both sides’ to suggest a third kind of space that is somehow ‘special’. In temporarily drawing subjects into this realm the artist “brings new insights to a particular problem or condition and in turn makes it visible to other disciplines” (Helguera 2011, p. 5). In this ‘ambiguous space’ it’s possible then for the artist as social practitioner to take on these multiple guises at will, without the need for anxiety or declaration.
Going still one step further, in his critique of socially engaged art, (which though invested in the social still attaches itself to the special ‘aura’ of art) Stephen Wright proposes an art of complete stealthiness, of invisibility (Wright 2006). Looking for the use-value of art in the present time, Wright asserts that it lies in a clandestine art carried out by secret agents with an artistic agenda but operating completely under the radar. For Wright this is the only way that art might escape the paradigm of representation. Art might regain use-value, if it surrenders itself and, while remaining visible, takes place in a different ontological landscape, foregoing the label art, and without authors, spectators or publics to address (Helguera 2006). The artist and curator Mark Hutchinson senses a similar dissolution in the social and away from the label art as a circumscribed relation between author and audience or publics. He too imagines a radically open system in which art allows itself to be transformed by its publics to the point that “such art might, then, be hard to see and to judge because it will be transforming what counts as seeing and judging” (Hutchinson 2002, p. 438).

This art without label, that’s hard to see and know, suggests the ultimate direction of this tactic of Plying stealthy masquerades. This describes a landscape in which the correspondence between art and architecture would be null, not required, as both disciplines open to a space beyond disciplinarity, to that of work—the practice of feeling for place—without the need to define or claim any specific disciplinary field, audience or public. Going beyond the ‘weak authorship’ I describe in Situationing (the first tactic), this ‘invisible to the disciplines’ non-artist non-architect might be an experimental self working in the vein of Mathews’ strategic practitioner “immersed in a fluxing field of immediate pressures” registered not objectively but in terms of their immediate impact or influence on the agency of the self (Mathews 2009 p. 349). This figure could then inhabit a fully expanded architecture, so expansive that it might be ‘hard to see and judge’; it might be an architecture that challenges the field’s capacity to recognise itself.

86 This is from an interview Pablo Helguera conducted with Stephen Wright that is available in Spanish on Helguera’s website—http://pablohelguera.net/2006/04/por-un-arte-clandestino-conversacion-con-stephen-wright-2006/ [3 February 2017]. As I was not able to source this in English I have used Google Translate to acquire an English version. Due to this I cannot attest to the accuracy of translation but from the context that led to this source I believe the translation does communicate Wright’s key ideas.
Fig. 53 A galaxy diagram of practice (second encounter).
Part 1

Chapter 4: Afterwards

Now she circles us back, revisiting the trajectory of her research. She returns us to her hunch, that the practice of feeling for place is a correspondence, a giving and taking between art and architecture; one that might provide a means of expanding the field of architecture beyond the envelope of building, the containment of the norms of the profession and into a space of work free of disciplinary confinement.

She loops back to the mode of an experimental self, fashioned through the research. She recollects this figure to foreground and activate the knowing-through-practising modalities of the research. She, this experimental self, is an agile figure who moves across and between art and architecture, amatetur and expert, outsider and local, engaging her practico-social-spatial energetics to take up the differing roles that emerge in the unfamiliar terrains of this expanded field. She casts her experimental self into the subject-formation that her creative practice research has unfolded for her, in the grain of a philosophical and ethical project. She hones her receptivity and seeks to artfully cultivate the assemblage composition of place through practice.

She senses allegiances and alliances as the practice of feeling for place rubs up against the attributes and procedures of those practicing in the zones of socially engaged art, and alongside those who pursue critical spatial practices, finding generative agency in broader social contexts. She tours us again through her four tactical ways of working, elucidated through her enquiry and through which she has come to know and trust the fine-grained operations of her practice. Here, she invites us to become more aware of the affects of her practice at an intimate scale. She articulates her tactical ways now more clearly and consciously as the means by which this practice of feeling for place can circulate beyond herself, intersecting with the practices of others.

Traversing this arc through her narrative account she is surprised to discover so late in the piece that her research enquiry is one of circulation. Rather than follow a clear trajectory from start to finish, her research has taken on the spatiality of her initial hunch, it’s a correspondence, a shuttling, a sharing, a looping back and forth. This motion, enacted across and between the differing forms of her research practice produces a generative give and take in the practice of feeling for place.

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87 Through bringing the thinking of Helguera, Doherty and others to this project.

88 Through the practice of muf, the thinking of Jane Rendell and the figure of the spatial agent identified by Awan et. al.
Now, she invites us to revisit and recall instances of this circulatory modality as it is revealed through this arcing backwards of her multiplying *experimental self* in practice:

Feeling her way toward locating the ethical orientation of this practice she invited herself into a knot of thinkers who ‘circle about each other’ in their positioning of theory at the service of agency.\(^8^9\) Finding a fellow-feeling for their work, she borrowed their ideas, moving them into new situations, into the nooks and crannies of her practice, to see how they might buoy it or stretch it further.

Part way through she stumbled across a text titled ‘since feeling is first’\(^9^0\) and found that it usefully invoked research as the drawing of circles ‘around ourselves’, temporary mobile circles like those inscribed in sand, that might be abandoned or widened.

She made notes-to-herself. Threading these through her narrative she attempted to divert the mono-directionality of her account and the singular authoritative ‘voice’. Her notes indicate other curves and circuits, other minor loops and paths that she, and we, might have followed.

She reached out for metaphors of motion; treating theories as shoes to try on, to take for a run; and treating the PhD body of research as its own galaxy, accounting for the parallax effect where everything, including her points of observation are in motion.

She generated a *formula of practice* as a means of overcoming the static qualities of a textual account. Enabled by the stealthy inhabitation of a mathematical form, her equation spatialises and mobilises language. She proposed that the equation be understood as an operative guide, carried out in a reciprocal looping between the constituent parts, rendering the reflexive quality of the research in which cognition, gained through practice, is looped and folded back to practice.

She conjured an *experimental self* as a self-in-process, fashioned through reflexive research and continued through a pedagogic disposition towards ‘paying attention’ and ‘piecing together’. Her *experimental self* is potentially unstable, with the possibility of an unpredictable outcome, away from the surety of the ‘tried and trusted’ techniques and processes inscribed by disciplinarity and fixed in professional norms. Assembling multiple manifestations of agency, her *experimental self* calls on different allegiances and alliances to ‘make things happen’.

She exposed the motion at play in projects: through the circulation of the bicycle-driven *Fluid City* (Part 2, pp. 12–15) pausing to claim a fleeting occupation of the city, there one minute, gone the next; through the tidal tenure of the *Flotilla Whau* (Part 2, pp. 26–33) that returns to the river again and again to generate a cyclical, seasonal, mobile spectacle; through her riding in the streets of Montreal, circulating herself bodily to map gardens; through her marshaling the movements of others towards a neighbourly encounter in Paris.

She mobilised accessories to allow other ‘movements’ to happen, for historical events to converge in the lived space of train commuters in *Bird in Hand* (Part 2, pp. 52–55), and for different forms of place knowledge to surface and circulate, moving through choreographies of postcards, stories, screens, books, maps, conversations and morning teas.

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\(8^9\) Bennett, Gibson-Graham and Matthews.

She highlighted the tactical as an approach that is inherently one in motion, taken up ‘on the wing’. She chose verbs to call out these tactical ways, for things to happen in the give and take of situationing, mobilising, becoming and plying.

She steered us towards the dynamic characteristics of the provisional assemblies convened in the practice of feeling for place and the almost aleatory practice of ‘weak authorship’ that curbs any tendency to settle or totally stabilise aesthetic and performative control.

She multiplied her experimental selves.

She invoked an as-yet-unmapped space of praxis to suggest the goal is to keep her practice contingently responsive, circulating across and between fields, and therefore unsettled.

Now she focuses our attention on how this circulatory motion gives traction to her creative practice research, generating feeling for place through things and events that act in tactical, relational and contingent ways. Her practice activates the capacity of subjects and subject-hood to shift and change through the sensitively calibrated encounters enabled through the works.

From this motion of arcing backwards and through her research she finds that she is interested in what might yet happen in the afterwards, after this period of doctoral research. As she writes, Hoopla: projects for the Whau are planning their 5th flotilla on the river. Its bigger than ever, and starting to stretch their capacity as ‘weak authorship’ oscillates between letting what happens happen and their responsibilities as local ‘art fund’ recipients (and good citizens) to ‘manage’ this project well. Along this same river the construction of Te Whau Pathway continues. First imagined in the Muddy Urbanism research studio (Part 2, pp. 20–25), circulated through exhibition, publication, discussion and advocacy, its now an infrastructure project in development, open for broad public consultation and managed by a large team including iwi (local Maori), and advisors on accessibility, marine environment and public art. Here Hoopla, who still resist any ‘official capacity’ are now consulted as ‘local experts’. In New Lynn a new park has been imagined. As yet there is still no sign of it, however the diagrams made as part of Make Believe (Part 2, pp. 40–47) persist, re-circulating this practice of feeling for place.
methodology in further contexts and arenas.\textsuperscript{92} And now a new project beckons her, one to uncover and performatively disclose public spaces in Tamaki Makaurau Auckland that are currently veiled behind corporate facades.

Her research through practice and reflection demonstrates a methodological proposition that place be construed as process, in flux, as an unmoored, extroverted assemblage open to practice. Her ethical, aesthetic and political task is to influence the dispositions of others in their relations to these place assemblages by invoking \textit{feeling for place}. She shows us her experimental practice that, in gently pedagogic ways, resists sedimentation and draws on forms of agency to intervene in or coalesce place assemblages. This practice responds to the unmoored, contingent place as assemblage through nimble modes and methods, opening architecture to an expanded or fattened field, one embracing values of time, process, ethics and subjectivity.

Following examples of research evaluated not against ‘mainstream norms’ but by looking at what is happening ‘on the ground’\textsuperscript{93} the legitimacy of the modes and tactical ways of the \textit{practice of feeling for place} reside with place as her ‘matter of concern’.\textsuperscript{94} She is called then to evaluate the research in this arena, allowing for and accepting the generative capacity of ambiguity and uncertainty, of the un-fixed, which enables the production of multiple orientations in the constant becoming of place. If the ethical value of enchantment lies in its “ability to persuade without compelling, to structure experience without insisting that this structure is one that must be duplicated again and again”,\textsuperscript{95} then the modalities and methods she has developed through this practice may be of value.

She offers a practice that acts experimentally, tactically and contingently, conjuring the \textit{practice of feeling for place}.
References

Primary Sources


References


Part 1


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