CAPTURING DISAPPEARANCE

A VISUAL–PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF SYDNEY’S IRREGULAR PERFORMANCE SPACES

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This practice-based thesis explores what might be discovered about a city’s being, through a phenomenological study of its most vital and dynamic alternative arts and performance spaces. Philosophy and photography are brought together to reveal and explore the networks that exist within Sydney’s alternative scene and the irregular spaces that bring it to life.

This doctoral research first establishes the historical and cultural context surrounding Sydney’s alternative arts and performance spaces, before delving into the intimate and ephemeral environments that exist within these irregular spaces. The methodological approach combines Actor Network Theory (ANT), hermeneutic phenomenology and photography to expose the sensorial and tacit dimensions of these spaces through a variety of visual assemblages.

My photographic practice illuminates, tracks and links the assemblages of human and non-human actors that form inside and outside irregular spaces, and connects them to the wider urban networks to which they contribute. This work seeks to capture the essence of irregular spaces beyond documentary representations and to disturb the binary logics of inside/outside; space/time; and human/non-human embedded within urban environments. In this, the research makes a practice-based, reflexive contribution to analysing the city and its spaces, particularly the discourse on ‘space’ and ‘place’. This research offers a mode of linking seminal and notable elements, patterns and associations of irregularity identified through my photographic investigation. In doing this, it aims to create a real and tangible contribution to the collective imagination of past, present and potential ideations of the city.
DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signed: ________________________________ On: 03/11/2014
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Lastly, thank you to my brother Joseph Catanzaro for his guidance and his way with words.
DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate my thesis to a wonderful group of people who were always there with love, guidance and support when I needed it.

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<td>AHRC</td>
<td>Arts and Humanities Research Council</td>
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<td>ANT</td>
<td>Actor Network Theory</td>
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<td>ARI</td>
<td>Artist Run Initiative</td>
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<td>ARSE</td>
<td>Artist Run Spaces Enterprise</td>
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<td>CUCR</td>
<td>Centre for Urban and Community Research</td>
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<td>DA</td>
<td>Development Application</td>
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<td>DIY</td>
<td>Do-It-Yourself</td>
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<td>LMTF</td>
<td>Live Music Task Force</td>
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<td>NSW</td>
<td>New South Wales</td>
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<td>MWA</td>
<td>Marrickville Warehouse Alliance</td>
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<td>OED</td>
<td>Oxford English Dictionary</td>
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<td>OH&amp;S</td>
<td>Occupational Health and Safety</td>
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<td>PM</td>
<td>Private Message</td>
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<tr>
<td>SMH</td>
<td>Sydney Morning Herald</td>
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<tr>
<td>TAZ</td>
<td>Temporary Autonomous Zones</td>
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A memory can absorb a space, and a space can hold a memory. The relationship is convoluted and intertwined. One almost defines the other. I'm sitting outside Melrose Hall, the venue where I first dallied with punk rock music. I was thirteen years old when my friends and I were dropped off in the gathering darkness beside the dilapidated, cream brick community hall. In my memory, the building appears to be long and thin, a quality it seems I imposed upon the venue because in its halcyon days, it was full to the brim with people, the crowd often spilling out into the park outside. Looking through the windows now, the space looks like an ordinary community hall, the kind where a scout group or a senior’s book club might meet. The floorboards are scuffed and old: the plastic chairs are stacked in orderly rows along the walls. A black curtain is drawn across the back of the performing space and the stage itself lacks the grandeur I remember. It seems small and diminished in the dusty, open space. Although the inside of the space has not changed dramatically, peering in through the window it begins to transform before my eyes, aligning itself with the space that inhabits my memory. The stage fills with all the musical acts of the past. Mohawks, army pants, piercings and raised fists extend above the sea of sweaty bodies before the stage. I feel lucky once again, that my short stature saved me from the various blows to the head that others around me received from stage divers. I can smell the cigarettes and the cheap wine, seeping from the crushed goon bags on the floor of the venue.

Walking around to the front of the space, I marvel at the fact that this is a community hall. Of all the gigs I attended here, I have no memory of any kind of authority policing the space. As I loop the building, peering in through windows and trying my luck at locked doors, I trace the lines of bricks with my hand. There are a number of scattered patches on the brickwork where a fresh lick of paint had been thrown on, evidence of graffiti silenced with a few brush stokes. At the back of the venue there's a playground. A mother and child utilise a space where we used to sit and drink in between the acts. There is a clear view of the back band room from the swing set, where the musos could be seen in days past, lugging their drum kits and instruments in through the thin wooden doors, painted a deep green. I can't remember if they were always green, it doesn't stick in my memory as being that way, but I think that is because the doors were always open, deterring any sense of exclusivity between punters and musicians. The windows to the band room aren't clear glass anymore: they are frosted, stopping me from peering inside. Despite this, I can still see vividly the face of my cousin being hammered against the glass during a back stage brawl. I remember standing to one side, frozen, watching mortified as the violence played out before my eyes. That night marked the end of Melrose Hall and all its former glory. It was the night that the ‘homies’ ambushed a punk gig at Melrose. A gang of them came from behind the neighbouring service station, armed with poles (formerly shopping trolley handles) and knives. Somehow, I came out physically unscathed, but the venue did not. Forever closed for punk gigs, the gateway to an exciting, experimental world, in which I might continue to grow up, was suddenly gone. By then, I was just sixteen and although I never attended a gig at Melrose again, the three years of experiences within this space ensured that the more-than-physical qualities of the space stayed with me, always.

Returning to the present, I hold my camera to take a photo, aware that night is falling, indicating the time I have spent sitting and reminiscing. I cross the road to get a better view of the entire venue, suddenly struck by the fact that a small village of identical units has replaced the petrol station. As I frame the image, I become aware of the tree beside the venue, which has grown and is now covering the green lettering that spells out the venue name. I notice for the first time that the building is emblazoned with the date ‘1934’. My eyes scan the surrounding scenery and I realise how much the immediate environment has changed over time. I’m thankful for the heritage value of the structure that seems to have evaded the infringing development. Eerily, while I photograph the space, the exterior lights switch on. A cold white floodlight is perched on the roof, a means to deter loiterers at night. Yet under the archway, a familiar glow emanates; the yellow warmth pulling at me, filled with a promise of the past. I take a number of photographs, none of which I am happy with, as the moment is removed from the intensity of those years before. I know this photograph can never capture the way I feel about this place: the place where my journey into irregular space first began.
PART 1: OUTSIDE-IN
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION
This research project is a practice-based inquiry into Sydney city and the irregular performance spaces that exist within its inner city and inner western suburbs. I use photography to capture the peculiar ontology of these irregular spaces and reveal their inherent intricacies, and speculate on their relationship with the city’s more regulated environments. My investigation is guided by the question of how my photography can capture and reflect the ‘being’ of irregular venues from the inside. I hope to contribute to an understanding of the networks that irregular spaces form and how they inhabit the wider city networks, which sustain but also potentially threaten them. In doing this (through my practice) I aim to analyse the ways the fluid, adaptable, creative and alternative dimensions of Sydney’s irregular performance spaces can be revealed through my phenomenological investigation.

1.1 Motivation and Context

This research is an exploration of the way that I experience the city and its spaces. It is an interpretation and translation of the city’s messages and secrets, its spaces and its objects. It is a record of evolution, reinvention and devolution and began as a need to capture the temporal and ephemeral spaces of the city. This is demonstrated through photographic imagery of Sydney’s dynamic irregular spaces; unregulated performance spaces that inhabit the city (irregular spaces are further defined in Section 1.2).

After travelling around Europe and living overseas in 2007, I returned in 2008 to what I felt was a very different city. The sounds and sights of my youth, the stories of a younger Sydney and playground for many, had disappeared. Music venues had closed or been reinvented, industrial and derelict inner city spaces—low rent refuges for creativity—had been transformed into expensive apartments. While to me, this loss of viable performance and creative space seemed to happen quite rapidly, evidence of Sydney city’s live music demise has been steadily documented since the late 1990s (Burke & Schmidt, 2009). However, my time away from Sydney allowed me to see the city anew. I had changed, the city had changed, and so had my perceptions of it. It was this sense of nostalgia that in part motivated this project, coupled with a determination to seek out and capture—through photography—the cultural spaces, sounds, narratives and objects that now constituted Sydney’s alternative scene. Knowing that this would not resurrect the past, I hoped that by capturing this disappearance, I would be able to assemble a network of images that would contribute to the collective imagination and memory of the city.

Eclectic sounds, driven by a do-it-yourself (DIY) aesthetic, still pour from venues across Sydney. However, where this sound used to be a raucous collective shout, a mash-up of sultry jazz and the anarchic growl of punk rock, now it is a collective whisper. In 2013, a study was commissioned on live music in Sydney. The results revealed a 61 per cent decrease in music events and gig listings from 2004 to 2013 (540 in a sample week in 2004, down to 213 over the same period in 2013) [Live Music Task Force Initiative (LMTF), 2013]. While this research is merely indicative, it is evidence of a downward trend in live music opportunities and experiences in Sydney (LMTF, 2013).

While the struggles associated with live music and performance venues motivated this inquiry, it is important to look at these closures in the broader context of Australian cities. Gentrification in Australian cities has applied pressure to stabilise the commercial value of city property by imposing a narrow view of ‘cultural capital’ (Throsby, 1999, p. 3).

British sociologist Ruth Glass first coined the term ‘gentrification’ in the 1960s. She defined it as ‘The movement of higher-income groups (the “gentry”) into lower income, possibly ethnic, neighborhoods and in so doing the replacement of latter groups’ (as cited by Diekjobst, Froidevaux & Jüssen, 2012). Subsequently, the term has been used:

to describe the process of re-evaluating urban spaces in the western world. The process involves social change as well as a physical change and renovation in the area and leads to higher prices in rent and/or a general transition from renting to owning property’ (Diekjobst, et al. 2012).

In his 2013 article, ‘Why did the inner city gentrify?’ Davies succinctly outlines the historical processes and events that stimulated gentrification in Sydney city. Davies situates Sydney in the 1950s as relatively working class, with pubs, terraces and factories as the key architectural structures. These areas were affordable and attracted migrants who, in turn, generated a demand for unique services, such as cafes. As the 1950s progressed, a change in production methods saw manufacturing depart from the city and move further west to the suburbs; subsequently, a large number of blue-collar workers and migrants followed employment to the west. This removal of industry is remarkable, as it made the city a more pleasant place to live. The 1960s and 1970s saw an influx of students and teaching staff to the inner city, due to expansions in higher education, shortly followed by an expanding cohort of professionals who had embraced the
changing societal values of a declining household size. Overall, this transition was responsible for the shift from a goods to a service and knowledge-based economy. As Davies (2013) highlights, it is difficult to emphasise all the factors contributing to gentrification in the inner city, yet these various interplays have worked to produce gentrification synergistically.

This brief overview contextualises the city’s historical relationship to gentrification. Gentrification occurring within Sydney today can be characterised as ‘a process beginning with artists and students, who create cultural capital, to be followed by gentrifiers and city office workers moving into older working class districts’ (Gibson & Homan, 2004, p. 69). Gibson and Homan (2004) explore the complex relationship between suburbs, alternative cultures and gentrification in Sydney, stating:

Residential developers have played upon the reputation of key suburbs as sites of creativity, lifestyle and alternative subcultures focused around main street consumption spaces. Yet, resultant property market rises have threatened the ability of artists, musicians and others employed in the cultural industries to secure affordable housing and spaces for performance. At the same time, Sydney has experienced a decline in live music venues, in part fuelled by competing revenue streams for publicans (such as slot machines, trivia nights and karaoke), but also exacerbated by the imposition of more restrictive licensing and regulatory laws. (p. 67)

Gibson and Homan (2004) continue to discuss factors associated with gentrification and its prevalence within the inner western suburbs of Sydney. The 1990s saw the inner western suburbs of Leichhardt, Newtown and Marrickville fill with students and artists, due to the lower rental prices and the suburbs’ close proximity to the University of Sydney (Gibson & Homan, 2004). These authors comment that in 2004, Marrickville—a suburb located seven kilometers from the central business district—was a laboratory-like reproduction of previous urban development and gentrification, mimicking urban patterns that had begun in the neighbouring suburb Newtown in the 1980s.

While the Marrickville of 2014 has changed dramatically from the Marrickville of 2004, this diverse and still somewhat gritty suburb has persevered as a core site for culture and alternative practices within Sydney. It is the principle area populated by the sites within this study. That Marrickville is still a thriving cultural suburb indicates the different tempos of gentrification. At times, it can be rapid and engulfing; at other times, it happens gradually, fortunately held at bay by legal (and aesthetic) challenges like remnant pockets of small-scale industry. The vibrant arts and cultural activity within Marrickville is in part due to its progressive council, which supports live music and arts practices with their commitment to grass roots initiatives (discussed further in Chapter 5).

The Council’s continued support of arts initiatives is a result of cultural funding being awarded for activities and events that embrace diversity, and engage in ‘placemaking’ (Gibson & Homan, 2004). As part of growing research on creative cities (Bianchini, 1995; Florida, 2002; Landry, 2000; Montgomery, 2004), Shaw (2013) comments on the pressure placed upon city governments to support the role of local culture, due to the increasing symbolic value of cultural diversity. The economic benefits of “creativity” have spawned an industry of consultants on how best to build cultural capital (Shaw, 2013, p. 338).

Due to this increased global pressure, progressive city governments are attempting to provide city spaces for lower income ‘creatives’ to prevent an all-encompassing middle-class colonisation of their cities (Shaw, 2005). The Sydney Creative 2030 (2008) document infers that this ‘creative cities’ approach is being implemented in current planning. The document acknowledges the lack of spaces for Sydney artists and professes to assess and review better opportunities for use (or continued use) of city spaces. Since beginning this research, I have noticed a number of local and council-sponsored events encouraging creative participation in the city1. The notion of a ‘contribution to the local’ seems to be working its way into everyday conversation and government rhetoric alike.

Even as there is an increased recognition of the role that the arts play within the economy and a vibrant city, Sydney still has some way to go in being the cultural city it aims to be. Unlike most other Australian cities, up until 2014, Sydney had no cultural policy. About 55 per cent of councils have some form of cultural plan, an increase on just 19 per cent in 1999. The growth is recognition that local government plays a vital role in encouraging culture (Morgan, Oct 2012).

In 2014, a cultural policy for Sydney was drafted and approved by Council (12 May 2014). This is now awaiting community input before being progressed further (Community Engagement, 2014). While this demonstrates the City of Sydney’s willingness to change and implement new policies, it is important to note that cultural policy is not always the answer. As Throsby (2006) describes:

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1 See Right to the City seminar, Event Brite events, UTS lecture series, Marrickville and Leichhardt council meetings, Have your say, City of Sydney’s Live Music Taskforce’s final action plan.
Cultural policy is not a single definable thing, but a pervasive mixture that not only determines the immediate and obvious ways in which we practice our culture—through the arts, for example—but also affects a broader range of economic and social policies that have undeniable cultural content (p. 33).

Part of this larger problem is the way that ‘culture’ is defined and normalised in cultural policy. The 2013 Creative City, Cultural Policy Discussion Paper (2013) defines culture for its own purposes, stating:

The city defines ‘culture’ as: the production, distribution and participation in creativity by its community of residents, workers and visitors, and the reflection and expression of its customs, traditions, heritage and social character (p. 8).

While this is a broad and inclusive definition of culture, the terms ‘production’ and ‘distribution’ resonate with economic outputs and traceable outcomes. We experience the same issue when examining how creativity is paired with the terms ‘industry’ or ‘class’. This pairing asks us to frame creativity as economic value creation, which underscores a highly contentious claim at the heart of ‘creative cities’ planning. This alliance between creativity and economic gain is widely identified as the brainchild of Richard Florida (2008), with his inception of the terms; ‘creative cities’ and the ‘creative class’. Florida (2008) states that human creativity should be at the core of economic growth. Globally, cities are adopting this notion, and investing in ‘cultural infrastructure’ and ‘creative economies’ (Comunian, 2008). Florida’s ‘Creative Class’ doctrine pairs creativity with ‘industries’ and ‘economic value’; however, creativity can not always be framed and digested as an industry or output. As a result, this theory has been criticised as symptomatic of finance capitalism (Conroy, 2011). What Florida fails to do is place the bohemian index alongside the growing disparity between those who produce surplus value and those who own and redistribute surplus value.’ (Conroy, 2011)

Global debate around the benefits of creative planning, place making and cultural policy is important to consider in the Sydney context, as this terminology consistently crops up in city plans and visions (as demonstrated in ‘Sustainable Sydney 2030’ City of Sydney Strategic Plan (2008), ‘Creative City’ Cultural Policy Discussion Paper (2013), ‘Strategy and action plan’ Open Sydney, 2013–2030 (2013)).

Despite these documents framing approaches to incorporating grass roots culture into the vernacular of the city as legitimate, ‘cultural spaces’ continue to close. The city’s inability to protect not-for-profit sites is arguably due to a lack of prioritisation. The Sydney Creative 2030 (2008) document acknowledges that the city provides a platform for creative expression. The document also states that:

Sydney’s success as a global city is not only associated with economic outcomes, it is also concerned with non-economic values associated with liveability, tolerance and quality of life. Arts and cultural activities are essential in developing these broader values in Sydney.’ (p. 213)

Although this positive outlook encourages DIY and grassroots approaches, 2014 saw a nation-wide political shift towards smaller government and decreased government spending on the arts. One of the biggest losers in the 2014 federal budget was the country’s peak arts organisation, the Australia Council:

The Australia Council grants $200 million to arts organisations and practitioners each year. Now the council will have to trim about $7 million a year as [the Federal government treasurer] Hockey cut $28.2 million in uncommitted funding over four years from its overall budget’ (Gill, 2014).

Despite this drastic cut having resounding effects on the larger arts institutions, David Berthold (current artistic director of La Boite in Brisbane and artistic director of Brisbane Festival from June 2014) states:

It’s the individual artists and new projects that will bear the brunt—all those applying for funds coming up… That’s the thing that troubles me most. The danger is that the most affected will be the grassroots: a major source of innovation and adventure. (Gill, 2014)

Time will tell what lasting impact this change of revenue distribution will have on the sector.

Despite a series of performance space closures within Sydney since beginning my research in 2010, there have been small wins for Sydney’s creative communities. A live music precinct on Sydney’s busy Parramatta Road has been approved, and a range of innovative and controversial actions have been drafted for the future, including the use of gaming revenue to support the live music industry (Taylor, 2014, Sydney Morning Herald (SMH)), as a result of the Live Music Task
fleettlingly inhabiting, occupying and transforming the night time environment. While this study does not focus on small licensed bars, it is important to articulate the transformations occurring in the city’s regulated spaces, as they also have a role in shaping experience of the city at night.

1.2 Irregular Space

While my research began as an interrogation into the forces responsible for changes and closures in commercial performance spaces, it transformed into a journey of discovery into those spaces existing outside the ‘legitimate’ realm. The imposition of increased regulation within commercial music spaces, and the implementation of poker machines in my favourite venues inspired me to look elsewhere for creative and cultural fulfilment. I began to delve more deeply into Sydney’s underground scene of unregulated spaces. While all research is a mode of discovery, this project literally unfolded before me as I learnt to see the irregular spaces that are largely invisible until you can recognise them. The more I explored, the more the unregulated cultural life of night time Sydney began to open up. This study is an inquiry into this cultural life and the spaces that support it. My research examines self-sustaining spaces that exist outside the regulatory environment and without the aid of ‘place making’ initiatives or government funding, and considers the important role these spaces play in a dynamic and global night time city. I refer to these spaces as ‘irregular’.

Irregular spaces attempt to maintain independent, grassroots arts and cultural practices in an increasingly expensive and therefore inaccessible-for-all global city. While irregular spaces often exist or operate in isolation, they are also part of a larger whole; a living, thriving network that breathes, hibernates, and stirs life into the City of Sydney. Within this context, irregular spaces are not easily identifiable; addresses are not available online or on flyers; external authorities regard these venues as somewhat illegal. These venues are not purpose-built spaces. They consist of a range of warehouses, lounge rooms and revalorised buildings within Sydney city and its inner west suburbs. Some of these spaces have other legitimate roles during the day, and the remnants of these activities form part of their irregular character.

The nature of irregular spaces is ever changing and indefinable. The majority of spaces must walk a paradoxical line between defining themselves (having character), while remaining unidentified in the public eye. Due to the disparity of characteristics from space to space, I have made a list of common traits

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3 Kings Cross has recently become a suburb enmeshed in media frenzy, as the site of Australia’s 15th fatality resulting from a ‘king-hit punch’ in the last six years (Needham & Smith, 2014). As a result of this and related incidents, the former NSW premier Barry O’Farrell announced ‘Lockouts for the Sydney CBD and Kings Cross and an eight-year mandatory minimum sentence for drug and alcohol affected one-punch assaults will be introduced as part of the NSW Government’s comprehensive package to make our streets safer’ (2014). These ‘lock outs’ require venues to disallow punters from entering venues from 1.30 a.m., with last drinks at 3 a.m.
During my research, I have come across a range of related terms that have a strong affinity with how I see irregular space. For example, Low and Lawrence-Zuniga’s (2003) definition of ‘contested space’ considers specific sites as political. These geographic spaces are concerned with conflict, be that subversive, oppositional or resistant. However, ideologically, Soja’s (1996) ideas surrounding ‘third space’ have also been influential; third space is where ‘everything comes together’ (p. 56–57), an ontological, epistemological space concerned with movement and ‘imaginative configurations of space for human practices’ (Maier, 2013, p. 77). Chatterton and Hollands’s (2003) notion of ‘marginal spaces’ ‘encapsulating both play and resistance’ (p. 202) have also played a part in refining the way I see and interpret irregular spaces. It is particularly Bey’s (2007) definition of the temporary autonomous zones (TAZ) that reflect the temporal nature of these spaces and their being.

Due to the organic and transitory nature of spaces in the study, not all will adhere strictly to all the traits listed below. Additionally, this adherence may change over time. Instead, these points equip the reader with an introduction to the being and entities of irregular space:

i. A space that has a relationship with the night and darkness and ‘sleeps’ or has another role during the day.

ii. A taken-over or claimed venue space that is not native to performance.

iii. A space that deals with political, experimental and alternative performance subject matter, encompassing ‘play’ and/or ‘resistance’ (Chatterton & Hollands, 2003).

iv. A venue whose hosts do not run it solely for commercial gain.

v. A venue that operates in some sense illegally, whether through not acquiring relevant licenses, allowing punters to bring their own alcohol or not conforming to fire safety and Operational Health and Safety regulations.

vi. A space operating under a blanket of ‘invisibility’ and discretion. Having a tenuous relationship with exposure, these spaces teeter on the brink of recognition and have an agonistic relationship with promotion.

A certain characteristic of irregular spaces is that they do not stay fixed in one place or in one form for very long: these spaces embody temporality. This bears a relation to Bey’s (2007) description of transformative spaces as TAZ. These are spaces of liberation (of time, land or imagination), which dissolve and reform elsewhere before the ‘State’ can crush them. These spaces are continually disappearing, reinventing themselves or reforming to evade and bypass legalities. The ability to remain hidden reinforces the relationship irregular spaces have with darkness; the night’s medium, which has the ability to conceal and reveal.

Irregular spaces are cloaked in darkness and emerge selectively from darkness. For some, exploring darkness holds comfort and familiarity; for others, it represents the unknown, terror and uncertainty. Schlor (1998) discusses the dualities that appear as we experience the night through newspaper articles and media. These stories range from night time assaults to reports on the highs and lows of the night time entertainment economy. In the media, the night is often a time of violence and disorder. These reports, and our understandings of them, resonate with a variety of dualities: ‘light and shadow, dream and nightmare, wealth and poverty—antonyms which construct a wide field from real news and fabulous stories, a world of its own’ (Schlor, 1998, p. 10).

My photography [writing with light] negotiates these dualities as they appear, and considers light, dark and the shades that exist in between as symbolic of the transformative, ephemeral nature of irregular spaces. The source of light is neither uniform, nor is it used to maximise exposure. Sometimes it is present within the image, and sometimes it is tangential, but darkness always plays a defining role.

In studying these spaces, I am motivated to capture the ephemeral, and events likely to disappear. However, my research also captures the community-minded attitudes these spaces thrive on and foster, in real time. Individual and collective experiences are recorded, as they represent private and personal encounters with the performers and the punters who attend these events.

Due to irregular space’s tenuous relationship with visibility, the issues I am identifying as outside forces—urban planning and development, gentrification, government funding cuts and laws and legislation—help to contextualise the concerns of my study. However, it is important to differentiate exactly where my area of study sits within this context. These complex issues inadvertently inform
the nature of irregular spaces, yet this study is not a call for the integration of
cultural policy in urban planning and development; neither is it a call for legitimising
irregular spaces. Rather, it is an exploration of the being of unregulated spaces
as they exist and operate independently, despite external urban development and
its consequential impositions. My interest is in the unique autonomy and intricate
associations that exist within the hidden and marginal spaces in my study, and
the ability of photography, as an extension of my own being in this world, to
capture them.

1.3 Traversing the Margins: The Urban’s Other

Although these spaces exist marginally and as a type of dissident action
in relation to the mainstream it would be inaccurate to suggest they began as a
reaction to the current night time economy. This economy has experienced a range
of closures, along with the wider factors of urban planning and development, and
changing legislation. It is evident that alternative scenes in various forms have
been prevalent within Sydney’s underground as early as the 1950s [see ‘The
Push’; Baker, 2002]. The relationships between contemporary irregular spaces
and their historical counterparts are explored in Chapter 4. However, due to the
nature of illegal spaces, it is difficult to trace the political motivations or objectives
of irregular spaces and there is a risk of oversimplifying political positions as
explosive anti-establishment statements that are evident in responses to the
sub cultural phenomena of the past. While this study does not position irregular
space as an active political movement, the documentation of Sydney’s irregular
spaces will inevitably reflect the social, economic and cultural context of the city
that incubates them. We can understand this when examining the precedent of
punk’s sub cultural history, ‘punk’s [sic] political mentality is not necessarily
brought about by a political knowledge or deep understanding of politics, it was ...
about reflecting life in the working class, this in itself, arguably makes a political
statement’ (Catanzaro, 2004, p. 10).

While I cannot presume to represent the varied political and social
inclinations prevalent within them (past and present), these spaces are political.
This is evident in their indefinable status, their lack of financial motivation or efforts
to accumulate cultural capital, their community-mindedness, and their exclusivity.

These spaces are constantly evolving in relation to transient and ephemeral
environmental and political contexts. They often disappear without leaving records
or formal conclusions. While a space’s demise or closure may be negatively
perceived, we should also consider that ‘some of them were not intended to last
forever but only as long as the project proved fulfilling’ [Bey, 2007, p. 113]. This
embedded temporality has resulted in very few formal records; therefore, limited
knowledge about these types of spaces exists [Bey, 2007].

This project’s visual and theoretical dimensions capture the notion of
disappearance. The purpose of this research is not to provide a traditional, historical
account of irregular spaces within Sydney and the inner western suburbs. Instead,
it is an attempt to capture—through my own experiences—the being of these
irregular spaces, their unique and momentary qualities, as well as to comment on
how spaces of irregularity interact more generally within the city space. Moreover,
my individual relationship with these spaces has enriched and informed my own
understanding of the city. Through my photographic practice, I have come to know
the irregular spaces in my study, inside out. This is not the objective knowledge
that comes from an exhaustive documentation of events in particular spaces and
the musical acts performed in them, including the when and why. My images stand
as a situated form of knowledge, an ontological extension of the phenomenal
experience of being involved in a place as a learning practitioner-researcher.

1.4 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis began with a preface, a personal narrative of my past, outlining
the motivations behind my project, to emphasise the importance of one’s personal
background and situatedness in the world to research and practice. In doing this,
I aim to exemplify the implicit ontological nature of my photographic practice,
aligning with Heidegger’s claim that ‘nothing can be encountered without reference
to a person’s background understanding’ (as cited in Laverty, 2008). The personal
narrative ensures that the reader approaches the thesis from a phenomenological
viewpoint; this is necessary for digesting both hermeneutic studies and practice-
based research.

Chapter 1, Introduction, initiates the reader in the issues integral to
understanding the city as a place of growth, regulation, development, transience,
interaction and submersion. The regulated night time city context is paired with an
initial definition of what irregular spaces are. This draws upon Bey’s definition of
TAZ, illuminating the ephemeral and transient nature of irregular space, which is
explored further in the thesis.
Chapter 2, Methodological Overview and Issues surveys the literature on practice-oriented research, explaining the practice-based nature of my research and the methodological and ethical issues surrounding the study. This chapter outlines my use of photography and hermeneutic phenomenology and begins to explore ANT and assemblage theory in the context of both urban and visual assemblages. The chapter concludes by introducing the spaces through abstract topological placement, familiarising the reader with the geographical placement of irregular entities and the suburbs within which they can be located (see Figures 4–7).

Chapter 3 Setting the Scene and the Scope of the Inquiry builds upon the definition and understandings of irregular space previously given in the Introduction. This chapter references historical and contemporary literature to support the various terminologies adopted within this research, situating irregular spaces within the alternative ‘scene’. The work of Bey is utilised further to expand on the death and disappearance of irregular spaces, and to reference anarchist theories on the rejection of dominant corporate forces, exemplified by the work of Debord and Lefebvre. This chapter draws on the philosophies of Tuan, Massey and Bachelard to dismantle the inherent differences between the terms ‘space’ and ‘place’ as used throughout the thesis, and their sometimes interchangeable applications.

Chapter 4 Sydney’s Urban Assemblages and the Networks Incubating Irregular Space begins by addressing the binary and oppositional issues associated with city analysis, labelled ‘the lure of binarism’ [Soja, 1996 p. 61], which represents a need to sort and divide that which contributes to the shaping of social space. I consider how ANT aids an understanding of the role irregular spaces play within a city frequently divided into regular and non-regular, public and private and inside and outside. This enabling of networks allows for a fluid approach to cities and their social constructs. This chapter then addresses the work of MacFarlane, Farias and Bender to explore how networks of relations can create assemblages, both real and imagined. Thus, Sydney is a contextual space for the subversive sites of irregularity thriving within it. This approach highlights the historical networks of alternative spaces within Sydney and consequently links them to events, spaces and cultures that intersect with the spaces I am studying. In doing this, the chapter introduces a range of concepts that are detrimental to the life span of irregular spaces, exemplified through witness accounts and research.

Chapter 5 Redefining Sydney’s Alternative Centre and the Shift West locates the reader in the inner western suburb of Marrickville. While Marrickville is named a site of irregularity in Chapter 1, the Introduction, Chapter 5 profiles the spaces located within this suburb. This section introduces stories about the deliberations and negotiations of irregular spaces. It examines how they connect, what they avoid and strategies for sustaining them, all of which reveal their dynamic character. The chapter refers to the sustaining and closures of legitimised commercial and music venues, highlighting different dynamics of closure and cultural maintenance.

A threshold separates Part 2 from Part 1, a pause before the reader enters irregular space. Within this threshold piece, I use a door as a symbol of the divide between outside and inside.

Chapter 6, Photography and Phenomenology marks the beginning of the second half of the thesis, ‘Inside Out’. The content here reveals my own intimate experiences within spaces, along with my own internal deliberations and approaches to these spaces. This explains in more detail my methodological approach, drawing on the hermeneutic phenomenology of Martin Heidegger. Chapter 4 explored ANT and its role in defining urban networks. Chapter 6, discusses ANT in relation to the ontological nature of photography and the networks that form between the camera and myself. This chapter positions my work within visual communication, and illuminates the link between the previously discussed theories and my practice. Chapter 6 begins to introduce my photography to the reader in the context of my practice. It explores the relationship my practice has with time and capturing ephemeral moments.

In Chapter 7 Analysing the Visual, I consider a range of photographer’s work that has informed and complemented my visual journey throughout this research project. I explain my own positioning as a practitioner and the ways in which this has influenced and transformed my phenomenological study.

Chapter 8, The Sensory Fold: Defining Irregularity represents a change of pace in the thesis. A different voice and tense is mobilised in this chapter to reveal an unfolding of experiences in ‘real time’. The chapter introduces the main body of photographic work to the reader, identifying images that signal this irregularity I have been, up until this point, describing by word. This chapter continues the notion of ‘slippage’, as set up in Chapter 6. Actors are connected across space and time (both past and present). An understanding of this is integral to relationality and the associative thinking that engages ANT.

Chapter 9, Demonstrating Networks and Connections explains the networks that inform the visual assemblages resulting from my practice. This begins by looking at connectivity between actors (including myself) within the spaces and how this immersion brought to life the transition between ‘space’ and ‘place’. This chapter (and my theoretical approach) draws on the writer Italo Calvino, to discuss...
the threads that exist between social and actor networks. Starting small, I begin by analysing the connections inside a singular image and progress to analysing networks between the image and myself and various images, building towards the visual assemblages in Section 9.2.3. In doing this, I analyse my photographic process, in which I have identified images bought together to demonstrate phenomenological patterns, in an attempt to overcome the representational fixity of the singular image. In viewing these, the reader views heterogeneous assemblages made up of networked relations, represented spatially, aesthetically and experientially.

Chapter 10 concludes the thesis by positing the tangible contribution that an image-based study can provide to the collective imagination of past, present and future ideations of the city. It also considers future directions of the research and the sites featured within it.

This thesis is accompanied by a separate series of photographs compiled into a designed book. This allows the viewer to explore the spaces in their own time. The central importance of time and space is exemplified within the designed outcome, ‘a book is a sequence of spaces. Each of these spaces is perceived at a different moment—a book is also a sequence of moments’ (Carrion, 1975, p. 1). The book itself ebbs and flows, much like words of poetry speak differently to those who read them.

Tim Cresswell (2014) discusses the nuanced relationship that exists between poetry and geography in Geographies of Poetry/Poetries of Geographies. Cresswell discusses the multiple roles of poetry, alluding to his desire for his work to paint images for people, not just through scholarly research, but also through the joy and fanciful nature of poetry and verse. In this way, I believe my photographs are a type of visual poetry about these spaces, attempting to capture the feelings, emotions and traces of these geographies of cultural irregularity, captured and expressed by my eye rather than by the written word. The photographs were compiled deliberately, allowing the viewer to move freely through the space of the page, ‘the space is the music of the unsung poetry’ (Carrion, 1975, p. 3). I elicit the viewer to consider all these sensory experiences when viewing this book: music, poetry, light and dark, engaging in the spaces themselves and the pauses in between. The overall design and design choices of the book are aligned to reflect the nuances of irregular spaces. The light in the images bleeds into darkness and the photographs are printed on a matte stock; this is an attempt to reference the non-commercial, non-glossy aesthetics of irregular spaces. The book is bound in black card, representing night time darkness. The cover title appears in a subtle print (foil), an attempt to engage the viewer in finding the hint of light in darkness, a darkness which gives way to the exposure within the book. This sense of a slow reveal is mimicked throughout the thesis and thesis structure.
CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGICAL OVERVIEW AND ISSUES
This chapter begins by surveying existing research on practice-oriented research and details the ways in which my own research is practice-based. Hermeneutic phenomenology, ANT and assemblage theory are explained and positioned in relation to my methodological approach, signposting their use throughout the thesis. The chapter draws on this methodological approach to justify the two-part thesis structure, which aims to take the reader on a journey from the unknown to the known.

Throughout this study, there has been a range of methodological challenges related to researching the hidden and the subversive. These challenges are explained here, and expanded upon in the thesis. This chapter elaborates that, while I am absorbed in these spaces, I am not interfering, intervening or attempting to sustain the spaces as cultural entities. Ethically, I agree with the ideas of Banks and Pink who suggest, ‘Swooping god like into other peoples’ lives and gathering data (including visual data) according to a predetermined theoretical agenda strikes me as not simply morally dubious but intellectually flawed’ (Banks, 2001 p. 179). Instead, I acknowledge the sensitive issues surrounding researching ‘subversive’ spaces and question methodological issues related to representing data and the disclosure of information in sensitive research studies.

In Section 2.3, I explore the human and non-human networks of interconnecting entities made available by ANT, which have helped inform my theorisation of irregular space. I then introduce the reader to the topographical placement of spaces, through abstract maps.

2.1 Practice-Based Research

In Section 1.1, I identified the first motivation of this project, which was to respond to changes in the city’s spaces. Specifically, my aim is to capture cultural irregularity. The second motivation of this thesis, as a practice-based PhD, is to contribute to the body of image-based research informing a critical and reflexive understanding of cities as spaces of dynamic interaction. Using photography to expose city life has a long tradition in the works of street photographers (e.g., the careers of Atget, Cartier-Bresson, and Frank) who used their cameras to capture the poetry of the urban everyday. I see my urban photographic practice as a way of capturing the intangible aspects of liminal urban spaces that shift between public and private, ‘through the practice of working with a camera and in a spirit of collaboration with place’ [Hunt, 2014, p. 152]. This practice-based research draws on my own understanding of photography as an inquiry method.

Research situated in and around practice is often problematic to define. The terms ‘practice-based’, ‘practice-led’ and ‘practice-oriented’ research are often used interchangeably. Although various accounts of what they may be exist, there is no one set of accepted or established definitions (Rust, Mottram & Till, 2007, p. 11). Rust et al., who prefer the term ‘practice-led research’ (2007), draw on the work of Colford (2005) to address this lack of definition. They infer it is due to opposition arising from fears that clear delineations of what practice-led research is (or is not) would produce a ‘crypto-science’, therefore distancing it from creative practice.

However, it is imperative to define the terminology in relation to my own individual research context. I determine that both practice-led and practice-based research support critical reflection and a move from the unknown to the known, from intuition to an understanding that folds back into and informs practice. Within this section, I negotiate the ways in which I draw on practice-led research, while ultimately identifying with practice-based research. At times, I use the term ‘practice-oriented’; this is an umbrella term that allows for a looser use of the ideas encompassed by practice-oriented research.

The Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) defines practice-led research as: ‘Research in which the professional and/or the creative practices of art, design or architecture play an instrumental part of an inquiry’ (2007, p. 11). Both the Arts and Humanities Research Board (AHRB) (2000) and AHRC (2007) guidelines explicitly state that creative practice, in a doctoral context, should be accompanied by a written component. However, as discussed by Candy (2006), the core difference between practice-led and practice-based research is that within practice-based research a full understanding can only be gained with direct reference to the creative outcome/s. It is due to this that I adopt the terminology of practice-based research, as my photographs play a key role in my research conclusions.

Smith and Dean (2009) state that the pivotal function within practice-led research is the role of making in the creation of knowledge:

Therefore practice-led research that is supported by critical reflection and reflexive action can be seen to invert the research process because it encourages working from the unknown to the known and it is purposeful yet open-ended, clear sighted yet exploratory. (p. 49)

While Smith and Dean’s (2009) idea of ‘making’ emphasises reflection, action, open-ended and uncertain investigation, their idea of ‘making’ is so broad
that it could include writing a thesis. Candy (2006) supports this, affirming that a practice-led thesis may be described solely in textual form without any visual work included. The aim of practice-led research is therefore to advance knowledge about, or within, practice.

For some, emphasis on the written component in practice-oriented research has led to the misunderstanding that the reflective component occurs in a project’s written parts, where the creative practice is ‘converted’ to research through an act of interpretation (AHRC, 2007). This is not the case in my project. There is also a misrepresentation in creative work that one (normally the practice) happens before the other. As further discussed in Chapter 6, Photography and Phenomenology, implementing the hermeneutic circle requires a shuttling back and forth between ideas, theories and practice, to achieve understanding: ‘understanding is achieved by our interpreting within a circular process, in which we move from a whole to the individual parts and from the individual parts to the whole through the hermeneutic circle’ (Debasey et al., 2007, p. 58). In this sense, my theoretical and methodological approach has emerged in conjunction with my practice. Through a process of writing, practice and reflection, I have continually reassessed both my creative outcomes and the theoretical and methodological concepts within which I have framed them.

Practice-based research, contrary to the misunderstandings mentioned above, confers primacy to the practice in the sense that the research is ‘based’ on and oriented in the practice. ‘In a doctoral thesis, claims of originality and contribution to knowledge may be demonstrated through creative outcomes in the form of designs, music, digital media, performances and exhibitions’ (Candy, 2006). This creative contribution is demonstrated in my resultant image assemblages, found in Section 9.2.3, and my accompanying designed outcome (book), which contributes significantly to this research. My visual outcomes reflect my phenomenological journey into and through these spaces, seeking to disclose irregular spaces as unique urban assemblages that contest formal binaries between: inside/outside, space/time, and human/non-human.

ANT offers an appropriate methodology for my investigation into Sydney’s irregular spaces. Developed by Bruno Latour, in conjunction with Michel Callon and John Law, in the early 1980s, ANT has become a popular mode of disabling the stability of social structures and hierarchies. Latour refrains from using the word ‘society’ in most contexts, due to his belief that it should not be something prescribed by external ‘authorities’ (Latour, 2005). In my research, the application of ANT does not seek to pre-emptively frame these spaces as composed of specific social movements or groups, but rather allows the actors themselves to emerge, autonomously defining the occurrences and connections between entities. This aligns reflexively with the nature of my intuitive photographic process, where the city (as subject) is represented as networks of relationships. In my research context, these networks are presented as a mapping of cultural ‘actors’, both human and non-human. The emphasis on non-human actors is a distinguishing factor of ANT, which distributes equal agency to both human and non-human objects: an actor is not just an object, but an association between a series of elements that come together to create a network (Latour, 2005). I capture these actors through my creative practice of photography, through which I explore and document my interpretations of internal and external space.

Hermeneutic phenomenology explores human experience and our interpretation of phenomena, ‘the focus is towards illuminating details and seemingly trivial aspects within experience that may be taken for granted in our lives, with a goal of creating meaning and achieving a sense of understanding’ (Wilson & Hutchinson, 1991). In my research, hermeneutic phenomenology describes and documents my embodied experience of irregular space and its intrinsic temporality. The camera captures not only these spaces, but also marks my own involvements and incursions as a dynamic ‘element’ in the network. Combining hermeneutic phenomenology and ANT allows me to reveal, track and link different aspects of the spaces I am assembling, and informs a reflexive understanding of my practice. Hermeneutic phenomenology positions my research within visual communications. ANT supports the identification and creation of both urban networks and intricate image networks, resulting in assemblages that transgress the objective divisions existing between the human and non-human. This combination of methods results in a unique understanding of the city and how irregular spaces exist within it. It also allows space for visual study not bound by the laws of representation.

In this study, the assemblage is a way of understanding how both urban and image networks can be held together to create a temporary configuration, brought into being through actor network associations. Assemblage theory was first established by Deleuze and Guattari (1987). The premise of the assemblage is interpretative and non-prescriptive. Bryant (2009) summates the following from an interview with Deleuze:

Assemblages are composed of heterogeneous elements or objects that enter into relations with one another. These objects are not all of the same type. Thus you have physical objects, happenings, events, and so on, but you also have signs, utterances, and so on.
In Part 1 of the thesis, I look at the various components of the city that form urban assemblages. The best way to illustrate the way the assemblages work in the context of this study is to consider the night time city as an assemblage. A night time city consists of population, organisations and collectives, government policies and law enforcement, entertainment, businesses, political movements, scenes and branding (adapted from Little, 2012). These elements enact varying temporal dynamics that are better analysed as interconnected objects, assembled and re-assembled at a variety of concrete sites across the city (Farias & Bender, 2010). The application of the assemblage allows for certain elements to be introduced, removed and reintroduced, forming new assemblages of evolving associations. ANT has been a useful tool in bringing together not only ideas about the city, but also the disparate research that informed my understanding of it. Throughout this interdisciplinary research process, I have been required to step outside my knowledge base; ANT helped me recognise and forge the connections between elements. The messy and elusive nature of the city and the spaces inhabiting it require a fluid, interpretative framework. The tactical use of ANT reflects my overall methodological approach, while respecting the ontological mode of cities and their consequential formations.

In Chapter 4, I outline the ways in which ANT and assemblage theory are critiqued, due to the lack of hierarchical implementation in their approaches. I hope that by acknowledging the difficulties surrounding ANT and assemblage theory, I will demonstrate the ways in which this combination of methods combats these issues. ANT, which is critiqued for its lack of specificity, is paired with the image, which has a rich visual meaning of its own. This combination counters ANT’s lack of specificity and the subjectivity of the image, by linking these images to other images, creating visual assemblages and forging associations that stretch across divisions, avoiding hierarchical organisation. Henceforth, the photograph’s subjectivity and implied meaning becomes grouped and directs the viewer to patterns of association and understandings, exploring Soja’s (2010) notion that ‘we are at all times engaged and enmeshed in shaping our socialised spatialities and, simultaneously being shaped by them’ (18).

These visual assemblages are located in Part 2 of the thesis, in Section 9.2.3. They are composed of my photographic images. A photograph is a moment, frozen in time (Sontag, 1977). Therefore, when viewing a singular image, it is perceived as a singular truth. The visual assemblages in this study seek to illuminate multiple moments and patterns in time, as captured through the images, which contribute to a larger assemblage of irregularity. In doing this, I hope to debunk the image as a singular moment of representational fixity. The elements captured within my images, variously big and small, intimate or public, real or imagined, are assemblages of actors that, when brought together, constitute a larger assembled whole. Each image is contingent on the image beside it, making the visual assemblages both spatial and dimensional.

I have outlined here my interest in assemblages as urban network formations and image network formations; at times, I also refer to an assemblage of ideas. For example, the two parts of the thesis comprise a range of idea networks that, when brought together, express interconnected and related concepts and theories I express as an assemblage. By doing this, I hope to honour the spirit of the thesis, that networks are made from a range of human and non-human elements captured through both visual and written means.

2.2 The Thesis as Assemblage

The inverted process discussed by Smith and Dean (2009), and the hermeneutic position that understanding is achieved through encountering smaller pieces that are part of a bigger whole, is an inherent part of my work. This is reflected in the overall thesis structure. The thesis is separated into two parts: ‘outside in’ and ‘inside out’. This is in an attempt to reflect my journey, in which I am slowly absorbed in the spaces through enacting ‘empathetic insideness’ (Relph, 1976). The two thesis elements are part of an interconnected whole, and are situated to both illuminate each other and the reflexive process undertaken throughout the research. The two inter-related parts are so tightly entwined that they cannot function without the other; they are as dependent on each other as night is to day, revealing diversities and potentialities about the city and urban life, coming together as an assemblage.

The first half of the thesis concentrates on the structural and theoretical underpinnings of how and where irregular spaces are located within the bigger space of the city and their historical, political and geographical dynamics. Consequently, it examines how these dynamics inform an understanding of irregular space. The situational information is posed to take the reader from the inner city (the location where I first encountered irregular spaces), outwards, towards the inner western suburb of Marrickville (the new ‘epicentre’ of irregular spaces in Sydney and the focus of this study). ANT can expose limitless networks of actors and forces, and varying levels of detail and intensity, as networks can branch out to other cities and countries. The network:
and assemblage theory as I began to connect disparate and closely linked actors. Images. This process was broadly phenomenological, yet I specifically applied ANT but also resulted from my direct experiences in the spaces and reflection on my irregularity. This list was informed by theoretical readings on ‘alternative spaces’, elements (through making lists) that contributed to or defined my understanding of reader, through both words and images. Early in my project, I began identifying actors within them. Developed and began to take shape, my practice began to align with the ideas I was after the images were taken, informing my theoretical approach. Yet, as this project concurrently forming about my practice, the spaces and my interactions with the thesis reflects these dualities by first acquainting the reader with the ‘outside’ and steadily drawing them ‘in’, revealing the intimate confines ‘inside’ the spaces. This allows experience of the places within the study, allowing the reader/viewer ‘to experience places in a secondhand or vicarious way, without actually visiting them, yet feeling deep involvement’ [Relph, 1976, p. 52].

In Part 2 of the thesis, ANT and assemblage theory is applied as a means of understanding more intimate networks within the venues themselves and the ways in which these networks come together to inform visual assemblages. Through my reflexive process, I have identified patterns in my images that constitute notable and iconic themes/ethea/aesthetic relations within irregular spaces. These are then grouped together to demonstrate bigger patterns between irregular spaces. The use of my photographic images to demonstrate these phenomenological groupings honours the network that is also formed between myself, my camera, the space and the actors that I capture and document. This analysis initially occurred after the images were taken, informing my theoretical approach. Yet, as this project developed and began to take shape, my practice began to align with the ideas I was concurrently forming about my practice, the spaces and my interactions with the actors within them.

Throughout both parts of the thesis, I paint a picture of irregularity for the reader, through both words and images. Early in my project, I began identifying elements (through making lists) that contributed to or defined my understanding of irregularity. This list was informed by theoretical readings on ‘alternative spaces’, but also resulted from my direct experiences in the spaces and reflection on my images. This process was broadly phenomenological, yet I specifically applied ANT and assemblage theory as I began to connect disparate and closely linked actors. Once an initial list ‘defining irregularity’ was established, I was more attuned to photographing these actants of irregularity within spaces, yet new actants also emerged through my repeated immersion across time. In this sense, the networks that defined irregularity were an evolving and transforming assemblage that I only solidified quite late in my research. Certain defining traits were deleted or reconfigured to match my renewed understanding. In Chapter 8, I use specific images to demonstrate my understanding of irregularity.

While I was defining irregular spaces, another type of analysis was also undertaken. As my research practice developed, I began to notice patterns within the images. Photographs exemplified more than just my definition of irregularity, they instead captured the sounds, connections and vibes of spaces. After pouring through images, I discovered (in part what I already knew) an intuitive inclination to capture the same ‘type’ of actors, moments and connections within space. With this knowledge, I wrote reflexively about the way specific images contributed to my understanding of place and created categories that constituted patterns and associations across different spaces and time. In the beginning, these lists were quite prescriptive and restricted the assemblages’ fluidity. Over time, I started to connect overarching themes that linked these networks into more opened and fluid assemblages: the ways in which these assemblages developed and emerged is explored further in Chapter 9. My photographs throughout the thesis, and the visual assemblages I have created, address the main research question: ‘In what ways can the fluid, adaptable, creative and alternative dimensions of Sydney’s irregular performance spaces be revealed through my phenomenological investigation?’ My visual journey through these irregular spaces reveals the ways that immersion within space contributes to phenomenological understandings of place. In Section 9.2, Visual Assemblages, I display the aesthetic and social assemblages of networked images that have formed as a result of my visual–phenomenological investigation. These are positioned as my research results.

### 2.3 Researching the Irregular—Methodological Issues

While I aim to make this study as comprehensive as possible, it is critically important that the fragile and secretive nature of the spaces and my relationship to them is understood. There may be a range of venues that would fall within the ‘irregular space’ definition that are located within Sydney and its inner western suburbs, but that have not been captured in this study. These may have been closed down prior to my research, or may not have been made accessible to me within the research process. Due to these spaces not being publicised, one is unable to
search for them in a conventional sense. The research process is unpredictable and sometimes the connection with a space, or the people within it, is fleeting.

While there is some evidence of Sydney city’s historic irregular spaces and alternative scenes, one of the key struggles of this research project is finding recent or current history and/or documenting history as it is unfolding, not after the fact. Pink (2014) discussed this predicament at a recent conference (Initiating Change by Design), contemplating the fact that the ethnographer’s work is often concerned with the past, as this is recorded and can hence be identified. The present event then becomes an example of what has gone before. This is problematic within my own research context due to the peculiar vitality of irregular spaces and their sporadic, event-based presence that temporarily flirts with the present before disappearing.

There is some, though not a wealth of research, alluding to the music performance scene within Sydney. In his book, History is Made at Night: Live music in Australia, Walker (2012) discusses the challenges of researching the regulated live music performance scene, indicating that an understanding of the alternative history was pieced together from widely scattered sources. If the legitimised, commercial music venues studied by Walker (2012) were difficult to uncover, it would follow that the irregular/illegal scene is even more difficult to map and research. I have used some research related to the history of Sydney’s warehouse scene (Byrne; 2005; Freeman: n.d.; Shaw, 2006) and the specific sounds and social conditions emerging from those spaces. Griffith (2012) has researched the recent developments and history of Artist Run Initiatives (ARI) in Sydney, with a focus on the role that transient artists play in legitimising these sites. As mentioned in the Introduction, research has been conducted on urban development’s effects on the live music scene in Sydney, and a contemporary history of venues and performances (see Gibson & Homan, 200r; Homan & Johnson, 2003; Homan & Mitchell, 2008).

Due to the disparate sources of information and the irregularity of these spaces, this study has resulted in records and accounts emerging from unconventional sources (blogs, music review sites, Facebook events, email invites, word of mouth), and has included an eclectic range of literature, beyond philosophy, fiction and poetry, to music journalism and ephemera related to irregular music venues. The drawing together of scattered sources is common in culture and scene-based research. Wendy Shaw (2006) discusses encountering the same problems around unconventional and fleeting data when researching the warehouse scene in Sydney during the 1970s and 1980s:

![Figure 2. Relational chart (Created by Author, 2013).](image-url)
The lack of formal records on warehouse living meant delving into less than conventional data sources, including my own recollections—my experiences of warehouse culture in the late 1970s and 1980s. This lead to conversations with [other] warehouse survivors who provided anecdotal moments and provided stimulus, for accessing other avenues. (p. 185)

Despite social media’s key benefits for those attending events and scoping the scene, it does come with its own set of problems, and can often play a role in exposing irregular spaces. This is expanded upon in more detail in Section 5.2, where I discuss the issues surrounding exposure and locative media.

All types of exposure are problematic, due to the geographical and promotional discretion these spaces require. A certain cultural awareness is needed to know about these spaces and the events they hold. It is not the commercial pub on the corner with its billposter advertisements; these spaces function under a blanket of discretion. On some internet and digital flyers containing details of events, the tagline ‘make sure you throw this in the bin when you are done’ is included, indicating the secretive nature of these events. Email invites and invite-only Facebook events often involve contacting the host for the address and event details. A number of invites carry a ‘friendly’ warning:

Remember to keep your BYO rations out of plane [sic] site, tell only your closest of comrades about our attack mission and it is of exceptional importance that you arrive and disperse in stealth mode at all times to avoid detection by the enemy ... over but never out. [9 Feb, 2013].

The informal language emphasises the discretion required to hold this event. It goes without saying that the event is illegal in some capacity, and that people are to enter and participate at their own risk. This adds to the excitement and danger surrounding an event.

Due to the adverse relationship these spaces have with visibility, rather than profile the spaces in detail (as in traditional case studies), my work attempts to initially situate the reader/viewer as an outsider to these spaces. When first entering this world you are not handed a fact sheet about the type of music at each space, or details about its inception. The beauty and allure of an irregular space lies in its ability to slowly reveal itself to you, drawing you into its world.

Next, in Section 2.4, I introduce abstract mapping, which indicates the general location and movement of the irregular spaces investigated in this study. To respect the sensitivity of these spaces, I have chosen not to reveal their specific locative details. However, there is a need for, and value in, presenting an accurate and descriptive snapshot of the moment in time that these spaces occupy. To do this, I have created abstract maps as a form of gentle disclosure that protects and respects the anonymity and hard won secrecy of these spaces, while providing a sense of the network and proximity of these spaces to each other in space and time.

In Figure 2, I visualise my networked interactions with the spaces utilising a relational chart. This chart details the actors who influenced and guided my introduction to the spaces (be that the internet or a person). These actors are represented by grey squares [a visual tool expanded upon in Chapter 9]. The dates when I first encountered the space appear down the side of the information graphic, indicating my slow and steady entry into this elusive scene. Circles represent each space: red represents the now closed spaces, orange represents the active spaces and black represents the unconfirmed closed spaces that I categorise as dormant. This figure charts the unfolding, run-on effect of research, how accessing certain spaces can consequentially reveal other spaces. This may be due to people I meet at these events, the proximity of one space to another, or the network or group it belongs to, and invitations to events at other spaces within the parameters of an existing event. These evolving relations support both the phenomenological nature of the study and the actor networks established within my research. This mapping of my research journey via human and non-human actors demonstrates my use of ANT to trace the ephemeral nature of these spaces. This idea of interconnecting entities—be they digital, personal, social or material—represents the range of assemblages captured through my practice.

In Figure 2, I visualise the connections between the internet, the spaces and myself, demonstrating the role the internet plays in tracking irregular events. The internet allows me to gain information that would have been more difficult to obtain and less accessible prior to the digital age and the influx of social media.
2.4 Mapping Irregular Space

Before the next chapter’s review of the urban and spatial history of Sydney city as a site of alternative spaces, I would like to introduce the reader to the spaces and their approximate location within Sydney, via mapping. Maps are useful in this study; they visually and spatially allow the viewer to determine quickly the movement of these spaces and their proximity to the city centre. However, it should be understood that these are not maps in a traditional sense. When I first began researching these spaces, I mapped them on a pin board, as seen in Figure 3. As I became immersed in the research, my mapping process developed and changed. It slowly became more minimalist with regard to specific geographic details. This was a careful choice, deferring to relationships between spaces as entities and not their specific geographical placement. Bey (1991) discusses the negatives associated with the spatially correct map, stating:

The ‘map’ is a political abstract grid, a gigantic con enforced by the carrot/stick conditioning of the ‘Expert’ State, until for most of us the map becomes the territory—no longer ‘Turtle Island’. but ‘the USA.’ And yet because the map is an abstraction it cannot cover Earth with 1:1 accuracy. Within the fractal complexities of actual geography the map can see only dimensional grids. Hidden enfolded immensities escape the measuring rod. The map is not accurate; the map cannot be accurate. (p. 5)

While we expect a map is objective, maps (like all images) are made for purposes (Boyd Davies, 2009). The maps I have made must be declared as abstractions. They are based on the original locations identified in the pinning exercises, but details have been slowly removed, avoiding provision of specific traceable, locational data that could incriminate these spaces.

Since I began my study in 2010, irregular spaces have slowly but surely begun to move further from the city centre. While there is evidence of earlier spaces residing in the inner western suburbs, the cluster of spaces in the inner western suburbs has increased dramatically since that time. Figure 4 is an early map that I created, highlighting the spaces I was investigating when beginning my research in 2010. It reveals a range of active venues close to the city centre within the Chippendale and Darlinghurst region; the active spaces (at the time) are demonstrated in yellow, the red spaces indicate the closed spaces I either visited or had locational data for, the black represents Carriageworks (a government funded arts institute, discussed further in Chapter 4) and the green represents

N.B. Map is included at a small size to aid concealment of details. The purpose of this map is to inform spatial awareness.
legitimate spaces that either began as irregular or embody irregular ethos, [this type of information is expanded upon later in Chapter 4].

In Figure 5, 2013, we see the additional appearance of only one new irregular city-based space (which has since become dormant). The map indicates that the majority of inner city spaces are now closed and/or dormant. Without confirmation of closures (for examples, Helen Rose), I can surmise that the irregular spaces located within these inner city suburbs are inactive. In addition, the inner western suburbs, specifically Marrickville, are now populated by an increased number of irregular sites. Figure 6 represents the spaces that became the core irregular sites for my photographic exploration. Figure 6 demonstrates my developed approach to mapping the spaces that strips graphic detail and identifying topographical features. Also included in the accompanying visual book, the final map seen in Figure 7 indicates the space closures at the time of my study’s completion in 2014. Here I use red to indicate closed sites, as they are inactive according to both my and local knowledge. Figure 7 indicates that in 2014, there is only six sites remaining out of the eighteen original irregular spaces I have studied in detail.

While these maps indicate location, they are also a testament to the short-lived nature of irregular spaces. The majority of factors that cause venue closures can be linked to structural pressures and trends within Sydney, as mentioned in Chapter 1. Gentrification relocates artists due to a range of factors; however, the nuanced relationships irregular spaces have with closures is explored further in Chapters 4 and 5.

Just as specific detail has been removed from maps, in the following chapters when clarifying issues surrounding policy and regulation these spaces have faced, certain identifying details related to the spaces are omitted [such as names and/or locations]. At times, the irregular space’s name may be revealed, at others it may be withheld due to implications this may have for the space. This also applies to the conventions and ‘naming’ of my figures throughout the thesis. While the reader is led through the series of images via traditional numbering, the arrangement of images reflects my own visual-phenomenological investigation.

Blume (2003) discusses the notion that cities can often tell their stories through their ‘scenes’, and acknowledges that the accomplishments of scenes are often ‘hard won and fought, there is perhaps an official history of scenes and a darker, secret, covert history that is deposited in the fragmentary remains of witness testimony, or awaits recovery’ (Blume, 2003, p. 169). Blume directly refers to oral testimony, whereas in my research I instead explore the material and social ‘fragmentary remains’, while attempting to keep the spaces protected.
Figure 7. Closed spaces, (Created by Author, 2014).
CHAPTER 3

SETTING THE SCENE AND THE SCOPE OF THE STUDY
This chapter begins by outlining the key academic literature that helps me describe, understand and analyse alternative cultures and ‘scenes’. While engaging with this material, I identify and adopt my own terminology, creating a type of glossary that is informed by contextual research. I particularly draw upon ‘space’ and ‘place’ literature to define irregular spaces and explain how my images of place incite the urban imaginary. This chapter applies the thought of ‘space’ and ‘place’ to anecdotal examples informing the definition of irregular space and supporting a phenomenological interpretation, while addressing the social and political context of irregularity.

3.1 Scenes and Practices

The irregular spaces that thrive within Sydney’s alternative arts and performance scene result from the continued investment of individual and collective actors. The events within these spaces are numerous and eclectic and are filled interchangeably with different actors, both human and non-human. Due to this state of flux, there is no fixed group within the spaces, and therefore no obvious or notable aesthetic that links this group of people as a ‘subculture’. Wyn and White (1997) state there is often a tendency within subcultural analyses to focus on superficial aspects of culture—such as style, consumption practices and the differences between young people and adults—while ignoring the continuities that exist across age boundaries (Catanzaro, 2004, p. 11). The binding thread between actors is their sharing of, and experiences within, irregular space. In provisionally referring to this as a ‘culture’, it is therefore a place of creative expression and performance not available within regular venues. This creation of place is not limited to the physical space in a traditional sense, it can exist simply in connections between people whose temporary association creates a provisional sense of place within already coded space (Tucker, 2009 p. 5).

It is challenging to capture how any one culture differs from its predecessors, and even more challenging to track and link when one subculture begins and when another ends. This research implicates the spaces themselves as the binding thread between the individuals and collectives that frequent these sites and bring them into being.

De Botton (2004) discusses ‘Bohemian’ art scenes and movements of the past, commenting on the existence of a thread(s) that links different groups of individuals:

One can wind the word [Bohemia] around a number of different artistic and social phenomena of the last two hundred years, from Romanticism to Surrealism, from the Beatniks to the Punks, from the Situationists to the Kibbutzniks, and still not snap a thread binding something important together. (cited in Shaw, 2013, p. 335)

While the term ‘bohemian’ identifies artists, musicians and counter cultures, I shy away from it, due to the historic reference as a ‘place where one could live and work cheaply, and behave unconventionally’ (Bohemia Amsterdam, 1995–2014). In my research, I favour the term ‘alternative’ to refer to the cultural ethos of irregular spaces: ‘Alternative cultures took clear form in the 1960s across the Western world’ (Shaw, 2013, p. 334). Brian O’Doherty brought together ‘alternative’ and ‘space’ in the early 1970s to identify the abandoned manufacturing lofts illegally occupied by New York’s artistic avant-garde movement (Terroni, 2011). Following O’Doherty, this study looks beyond aesthetics and fashion, and instead focuses on the inhabitation of ‘alternative space’ and the consequent creation of culture. Despite this study’s focus on the spaces themselves, examining the issues and historical contexts within which alternative cultures have been forged highlights the symbiosis between culture and space.

Shaw observes the thing that often binds the alternative together is the ‘rejection of mass-produced, commercialised culture’ (Shaw, 2013, p. 335). The marginal nature of past independent subcultures played an integral role in participants’ abilities to evade the responsibilities affiliated with formal recognition. This rejection of dominant culture and formal recognition has become a key aspect in defining a culture as alternative to the mainstream (Shaw, 2013). These factors are important when examining the irregular spaces within Sydney, as they too evade formal recognition and visibility. The tendency for actors to claim physical space for temporary use within the city is in part due to the lack of available spaces dedicated to non-commercial creativity. Shaw (2013) states the pressure on increasing development has affected the relationship that alternative cultures have with their cities.

While Sydney’s irregular spaces operate independently, they are still in some ways part of a larger whole. Some spaces are more closely connected topologically and this is explored through the use of maps in Section 2.4, but also through the formal collectives and networks they consequently form. This formal collectivisation is explored further in Section 5.3.
If terminology is applied to this group of spaces, I adopt the term alternative ‘scene’, as it has strong ties to place: the ‘scene’ of a crime. Blume discusses the way that the depiction of ‘scenes’ (particularly art scenes) can often become the legacy of a city, yet he notes that the glorification of historical and urban scenes often glosses over or leaves unmentioned the tensions that exist ‘between the city and the scene’ (Blume, 2003, p. 169).

Geoff Stahl (2004), following Straw (1991), also draws upon the idea of the scene being a mass of ‘extensive inter-related networks, circuits and alliances formed both inside and outside the city’ (p. 54). He explains that this network of interconnected resources pools together to reinstate and support activities primarily concerned with culture in the city (Stahl, 2004). Theorising scenes as networks aligns with my application of ANT, when studying these spaces as sites of emergence and flux, made up of heterogeneous actors, both human and non-human, internal and external.

When defining spaces within the alternative scene, I pair the term ‘irregular’ with ‘space’, as irregularity represents something contrary to that which is normal, regular and established. Irregularity also represents a visual quality and can refer to an uneven balance in shape or arrangement (Oxford Dictionaries online, 2014). Irregularity can also be defined in its relationship to time and flux ‘lacking continuity or regularity especially of occurrence or activity’ (Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 2014).

Although I have begun to establish what an irregular space is, it is also important to identify the terminology applied by others to identify Sydney’s irregular spaces. ‘ARI’ commonly refers to alternative spaces. However, this differs from ‘irregular space’; it is a designation that seeks official ‘recognition’. This identity and representation, if applied to irregular spaces, would constrain their dynamic nature. Writing grant proposals increases administrative work and hampers spontaneity through the necessary arguments about relevance, significance and legitimisation. Instead, irregular spaces generally move in an alternative direction, towards invisibility, and therefore are not formally recognised by government institutions and funding bodies.

Despite the possible existence of irregular spaces that identify as ARIs, I avoid this terminology, as it places primary emphasis on the artist. This is problematic, as it prioritises the human element as the core creator of a space.

Within my research, I focus not only on the human, but also on an irregular space’s non-human properties and the ways in which they combine to create networks of associations. In addition, within the alternative Sydney scene, people do not always identify as ‘artists’. In fact, in a number of cases, individuals hosting an event may merely enjoy engaging with, and contributing to, the alternative scene. I use the terms ‘actors’ and ‘practices’ as descriptors in an attempt to encompass the broad range of people, things, activities and performances that contribute to the assemblage of irregular spaces. Irregular spaces are also referred to as ‘warehouse spaces’ and this term appears within actors’ accounts throughout the thesis. The large majority of irregular spaces still functioning within Sydney do exist in the disused industrial warehouse spaces of Marrickville. Despite the warehouse becoming the primary physical site of irregular spaces within Sydney, there are still exceptions to this rule. I avoid this term as it emphasises the site’s original function. It must be acknowledged that while irregular spaces are revalorised sites not originally intended for performances, they may also encompass a ‘place of residence’.

As Byrne points out, this sets irregular space aside from the mainstream operations of commercial venues. The actors that live within these spaces, or organise events at irregular spaces, are referred to as ‘hosts’. In common language, the term ‘host’ can refer to individuals within society holding a party at their home. This is fitting, as the events held at irregular spaces often involve hosts inviting punters into their place of residence or their place of work (artist studios). A recent event invite stated:

I should note that this is NOT a live music venue, it’s an incredible space, with music facilities that’ll blow you away; however some very generous [hosts] people live here, and it should be treated with respect. Got dickhead mates? They’re not welcome. (Nov 18, 2011)

The blurred boundaries existing around irregular spaces that are also homes infers an element of generosity and reciprocity; a host gives something and expects a certain respectful etiquette in return. It appears these elements of
‘home’ are an extension of community trust; these spaces are first and foremost socio-material environments rich with unique assemblages of objects and people (human and non-human actors).

When referring to the actors who attend events at these irregular spaces, I use the term ‘punters’. The word ‘punter’ is associated with Australian slang, yet it is recognised internationally by the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) as ‘A customer or client, especially a member of an audience’ (2014). Other found definitions often associate ‘punters’ with illegal or illicit activities, including the procurement of prostitutes and gambling; it is used colloquially as a verb, as in the expression ‘taking a punt’ in relation to placing a bet. While the connotations associated with this terminology may appear negative, the use of this word within my research simply refers to these punters being committed to attending events within irregular spaces. In some ways, the idea of ‘taking a punt’ reinforces the act of committing to the unknown, a type of social gamble. At each event the punters are heterogeneous and leave a unique trace or fingerprint on the space itself, only later to be erased or modified by the next collective of punters. These punters and their transient engagements with irregular spaces are essential to deciphering temporal and sustained assemblages.

3.2 Space and Place

Kruse notes in her 2003 book Site and Sound that, while much has been written concerning the production and consequent consumption of cultural artefacts in social and cultural research, there is a lack of studies focusing on the role that space and place play in situating alternative and music-based cultural practices (2003). Over time, the important role that ideas about space and place play in a social, philosophical and geographical context has been readily contested in academic literature. Soja (2010) for example, discusses the unprecedented diffusion of critical spatial thought across a broad range of areas that has resulted in what scholars have called ‘the spatial turn’ (p. 13). Soja views the spatial turn as a profound change, a shift away from an era when spatial thinking was subordinated to historical thinking, toward one in which the historical and spatial dimensions of whatever subject you are looking at take on equal and interactive significance, without one inherently being privileged over the other. [2010, p. 15]

Soja [2010] argues that this spatial turn is the start of a more critical spatial perspective counteracting the relative neglect of spatial thinking in the last century and a half. The ‘turn’ itself implies looking back, a need to understand space in its original form. This retrospection argues that modernist theory understood time as fluid entity; alternatively, space was seen as closed and immobile (Massey, 2005). The modernist predilection to theorise space as merely a geometric or closed entity is in part responsible for the spatial turn of the 1970s. This turn ushered in a different perspective on spatiality, where social relations were inseparable from an understanding of space. The spatial turn saw geographers unite with scholars across a range of disciplines, with the intention of documenting capitalist society (see Harvey, 1976; Smith, 1982) and exposing spatial divisions of labour situated within capitalist, geopolitical and territorial structures (see Corbridge, 1986; Massey, 1995; Sayer, 1991; Wallerstein, 1979 (Hubbard & Kitchin, 2004]). These ideas were elaborated upon and transferred into academic theories, such as ‘the relationship between power and space “territoriality,” Massey’s “power geometry,” and Harvey’s “space-time compression”’ (Guldi, n.d.).

The placement of humans and human relations at the core of space studies ‘sought to supplant the “people-less” geographies of positivist spatial science with an approach to human geography that fed off alternative philosophies’ (Hubbard & Kitchin, 2004, p. 6) Of these alternative philosophies, existentialism and phenomenology gained momentum. Tuan, among others (see Buttimer 1976; Ley, 1979; Relph 1985) reminded geographers that we live in a world of meaning (Hubbard & Kitchin, 2004). Tuan [1974, 1977] argued that few academic works address how people ‘feel’ about space and the ways in which they experience it: this is important as ‘no two persons see the same reality’ (1974, p. 5). Tuan’s work around the experientialism of space lays the groundwork for identifying ways in which the meaning of space can often merge with the meaning of place (1977, p. 6).

Space represents a potential; it promises place. Tuan (1977) ties the themes of space and place to that of experience, posing the question ‘what is the nature of experience and of the experiential perspective?’[p. 7]. In Tuan’s book Space and Place (1977) he defines the experiences of space and place through the eyes of a child, noting that meaning is often embedded within objects and narratives, and that these contribute to a sense of place.

Within my research, irregular spaces are brimming with unique actors and experiences. These socio-material and human elements transform a venue, which begins as space, into a place, as attendees become familiar with the site
and begin to endow it with value [Tuan, 1977]. Cresswell [2004] agrees with Tuan's definition of place, claiming place is a location that is bestowed with meaning. Tuan (1977) notes that interaction is necessary for space to become place, insisting that place is a combination of experiences over varied moments in time. Furthering this idea, he states that time equals experience and experience equals place; these experiences are undoubtedly imbued with meaning developed over time. Due to closures, venues shifting and the hibernation of irregular spaces, the chance at repeated time spent in one space is not always an option. Tuan (1977) does present a loop-hole of sorts in relation to the above theory, stating that while it takes time to form an attachment to place, the quality and intensity of experience matters more than the simple duration. The intensity of experience is almost always heightened in irregular spaces. This might be due to the irregularity of the performances themselves or, as above mentioned, the temporality of the spaces. The fear of potential closure and the thrill of a space’s illegality creates a more dynamic and arguably memorable experience, out of volatility.

In my research, all these irregular sites began as ‘spaces’. Those spaces are often hard won, eked out of already existing environments, claimed in the interstices of place/space dynamics. It is important to note that like this study, space and place are inherently phenomenological concepts [Vanclay, Higgins & Blackshaw 2008]. The transition from space to place in this specific context is based upon my own experiences. When I first arrive at an irregular space, it exists as ‘space’ to me. As it is not yet imbued with memories and past experiences, it may very well already represent place to others within the space. Each time I visit a site (familiar or unfamiliar), I do not know if I will encounter space or place; these may very well already represent place to others within the space. Each time I visit a site (familiar or unfamiliar), I do not know if I will encounter space or place; these may very well already represent place to others within the space.

3.3 Social Space

While we understand irregular spaces as somewhat physically bounded geographic entities [despite their temporal dimensions], the city, as the site that hosts these irregular spaces, is also understood as a larger evolving and interchangeable space/place. Massey defines place as a process; therefore, it is never static. Place is framed in relation to the construction of continual relations, ‘for [Massey], a place is the locus of complex intersections and outcomes of power geometries that operate across many spatial scales from the body to the global’ (Hubbard & Kitchin, 2004, p. 7). Massey’s identification of the body represents the link between internal spaces and the city that resides outside the space. Crang (2001) discusses the city as being in a constant state of flux. He utilises the term ‘space-time’ as ‘[b]ecoming, a sense of temporality as action, as performance and practice, of difference as well as repetition; the possibility, as Grosz (1999) argues, for not merely the novel but the unforeseen’ (Crang, 2001, p. 187–188). These notions of unfolding and becoming are explored through the being of ephemeral irregular spaces that constantly emerges. Lefebvre also indicates that space is a result of emergence, proposing:

a trialectics of spatiality which explores the differential entwining of cultural practices, representations and imaginations. Moving away from an analysis of things in space, this is an account that sees space as ‘made up’ through a three way dialectic between perceived, conceived and lived space (see also Soja, 2010). Here, place emerges as a particular form of space, one that is created through acts of naming as well as distinctive activities and imaginings associated with particular social spaces. [Hubbard & Kitchin, 2004, p. 6]

In my research, the ‘naming’ is transferred to the ‘capturing’ of space, creating a visual representation of perceived, conceived and lived space/place. Alongside the visual mapping process (outlined in Chapter 2), I use the visual practice of photography as a method of phenomenological research to capture the spatial, social, material, real and imagined [Soja, 2010] practices of human life in these irregular spaces.

Ideas about space and place are fundamental to the geographical imagination. Other geographers tap into this notion, exploring the idea of the urban imaginary. Doreen Massey (2005) is specifically concerned with the way people imagine space. Sakellaraki (n.d) discusses that, while space offers uses and functions, it also includes potential and choice. In relation to images, these potentialities and imaginings are often collectivised by academics. Soja (2010) implicates the physicality of social relations, noting they are not only spatial ‘but are also creatively represented in images, ideas and imaginings’ [p. 18]. Bianchini (2006) draws on Maruyama’s term of the ‘urban mindscape’ in an attempt to define
the urban imaginary, indicating it is something that exists between the physical landscape of a city and the cultural and visual perceptions of people. Bianchini (1999) explains that this can also be expressed as ‘landscape of the mind’, by which he means that the city’s mindscape can correspond to an urban ‘image bank’ consisting of local and external images of the city. These are manifested in a variety of forms, which he lists as:

- media coverage
- stereotypes, jokes and ‘conventional wisdom’
- representations of a city in music, literature, film, the visual arts and other types of cultural production
- myths and legends
- tourist guidebooks
- city marketing and tourism promotion literature
- views of residents, city users and outsiders, expressed, for example, through surveys and focus groups

(Bianchini, 2006, p. 14).

Within my photographic practice, in the same way that I aim to capture the comfort and immersion of punters experiencing place, I also aim to capture emotions, ideas, actions and networks that are synonymous with the urban imaginary. In addition, I also hope that my photographs will (in turn) add to the collective imaginations of the city.

The collective imaginations of the city have also been expressed as the ‘social imaginary’. Bianchini discusses the essential role Lefebvre (1996) played in constructing an experimental utopia for new urbanism, which he labels l’imaginaire urbaine. Lefebvre’s ideas share similarities with Castoriadis’s (1950s) idea of the ‘social imaginary’. Curtis (1997) states that the social imaginary is expressed by the people’s potential for creative and autonomous self-activity (cited in Bianchini, 2006). Lefebvre’s (1974) theory of l’imaginaire urbaine emphasises the exploration of what is humanly possible, especially within the confines of the urban. Lefebvre’s ideas around urban exploration link to his concept of œuvre, which considers the city as a work of art. Yet, despite the city’s inherent beauty and fragility, it is full of constant conflict between the urban as a place of encounter and as a site for the market [Bianchini, 2006, p. 16]. Lefebvre believed that urban inhabitants had a right to experience the city as a work of art. Kofman & Lebas (1996) discuss the diversity in Lefebvre’s ‘right to the city’ (1968) stating, it can be a right to freedom, to individualization in socialization, to habit and to inhabit. The right to the œuvre, to ‘participation’ and ‘appropriation’ (clearly distinct from the right to property), are implied in the right to the city (p. 174).

When discussing the spatial turn, Soja (2010) refers to the ways in which critical spatial thought has extended its influence beyond the academic realm and into the wider, political world. This is demonstrated by an increased awareness and an active search for spatial justice and the ‘right to the city’ (Soja, 2010, p. 14). Within the last ten years, the ‘right to the city’ has been paired with a variety of social action against the processes of globalisation, commodification and the privatisation of urban space. Global examples range from organised research projects, such as ‘Urban Policies and the right to the City: Rights, Responsibilities and Citizenship’, initiated by UNESCO with UN-HABITAT (2005), to grass roots and ‘spatial tactics’, including boycott campaigns, online-activism and protest art’ in Cairo (Fahmi, 2009). Ultimately, such actions question who has a claim to the city and what kind of city it should be [Brown, 2010].

Irregular spaces are not an outward contestation of, or claim to the city, yet they affect what kind of city Sydney is/should be. Additionally, as outlined above, they are intrinsically linked to the city that incubates them, and align with the ethos of the ‘right to the city’ movement. Many actors and punters affiliated with these spaces are actually involved in the ‘Reclaim the Streets’ events across Sydney. Collectives within the alternative scene often initiate public festivals and street parties. This demonstrates the ways that networks of irregular spaces traverse the inside and outside spaces of the city, blurring the distinction between public and private.

Historically, the Situationist International are a key example of a group who enacted their ‘right to the city’, subverting what they labelled as ‘The Spectacle’ through temporal and autonomous acts. The Spectacle is the mediation of social relations by images. These images, however, do not represent a true society.

4 With origins in the United Kingdom, Reclaim the Streets is a movement that reacts to urban development and its impact on public space and natural environments (see http://ohsomnotbombs.net/happenings/carnivals-of-creative-dissent/reclaim-the-streets for the Sydney specific site).

5 The Situationist International is an avant-garde movement and constituted a group of social revolutionaries, largely influenced by Guy Debord. (McDonough, 2004)
'The spectacle gives us a happy image of a unified culture, eagerly consumed; yet it must hide the real conflicts in a society' (Heroux, 2000, p. 4). One of the most famous notions in Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle* (1994) is the entanglement of material ‘real’ life with the represented: ‘the obvious degradation of being into having … and from having into appearing’ (p.17). The Situationist reacted to these notions through rebellious acts, titled ‘situations’; this was based on a desire to create new moments (Plant, 2002). This idea of the ‘situation’ is relevant to irregular spaces as they are a conscious creation; a repurposing of space in time. Debord argued ‘The “situation” [closely articulated to place] is completely spatio-temporal’ (cited in Merrifield, 2006). This group, similar to Lefebvre, was reacting to the commodification of the city or the ‘Spectacle’. As Debord himself suggested, it is near impossible to escape the ‘Spectacle’. However, it is possible to subvert it, as these irregular spaces do, if only temporarily (and at times unintentionally). Attending or organising ‘subversive acts’ empowers actors within the city to feel liberated and to have actively claimed their rights within the city, symbolising an act of anarchy.

Bey (2007) discusses similarities in relation to TAZs, stating that the TAZ is a microcosm of the free culture ‘anarchist dream’. Bey identifies that the TAZ’s greatest asset lies in invisibility; the State cannot recognise it. As history has no definition of it. Bey cogently argues ‘the TAZ must vanish, it will vanish, leaving behind it an empty husk, only to spring up again somewhere else, once again invisible because indefinable in terms of the Spectacle’ (n.d.). This suggests the importance of ‘death’, ‘disappearance’ and mobility to ‘on again, off again’ irregular spaces. These spaces are redefined continually, to bypass and evade the commercial underpinnings of the regulated urban environment, creating real experiences that reject the ‘Spectacle’s’ superficial generalisations. That these venues are illegal ensures their lifespan rests on uncertainty; the very essence of death. The bending or rejection of rules and legalities within a city allows for varied levels of play and resistance. This rejection of laws can be traced back to the ‘speak-easy’ of the 1920s. Historical speak-easys are a type of TAZ that arose out of the desire of groups of individuals to consume alcohol in a dry city operating under prohibition. This terminology has infiltrated contemporary colloquial language and is sporadically used among some actors within the scene, who refer to irregular spaces as ‘speak-easys’. Although past speak-easys were temporary and evaded the law, the core difference was that they relied on commerce. In contrast, Sydney’s irregular spaces are not profit-driven enterprises.

This rejection of the ‘Spectacle’s’ commercial motivations is displayed in a free or relaxed approach to monetary exchange for goods or services. A cover fee (more often than not) simply covers the costs involved for organisers. Yet, even when this is stipulated on invites, it still works very much on a case-by-case basis. This is exemplified in the comment found on a 2012 party invite:

**ANOTHA ACCESSIBLE COMMUNITY CONSCIOUS CHEAP DANCE PARTY**

$5 $5 $5 $5 $5 SLIDING SCALE NO ONE GIVEN SHADE OR TURNED AWAY FOR LACK OF FUNDS!! (Oct 19, 2012)
A number of these events are free, and organisers pride themselves on their ability to offer free and accessible arts and culture. Alcohol is either BYO or the DIY bar within the venue might ask for a gold coin donation for drinks (enabling event organisers to pay the musicians who often also play for free). These irregular events are about exchange, an exchange of experiences and engagements. Performers know that the experience of performing at one of these events differs from the regulated, commercial venue experience. When ‘The Scare’, a Brisbane-based band, were asked in an interview about the contrasting experience of playing an irregular space and a huge 20,000 attendee event (Parklife), they replied: ‘It’s hard to compare, but the positive of playing a place like [Sydney warehouse space] Hellen Rose’s’ is that everyone who shows up is showing up because they were looking in your direction in the first place. They weren’t looking at posters in the fucking train station. They were on the internet and they were following you as a band. They’re all going to be die-hard fans and if you can pack it out it’s a really great feeling. And you know that they’re going to be at your next gig because they’re following you, and just a really rewarding thing, even on a small scale. (2009)

These irregular spaces create an interesting site for the exchange of musical experience. Yaron Hallis, a musician and host in Marrickville, discusses the alternative scene, stating ‘it affords musicians the opportunity to do very different things, it allows fringe musicians, musicians that are doing things that are cutting edge or that perhaps won’t easily find a home in mainstream venues, to do their thing’ (Corderoy, 2010). This different appreciation of the experimental nature of sound, with little or no price tag, changes the ways in which people experience spaces and performances. The pressure for punters to feel as though they must ‘get their money’s worth’ is removed: this expression is frequently heard in the promotion of large-scale gigs or music festivals.

While in general there is flexibility around economic exchange in irregular venues, at times, the space can be leased or rented to an external ‘party company’ that wants to use the spaces’ diversity and anonymity. Individuals outside the usual ‘scene’ attend these events, and therefore higher prices are charged. Punters and hosts familiar with the week-by-week workings of irregular spaces don’t always attend the bigger ticketed events. Instead, they stick to the low key, lo-fi nights that are free, or operate via gold coin donation. While the actors who live in these

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something unique to these spaces; they can cover quite controversial events, but also engage youth in serious debates and topics where one’s view is not scrutinised. These themed series of events contained debates over successive nights, including, ‘The Great Green Debate’, which entailed debaters to argue the point:

THAT THE BEST THING YOU CAN DO FOR THE ENVIRONMENT IS TO KILL YOURSELF. (30 Oct, 2010)

The series also included topical debates around the city and its various uses through ‘The Great Klepto Debate: “That Property Is Theft”’. This installment discussed ‘property rights, commercialisation, corporatism, gentrification, art and increasing inequity’ (3 Dec, 2011). These debate topics demonstrate the alternative, yet invested approach to community and global issues, that affect these spaces and the individuals frequenting them. The ‘Great Klepto Debate’ intersects with the earlier discussions within this thesis, evidencing the extent to which actors within the scene are actively connected to the urban issues that directly affect the inhabitants, performers and punters who comprise these irregular networks.

Other topics of debate that incited a sense of play were ‘The Great Love Debate’ and the not so serious ‘Gaga Debate’, which asked the question, ‘Lady Gaga: Diva or Muppet?’

This chapter has brought together a range of literature and real life examples to explore the intrinsic relationship that alternative scenes have to space and its consequent production. Drawing on the work of Tuan and Massey, I have solidified an understanding of the phenomenological nature of space and place and the ways in which my image creation (born out of my experiences in space) contributes to the urban imaginary and collective memories of city spaces. The political and playful nature of the irregular spaces within this study is discussed in relation to a variety of events that exemplify the range of practices these spaces encompass.
CHAPTER 4

SYDNEY’S URBAN ASSEMBLAGE AND THE NETWORKS INCUBATING IRREGULAR SPACE
This chapter draws on ANT and assemblage theory to explore the interconnections between irregular space and the city that hosts and incubates them. In the previous chapter, alternative scenes were defined in relation to theories of space and place. Chapter 4 addresses Blume’s (2003) concerns (raised in Chapter 3), that research into alternative scenes often glosses over the tensions that exist between the city and the scenes themselves. The chapter begins by exploring ANT and its application to this project in more depth. It identifies the dualities drawn on within urban studies. Following on from Chapter 3, this chapter begins to enact the analysis of Sydney’s urban networks (the terms for which were established previously). In doing this, the chapter draws on literature to establish how conflicting forces are acknowledged as human and non-human actors within an assemblage, recognising the internal and external networks constitutive of spaces. These networks extend back in time. To contextualise contemporary Sydney’s alternative scene, this chapter also considers the history of alternative culture within Sydney’s inner city. To holistically cover Sydney’s past alternative scenes would be a thesis in itself. Instead, this section gives an overview of the relevant, spatial, historical and political spaces that Sydney’s irregular spaces were born out of.

ANT is used throughout this thesis to connect and link networks of both human and non-human actors. I draw on the work of Farias and Bender (2010), who comment on the emergence of urban spaces, indicating they are ‘relentlessly being re-assembled at a variety of concrete sites of urban practice, or, to put it differently, as representations of the limitless processes of becoming’ (Farias, 2010). This idea lends itself to the de-territorialisation or blurring of the city’s definitive boundaries and its spaces. In this chapter, I begin to outline how ANT is applied in two different ways within this study, highlighting the application of ANT and assemblage theory and how they differentiate but support each other.

After establishing these theoretical frameworks, the chapter contextualises Sydney city and its relationship to alternative scenes of the past and present. This chapter does not aim to dissect the all-inclusive history of alternative spaces in Sydney, nor does it aim to encompass the far reaching issues surrounding urban planning, development and policy. Instead, I offer a curated collection of historical and contemporary elements that inform the positioning of irregular spaces within Sydney and its inner western suburbs. This approach does not look at city sites or their consequential formations as static entities, but instead considers turbulence and importantly, in my case, the socio-materiality of phenomena, which is integral to my image-based study.

4.1 City Networks and Assemblages

The city is often understood as merely a physical space. This consideration of the city aligns with the modernist dogma ‘that has tended to consider architecture and planning as a privileged means to govern city life’ (Cupers, 2004, p. 4). The cities of today are much more complicated and convoluted, caught up in an evolving ‘dichotomy between the planned and the unplanned, the rational and the irrational’ (Cupers, 2004, p. 5). This chapter explores the intricacies of urban spatiality with reference to urban and social studies literature (namely, Bender, 2006; Cupers, 2004; McFarlane, 2011; Latour, 2005; Shaw, 2006). ANT and assemblage theory are particularly helpful in characterising the role of irregular spaces in the social life of the city.

A spatial understanding of the city is problematised in contemporary urban theory. Bender (2006) articulates that, although we know better, we have a tendency to see cities as a ‘thing’. By labelling the city as such, we are designating it as a place, which Bender argues implies a bounded and coherent whole. This perspective disregards the city as a complex and dynamic assemblage composed of diverse beliefs, outlooks, principles and experiences. Chase et al. (2008) also recognises the difficulties in trying to label and identify the inexhaustible nature of cities, acknowledging that they contain a range of overlapping and contradictory meanings, be they ‘aesthetic, intellectual, physical, social, political, economic and experiential … that they can never be reconciled into a single understanding. Urbanism is thus inherently a contested field’ (Chase et al., 2008 p. 6). Cupers (2004) eloquently addresses this same complexity concerning cities, identifying that conventionally, architects and urban planners have played key roles in making or revalorising the city, developing tools and technologies that transform the city as per the modernist vision:

The formation of this specific professional group involved in urbanism has invoked a strong dichotomy between ‘the planners’ as creators of space, and ‘the people’ as its users. As such, urban space seems to be caught up in a dichotomy: the modern city has been imagined either as a disciplinary space where people are governed through rational urban planning, or as a dark space of alienation and estrangement, a space out of control (2004, p. 5).
This dichotomy between the physical and social does not capture the dynamic human and non-human arrangements that inform the city’s life. This type of reductionist approach that sorts and divides city space supports binary oppositions such as ‘subject-object, mental-material, natural-social…local [and] global’ (Soja, 1996, p. 60.) Cupers (2004) discusses the way that the city has undergone a change in its contemporary relations and how assemblages can illuminate an alternative vision of the city:

The collaborations and shifts between planners, local groups and city councils, the lack of rationality to urban planning initiatives and the urban reorganisation generated by late capitalism are some of the indicators of an alternative vision of the city: no longer a dichotomy, but a multitude of [dis]ordering interventions that constitute and transform the urban landscape (p. 5).

This aligns with Massey’s previously mentioned notion of place (and in this case, city space) as a process of continual relations. Different social classes, community groups and ages all have unique interactions with/within the city. Everyday Urbanism (2008), cites an example of how a homeless man and a mother would have different interpretations of a shopping cart: one seeing the potential as a tool in a busy supermarket, the other identifying the cart as a form of shelter. ‘These differences separate the lives of urban inhabitants from one another, while their overlap constitutes the primary form of social exchange in the city’ (Chase et al., 2008 p. 8). This exemplifies that the meanings of physical infrastructure within cities are not fixed. These differing interpretations are a reaction or a compulsion based on each individual’s social and economic placement within the city. The multitude of city uses and enactments supports the creation of networks within the city.

ANT (Latour, 2005) is an important theory to mobilise in exploring these networks, as it does not pre-emptively label the scene, but allows the actors themselves to emerge, autonomously defining the occurrences and connection between entities. Macfarlane (2011a, 2011b) furthers the work of Latour and applies it in an urban context, explicitly labelling the links between actors as constituting an assemblage.

An important allied theory is assemblage theory, first brought into being by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) and introduced in A Thousand Plateaus. The original definition of Assemblage theory is inchoate and scattered throughout the book and not clearly defined. In many ways, the book itself, is an assemblage of heterogeneous elements (DeLanda, 2011). Acknowledging the ideas of Deleuze and Guattari (1987), DeLanda (2011) furthers their work in an attempt to make assemblage theory more definable and concise, synthesising the concepts and redefining assemblages as ‘a part to hold relationships’ (DeLanda, 2011). The parts, which are made of material and expressive components, need to interact with each other to reveal a whole that has properties of its own. These things are not merely a collection of things; instead, they must come together to reveal meaning, and when assembled they must connote meaning (DeLanda, 2011).

Macfarlane (2011a) discusses the benefits of assemblage theory in an urban context, stating that ‘rather than focusing on cities as resultant formations, assemblage thinking is interested in emergence and process, and in multiple temporalities and possibilities’ (p. 206). This idea of mapping the processes of becoming is inherent to my study. Irregular spaces are in a constant state of flux; therefore, an empathetic approach to these sites is needed to understand their creation, sustainment and disappearances. Both ANT and assemblage theory are often critiqued as not explicitly accounting for how networks form or the consequent factors that play a part in their formation. Instead, ANT and assemblage theory merely link entities together through relational ties. Farias and Bender (2010) criticise ANT by noting that the word ‘theory’ is part of the problem: it would be inaccurate to define it as a theory, for it does not aim at providing explanatory theoretical constructs for any particular state of affairs. It involves rather a certain sensibility towards the active role of non-human actors in the assemblage of the world, towards the relational constitution of objects and the sense that all this calls for symmetrical explanations. (p. 3)

Similarly, assemblage theory is critiqued for its lack of empirical and conclusive evidence: it arguably does not understand the urban as being embedded within dominant, political and economic structures and institutions [Brenner, Madden & Wachsmuth, 2011].

I tend to agree that the assemblage ontology focuses on socio-material actors without critically analysing their context. However, the distinction in my theorisation of the context of irregular space is the idea of historical incubation, which ‘anchors’ networks in historical trajectories. This is coupled with the way the spaces inevitably enter into responsive relationships with regulatory activities, laws, developments and even infrastructure. So, while the networks allow fluidity and change, the networks are constrained by certain contextualising forces and tensions.
The forces that are often understood as oppositional to the alternative scene—such as zoning and planning policy, property laws, security, gentrification and growth, police and state laws and the rules and regulations surrounding operational health and safety and alcohol licensing as imposed by councils—are viewed as a part of the network of actors seeking to disclose and contribute to the immanent, urban assemblage of this study. Viewing these counter forces as part of a larger assemblage [as opposed to disparate entities], my work rejects the hierarchical structures that exist within these autonomous irregular spaces. Instead, it contextualises the tensions and forces that surround their being. This is also a strategy to avoid oppositions (dominant and submissive/powerful and weak/exterio and interior); rather, the assemblage is composed of conflicting and intersecting elements. This use of networks overcomes the dualisms associated with urban and social studies, and instead ‘traces how actions are embedded in materials and then extended through time and space’ [Murdoch, 1997, p. 321]. This is explored further in Chapter 6, Photography and Phenomenology.

Deleuze’s elucidation of the ‘assemblage’ supports the ideas surrounding non-hierarchical conflict, and his concept of the ‘left assemblage’ is a rethinking of urban approaches: A left assemblage can take the form of a political party, a non-governmental organisation, an anti-war rally, a school environmental club, a punk rock collective, a campaign to legalise gay marriage, or any loose and provisional material and expressive body that works for freedom and equality. Deleuze envisioned the left as a network of intersecting and conflicting assemblages – a garden rather than a tree...

Deleuze constructs the concept of assemblages precisely to show how the left could nurture diversity and disagreement [Tampio, 2009, p. 385–395, cited in McFarlane, 2011a, p. 205].

Within the model of the assemblage, conflicting entities exist alongside each other, impacting upon and reacting to connected social and economic changes in varied ways. Sarah Pink discusses a similar notion in relation to characterising urban ‘resistances’ in studies on Slow Cities within Australia. Instead of adopting the term ‘resistance’ and its associated dualities, she instead aims to ‘go beyond the binarisms connoted by a concept of resistance through contestation or reterritorialization, to suggest such resilience is made through the relationally of things, narratives, flows and processes that traverse the local-global in between’ (Pink, 2014, p. 1) Hence, irregular spaces are spaces of resilience, flexible in their formations and their need to continually negotiate dependence on outside forces. The elasticity of irregular spaces allows self-sustaining by weaving in and out of a range of networks that help to define, but also potentially threaten them.

My images and experiences, while connecting the actor relationships within the spaces, also link the outside representations of the spaces to the internal. It is necessary when observing these spaces to understand not only how they operate individually, but also how they traverse the boundaries between inside and outside and hence link to the night time city. Actors use the urban apparatus to claim the city as a public arena through guerilla or DIY tactics that demonstrate adaptive resilience rather than resistance. DIY principles commonly represent what actors want the city to be and what they want the city to become [Harvey, 2000]. Harvey (2000) goes on to state that if we accept Unger’s (1987) view that ‘society is made and imagined’ (159), then we can also believe it can be ‘remade and re-imagined’ (159). This notion informs the various representations of the city found within my images, both internally and externally.
Figures 8, 9 and 10 were all captured on the same evening at the same event. Each of these images represents or manifests the city and connects the space to the city’s exteriority.

The first image, Figure 8, captures a large-scale map found of the local area. This is a participatory environmental artwork, featured as part of an event. The interactive artwork (consisting of the map and the seeds) invites people to choose a space where they would plant a tree. The map depicts the inner west of Sydney; at the front of the image, the location Hutchinson St. can be seen, and this is one of the key geographical locations where irregular spaces have existed upon and around. The act of asking people to place a tree within the city is a gentle attempt to engage people with the city and express their own vision of what the city should be.

Figure 9 captures the outside of the space within the broader city context. On the left hand side of the image you can see a small trail of light; these are milk bottle lights held up by strings that physically connect the external city to the interior of the space. They underscore a reliance on shared power infrastructures and supply, reinforcing that the physical space itself is a zone that cannot always be autonomous. This particular event was the first to be held at this irregular space and the light trail was a way-finding device to light the path for those visiting the space for the first time. At subsequent events, the lights were not often lit, as the space practiced the secrecy and discretion normally observed by these venues. Inside the venue, the third photograph Figure 10 was taken; it depicts the work of an artist available for sale. The three dimensional (3D) model is a small-scale representation of a city. It functions as a part of the decoration of the space, but is also a means of generating income for the artists, creating a gallery within this performance space. A small sign that lists the price of the artwork and artwork’s name accompanies the artist’s representation of the city. The title of the work is ‘Portable City’. The name of the work suddenly draws attention to the materiality of the artist’s representation of the city, which is located inside a suitcase. The suitcase is an object, which lends itself to movement and flux and the work itself embodies ideas synonymous with the immanence of the city and city space.

The intricacy and depth of associations between the photographs and actors is undeniable, as the photographs link networks of associations between the images, both visible and invisible. All three photographs combine to represent the more-than-physical qualities of the city as assemblage. While we understand the city in a spatial and visual context, the city is also a mental construct. A warehouse, a common site for irregular spaces, traditionally lends itself to connotations of labour and conformity, whereas actors within Sydney’s alternative scene re-imagine this
space as a potential place of urban creativity, innovation and alternative futures.

In the above examples, the connections are based on the ideologies and tensions of the imagined city. The connections I photograph and assemble together in Chapter 9 also focus on the relationships that exist inside the space, the relationship between various rooms, the way that people experience connections and actor relationships within the space. This may be done emotively, through the performance or their connective relationships/interactions with other actors within the space. The hermeneutic approach I implement allows me to look at parts of the spaces and analyse how these connections contribute to my understanding of the space itself, and the ways in which they define bigger space—the city—as parts, connections and as a whole.

This connective approach is applied further in the analysis section in Chapter 9, and specifically in Section 9.2.3. I demonstrate connections between images, objects, ideals and networks and present them to the reader in sets of complex assemblages. However, the reader is free to, and no doubt will, continue to draw their own visual and ideological associations in relation to the images presented. It is due to this that a separate visual outcome has been created to facilitate alternative journeys. This is a book with pace, rhythm and flow, allowing readers to flick through the ‘space’ without rules and too many directives from the photographer. The printed publication reflects a more linear approach to experiencing space, working as a slow reveal; ‘A book is a sequence of space. Each of these spaces is perceived at a different moment—a book is a sequence of moments’ (Carrión, 1975, pp. 6–7).

My practice-based outcome aims to contribute to the urban imaginary, particularly an understanding of the transformative nature of ‘space’ and ‘place’. Using my body of work, I aim to reveal dynamic assemblages of the city that gather emotion, meanings and materiality and reference the past, as well as inferring alternative futures.

4.2 Understanding Sydney as an Incubator for Irregular Space

As outlined in Chapter 1, an understanding of the issues surrounding the external city context and its approach to cultural planning and urban development and policy, is important to consider. It emphasises the tendency towards spatial identification of places for creativity. This section focuses on the tension between forces of regulation and the planning of cultural activity, and the need of irregular venues to move and inhabit more open (undesignated) zones within the city. It also focuses on the impact and networks that forms between artists, gentrification and urban development.

Sydney, like many new cities, lacks a venerable past. As a city we can hardly flaunt our past or culture (there is little evidence left of this, due to redevelopment). Instead, like many cities, we measure ourselves by our geometric spectacles: skyscrapers created by cutting edge architects, ensuring we are the most central, the biggest, the fastest and the tallest (Tuan, 2008). Sydney has a predisposition to renewal; both iconic and everyday historical spaces are commonly replaced by new developments.

Sydney’s suburb and foreshore area, Darling Harbour, illustrates this type of development. In the early 1970s, Darling Harbour was a working class area. ‘East Darling Harbour has been a backdrop for many battles throughout the city’s history, from protesting dockside workers to the veteran wharfies fighting to protect its historical significance’ (Dorizas, 2008, p.16). Despite this history, the area is currently undergoing a massive redevelopment of a historically iconic Indigenous site in Darling Harbour’s east, known as the Barangaroo development.8 The site acknowledges its Indigenous heritage through its name, ‘Barangaroo’. This is the name of an influential Cammeraygal woman (barangaroo.com, 2014). While acknowledging the site’s Indigenous heritage, this is a typical token gesture to cover the destruction of a significant place in Indigenous memory. Examples such as this demonstrate how cities are marked by their historicity. Through the inclusion of historic material, Sydney’s past can be viewed as more than just a background for change; instead considering its role as a possible actor in current urban politics (Bender, 2006). This supports the notion of urban assemblages as networks connecting past, present and future entities.

When contemplating the history of alternative cultures, Wendy Shaw (2006) traces the birth of alternative housing within Sydney, stating that unconventional ways of living most likely began in Sydney just after the Second World War. Shaw (2006) recounts that from the 1940s onwards, a collective of anarchists began

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8 Barangaroo is a harbour side site steeped in Indigenous and working class history. This site is now undergoing mass scale redevelopment (including a six star hotel and casino) that has attracted controversy over the division of public and commercial land and the initial intentions to include large tracts of green, public space, which have been jettisoned and constrained by approved commercial stakeholders (http://wwwbarangaroo.com).
residing in ‘undesirable’ accommodation in Sydney city: ‘Low income earners, such as students, artists and musicians, had sought “creative” refuge from suburbia and conventional inner city housing (terraces and old flats) through the occupation of warehouses and unused office buildings’ (p. 187). This also created changes in living arrangements from the formal household structures of the past. People began to live as collectives and groups and in much larger numbers within inner city warehouses. Yet, due to the wide sweeping development in the inner city in the early 1980s, factory conversions into ‘loft-style living’ began to displace these low income earners, a movement that Shaw identified as the ‘Soho Syndrome’ (2006, p. 184), named after the lower Manhattan area called SOHO.

Ultimately, residential developers were working on the same principles as artists, and revalorisation or property conversion became a cheaper and more affordable option than wholesale redevelopment [Roseth, 1981]. This mode of development has continued. Places inhabited and/or used by marginal cultures have become hot spots of gentrification: ‘Brownfield developments, infill projects’ and factory conversions are displacing informal and low income uses, and places in the interstices are becoming harder to find’ [Shaw, 2005]. Shaw explains the perception that ‘small scale buying, selling, demolishing and renovating of property is a vital component of the Australian economy’ [Shaw, 2009, p. 195], and has been central to making real the ‘Australian Dream’. This dream is an individual and nation-building activity, which is becoming less and less obtainable or desirable for contemporary youth due to Sydney’s property prices that are amongst the highest in the world (Mulligan, 2014).

Due to increasing development and gentrification, the inner city spaces with a ‘loose’ identity that once housed alternative cultures and practices are demolished, or revalorised. The utopian days of counter cultures fleetingly inhabiting inner Sydney city spaces is little more than a memory [Byrne, 2005, p. 3]. Scattered accounts of the habitation of the Darling Harbour slums of the 1970s, the Palmer Street squats in Woolloomooloo that proved resilient in the 1980s, and the Broadway squats of the late 1980s [and again in the early 2000s], tell unofficial stories of artists, musicians, activists and creatives being moved on in the wake of development [W. Shaw, 2006, ABC Radio, 2010, layman accounts]. In this section, I expand on some of these examples to illuminate the networks that exist between the past and present spaces of Sydney’s alternative scene.

In the early 1980s, Sydney’s historic and glorified Darling Harbour was a haven for counter culture inhabitation and appropriation. The ABC documentary, Do that Dance, Australian Post Punk 1977–1983 [2010] discusses Sydney’s post-punk culture occupying the terrace houses and industrial spaces of the ‘then’ run-down inner city Darlinghurst and Surry Hills areas. Both these areas are now gentrified and claim increasingly high rental and property rates. In this documentary, a member from Sydney-based band Voigt/465 talks about a concert in the late 1970s, where the band set up under the concrete pylons of the Eastern Distributor freeway, then under construction. ‘We loved Darling Harbour in the renaissance phase, where it was a real industrial wasteland, it was an awful place’ (2010). This unrecognisable, and almost unbelievable, description of Sydney city’s tourist hub provides a valuable insight into a rapidly changing landscape, now filled with restaurants, cafes and boutique stores catering to tourists. It retains little to no qualities of the working and industrial harbour, nor of the countercultural activity of the post-punk era, musical or otherwise.

While for the most part, the physical spaces of past alternative cultures have disappeared or been reinvented, collectives still persist, bound by the ethereal sense of place that transcends the physical space. ‘Squatspace’ is a lasting initiative born out of the fervour surrounding the infamous and autonomous Broadway squats:

The Sydney Broadway squats ran for almost a year from August 2000 to July 2001. Located on a major traffic route into the central city the shop fronts not only provided housing and a social space for a variety of activities, but also created a vibrant and highly visible symbol of resistance to the gentrification caused by the 2000 Olympics. [Australianmuseumofsquatting.org, n.d]

The Broadway squatters resounded loudly and publicly about their revalorisation of unused space. This was remarkable in a scene that had been rife with secrecy and discretion, due to Australian criminal trespass laws. The Broadway squats rallied wide-reaching community support, encouraging community involvement in their DIY initiatives, such as the ‘re-cuisine machine’ dumpster cafe [Australianmuseumofsquatting.org, n.d].

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Although the squatters’ commitment to public inclusion was commendable, it ultimately placed a time bomb on the Broadway squats, by making them increasingly visible. Lucas Ilhein is a key member of SquatSpace and talks succinctly about the role that artists play in the gentrification of urban space:

When we artists and creative types move into a neighborhood, it is nearly always because of its affordability. Run-down spaces offer an opportunity to artists not visible to other sectors of the property market. We are able to invest energy into architectural waste structures, creating a connection between beauty and utility where there previously seemed to be none. In fact, it is this “authentic” utilitarian beauty of artists’ warehouses, lofts and squats… which allows the broader property market to wake up to their potential for intensified commodification. [Ilhein, 2009, p. 49]

The view of artists standing in solidarity on the frontline of gentrification has been explored globally, and has been succinctly described by art historian Rosalyn Deutsche (1999), who refers to artists as ‘the shock troops of gentrification’ (p. 151). We see examples of gentrification globally; early examples include London’s Islington and Manhattan’s Greenwich Village. However by the 1970s, gentrification was prevalent in Europe, North America and Australia (Smith, 2008).

The rise of gentrification demonstrates the state of constant flux that cities are in, indicating they are a work in progress. They are sites for experimentation, contestation and appropriation. This recognition (previously discussed in relation to Lefebvre), of a right to claim city space for artistic activity, is expanding. Music and art production is happening increasingly in digital platforms. As Walker (2012) discusses, ‘that with all this increase in virtuality, it shouldn’t be surprising that people are craving [performative] experiences in the flesh’ (p. 39). This coincides with my previous discussions around the creation of ‘place’ within irregular spaces, and actors craving to exist in physical environments with others who share similar ideals. This move towards a more active citizen involvement within cities is characteristically referred to as the ‘production of space’ [Lefebvre, 1991]. This theory embodies an increased emphasis on the human actor and their ability to impact and influence urban space beyond its physicality. Harvey (2000) comments on the disillusionment people feel in the face of corporate power, ‘we the people have no right to choose what kind of city we will inhabit’ (p. 156). However, both Lefebvre and Gebord identify the urban environment as a unique site for contesting the alienation of modern capitalist society: that this can be overcome through acts of urban regeneration or everyday urbanism.

As these approaches to new urbanism and urban regeneration strategies are being implemented across the globe, there is an urgent need to critically assess the nature, impact and meaning of the phenomenon (Porter & Shaw, 2009, p. 1). I do this later in this chapter and interrogate how these effects have specifically influenced Sydney’s irregular scene. By their nature, irregular spaces are vulnerable to the ‘identity creating’ activities of city planners and developers.

Actions connected with gentrification of the city are problematic ‘because in altering the physical space of the city, it alters its social and symbolic meaning, too’[Allen, 2008, p. 2]. Helen Armstrong (2010) discusses the notion of embracing the ‘ugly’ city and the value and benefit one can get from the dirty and the derelict: ‘In contrast to designed and regulated space, neglected sites can provide an aesthetic disorder, surprise and sensuality, offering ghostly glimpses into the past encounters with forgotten objects and materials’ (p. 1). This description of the ‘ugly’ city is synonymous with the breeding grounds these alternative acts began to inhabit. In an interview on FBi radio, Michel Freeman discusses the early 1990s rave scene with Luke and Seb from the pioneering electronic music duo Sub Bass Snarl, whose parties were very reminiscent of the events happening now in Marrickville warehouse spaces. This interview addresses the kind of illicit environments that rave parties were often held in, described as the derelict, the dirty and the dangerous spaces that in the light of day are actually quite ordinary and boring. Seb and Luke discuss the lack of regulation that accompanied these empty industrial spaces scattered across Sydney:

people were free to just explore these venues, there would be times when you would be walking along in the dark, two stories up in the air along these rickety old walkways and they would suddenly stop and then there would just be a vertical drop. People just looked after themselves and there was less of a ‘nanny state’ going on. [Seb & Luke]

Both interviewees discuss that after the regulations introduced in 1995 (largely as a result of the Anna Wood saga), the scene became fractured and splintered and the move to legal venues changed the overall output of the music and the way people interacted with it.

10 In October, 1995, Anna Wood died after taking an ecstasy tablet at a rave party (Horin, 2012). This event drew phenomenal media attention and incurred a crack down on ‘rave’ parties.
Rave culture/s within Sydney in the late 1980s and ’90s again had similar roots to the kind of spaces that formed out of their demise. Rave culture is a good precedent for the ways in which alternative scenes engage with and transform space; in particular, due to the temporary alterations of ordinary environments by light and sound. Rave culture retains a strong tie to space and specific sites: we see this demonstrated through the imaginative landscapes they create that are exemplified by the names given to specific rave parties, such as Happy Valley, Field of Dreams, Bent in Space, Utopia (Gibson, 1997). Still active, a number of underground rave/dance party organisers use the irregular spaces covered in this study, yet the nomadic and temporary quality of rave culture is very important and results in different rave events fleetingly inhabiting different irregular spaces. This aligns with the historic approach where raves have a tradition of changing spaces and exploring new frontiers: they must move on. ‘Trance parties have been designed to engender a magic aura that remits participants into a cosmic temporality’ (D’Andrea, 2007, p. 210).

In the FBi radio interview, Luke and Seb discuss the rituals associated with rave culture, of breaking into unused and abandoned spaces to ‘party’. The careless disregard for abandoned space used in past parties differs in the approach to the irregular spaces of Sydney. Inside Sydney’s irregular spaces, temporality is experienced in a different way to the rave culture of the past. With obtainable space suitable for art creation and performance becoming rare, the need to lay foundations within a physical space, in the hope that it will become ongoing (if not lasting), is increased. However, this in no way alludes to a fixed entity. Although the physical margins of the space are bounded, each space changes and forms, based on every event. While the bricks and mortar may remain the same, the space’s interior shifts and transforms, at times extending its boundaries and networks to other spaces and locations for specific events. The way in which hosts are able to offer punters spaces to perform in, or experience performance, is through the transformation of redundant spaces. This is often only made obtainable [primarily due to financial concerns] by using these revalorised spaces for a dual function: although they are performance spaces, they also double as living quarters and homes. While the majority of past rave-based events were held in unpopulated or unused industrial spaces, the majority of Sydney-based events [both rave and other] are held in revalorised industrial spaces/warehouses.

The irregular spaces of today share similarities and differences with subcultures of the past. By illuminating these factors, links are identified that connect spaces across the boundary of time and also inform the analysis of spaces in recent history, discussed in the next section.

4.3 Researching Recent History

Section 4.2 reveals the historical context of the alternative scene in Sydney (1940–2001), within this section, I discuss the recent history of Sydney’s alternative scene and its irregular spaces (2006–2013). This provides a strong sense of the dynamic nature of the current scene and builds upon the networks established in the previous section. As previously mentioned, it is difficult to find evidence of past irregular spaces. Often, blogs or personal accounts can be found through key word searches and searching off the internet.

In a 2006 blog post, Eliza Sarlos makes a comprehensive list of existing spaces within the alternative scene. This compares the spaces active in 2006 to the 2010–2014 active spaces within Sydney today [see Figures 4 and 5]:

Now that we’re in our comfy postcode zone that spans out (only) as far as Marrickville, let’s traipse around a bit.

Iraq
Space 3
The Wedding Circle
Sydney
Yvonne Ruve
Maggotsville
China Heights
The Frequency Lab
Lan Franchis Memorial Discotheque
Twenty Two
The Clubhouse
Pelt
Devonshire Street Tunnel
Rooftops
Boats
In addition to Sarlos’s list, I can list other venues existing after 2006, such as Figure 8, Iceland, Imperial Slacks, (layman accounts) Helen Rose Laboratorium (Albert, 2009) and qirkz (Smallhorn, 2010).

The only more traditional form of research that I have been able to uncover coincides with the spaces listed in Sarlos, 2006. A SMH article revealed the following spaces:

- Pelt, http://www.impermanent.info/pelt
- May’s, http://www.mays.org.au
- Medium Rare, http://www.mediumrare.net.au
- Space 3, http://www.space3.org

(Creagh, 2006)

It appears there is some cross over between the two listings, yet Sarlos’s list is more expansive and respects the discrete nature of the spaces by not including references to websites in a public forum, which generally results in an exposure of address or locale. In Chapter 2, I discuss my personal concerns around ‘exposing’ irregular spaces and the tenuous relationship that exists between recording their existence and contributing to their demise.

While Creagh includes the venue’s websites in his article, hosts of these spaces activate the websites themselves: it is the act of the websites being later positioned within mainstream media that can cause issues. That all the spaces included within Creagh’s list have a corresponding website indicates the semi-legitimised status, or visibility of the space. More established irregular spaces have some kind of formal web identity that allows individuals to track the spaces in some easily surmountable way. The inclusion of websites to accompany names instils the (sometimes) warranted fear of journalists and their capacity to expose irregular spaces through commercial mediums [such as newspapers]. Despite the evidence of a space’s existence, there is generally even less evidence available about their closure. Some spaces (which I term ‘dormant’) are never confirmed as closed and simply disappear: the space still exists in its physical form, yet nobody can confirm what happened to the host or define its current use. Due to this lack of information, it is impossible to track any detail about their flux or account for details contributing to their demise.

However, some space’s closures are accounted for on websites and in news articles. Creagh reports that in early July, 2005, ‘the Space 3 artists received a termination notice; they had a month to leave. The building has been listed for sale and was expected to fetch up to $1.4 million’ (Creagh). Located just down the road from Space 3 was The Wedding Circle. After just ten months of operation, The Wedding Circle space was ordered to close by the City of Sydney Council who stated, ‘the official problem was the holding of “illegal assemblies”’ (Creagh, 2005). Reasons for the closures of both spaces are similar to closures of the irregular spaces within my study (shown in my mapping, see Figures 4–7 in Chapter 2). By my research accounts, only China Heights [which is classed as a legitimate gallery] remains open from Sarlos and Creagh’s 2006 list, reinforcing the ever-transient nature of irregular spaces within Sydney.

A well-documented example of a significant space in recent years is the controversial closure of Lanfranchis Memorial Discotheque, locally referred to as Lanfranchi’s. Lanfranchi’s was housed in a former chocolate factory on Cleveland St, Chippendale. It was named after the underground figure Warren Lanfranchi, a notorious thug who was shot behind the venue location in 1981; ‘the reference infused the place with the spirit of the underworld and the underground. It seems equally impossible to imagine the Sydney arts scene in the mid-2000s without it’ (Priest, 8 November 2010). Lanfranchi’s created a considerable buzz in the Sydney scene and I would hypothesise that Lanfranchi’s played an integral role in sustaining the irregular space networks detailed in the two 2006 lists, highlighting a thriving scene.

Lanfranchi’s operated as an active and unique irregular space from 2002 to 2007. Prior to its closure in 2007, I attended a variety of events at this space. My encounter with Lanfranchi’s constituted my initiation into the alternative underground scene. In August 2010, Richard Barron released a film documenting the last days of Lanfranchi’s 2002 to 2007 reign. This film pieces together a historical account of ‘the good ol’ days’ of warehouse spaces, showcasing interviews with the former residents, who refer to the proliferation of artist-run warehouses in
the 1990s, listing Imperial Slacks, Space 3, Hibernian House, Mekanarky, Punos, Ebomb and Siliar. The names presented here intersect and cross-reference Santos’s (2009) earlier list. The former chocolate factory residents discuss their motivations for launching Lanfranchi’s, professing that while there were a number of DIY art/gallery spaces, there was no specific performance-based space: Lanfranchi’s was a response to this growing need. While the film is very focused on the space’s closure, it mentions the Evil Brotherhood of Mutants, a music collective who inhabited the space in the 1990s; therefore, acknowledging a twenty-year history of arts practice in the building (Creagh, SMH, 2007).

This film documents a heady mix of events and acts that included nudity, experimental sound, grit, pyrotechnics and mime. The complete looseness of this space is summarised by a resident who states that the entire space felt like ‘a mixture of a house party and an event’ (Torzillo, 2010). The film portrays the space as a fantastical place where all types of experimental performance were accepted, digested and exulted, from a Dorkbot event11, which is a meeting for people who enact strange DIY objects with electricity, to the site of the Marrickville jelly-wrestling tournament.

Despite the sense of extreme play in this space, it was also used for more serious endeavours. The residents explain their frustrations when applying for government grants to fund their national and international art space, outlining the difficulties of defining what it encompassed, contained and offered others. Validating and vocalising an irregular space’s worth is a difficult task due to its blurred boundaries and transient nature.

Lanfranchi’s also housed Dual Plover, a recording label that ran out of the space and worked with artists as well known as the YEAH YEAH YEAHS. Despite these small acts of legitimisation, a resounding DIY approach resonated throughout the space and was successfully captured in the film. The residents expressed their own ‘in the moment’ (‘work it out as you go’) managerial approach, casually stating ‘we don’t have a business plan’ (2010), an open-ended approach that aligns with the non-commercial.

The residents discuss the intricate relationships, experiences of power and the distribution of responsibility when living within a space that holds constant events. The tumultuous relationship between various residents within the house and their varied visions for the space is evident. Despite their differences, what becomes clear is that there is an unwavering commitment to the arts and performance. The film documents the kind of external struggles those living within the space encountered, such as electricity being turned off, police shut downs, development proposals issued and violence and abuse from landlords. It helps to contextualise the social and political landscape that many other spaces have been born out of, and perhaps unintentionally documents a handbook of what to avoid and implement when living in a communal irregular space.

This threat of development, which I have explored in various ways throughout the preceding chapter, is also touched upon within this documentary. The film’s establishing shot focuses on a development proposal posted to the door of the infamous venue. The film also makes a provocative connection between Lanfranchi’s closure and government funded development in the arts, as the director documents the opening of arts institution Carriageworks. While it is far reaching to suggest that the opening of Carriageworks was responsible for the closure of Lanfranchi’s, it is reasonable to map the relationship between the two spaces and their close proximity to each other, as evidenced in Figure 11. Carriageworks is a redevelopment project conducted by the New South Wales (NSW) Government through Arts NSW, completed in 2007 (ArtsNSW, n.d.).

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11 Dorkbot was later moved to Serial Space after the Lanfranchi’s closure.
Carriageworks is the largest and most significant contemporary multi-arts centre of its kind in Australia (Carriageworks, n.d.):

The fact that Lanfranchi’s demise roughly coincided with the opening of Carriageworks’ is an irony also not lost on the filmmaker. However he cleverly allows Carriageworks’ then CEO Sue Hunt to make his point for him, as she speaks of how the complex will be ‘a place for creativity and innovation’, and then discusses how ‘thrilled’ she is to include Channel 10’s ‘contemporary dance piece’ So You Think You Can Dance. (Priest, 2010)

Barron’s film sets up Carriageworks as the corporate ‘other’ and reverts to a traditional binary schema where large-scale institutions are bad and DIY spaces are good. Despite this implication in the film, the true beauty of Lanfranchi’s and its role within the scene is succinctly coined within the words of one resident, stating that ‘[Lanfranchi’s] gave a different environment than the bigger institutions’ (Torzillo, 2010). This irregular space was an experimental breeding ground for art and performance acts and allowed those in the alternative scene a space to experience what could not be found in the commercial sector.

4.4 Transference: Legitimate and Illegitimate Practices

Sydney’s Hibernian House, an inner city, five storey residential block, houses approximately 36 artists of varied expertise and is one of the spaces I have never photographed. In 2010, Hibernian House was discussed in one of the two main Sydney newspapers, the SMH. The article expresses the vitality of the space, with artist and resident Ben Frost stating, ‘in the last three years, more artists have moved in and it’s overflowing with creativity’ (Wood, 2010). Despite Hibernian House being an artist’s residence, it also holds gigs sporadically in many of its mottled spaces. The large number of people residing within the space ensures difficult navigation of events and performances. It was also brought to my attention that certain residents of this space harbour deep-seated insecurities about hiding the identity of the space and/or not having their events documented. This is largely due to the fact they have worked hard and successfully to establish Hibernian House as an inner city artist hub and it remains one of the only (if not the only) inner city artist resident conglomerates left in Sydney. While I visited this space prior to my research, throughout the duration of the project, no contact was made or became apparent that could link me with this space. As such spaces are mostly residential or artist studios, the atmosphere is intimate and at times, the click of a camera becomes too intrusive. Tony Kingston described a 2013 gig at Hibernian House as follows: ‘Whitely’s hilarious personality and the intimate space certainly made it feel as though we were watching our friend’s band play in someone’s lounge room’ (Kingston, 2013). This intimate ‘vibe’ is definitely found among a majority of the irregular spaces, but due to connections and timing, a window into the world of Hibernian House was not opened to me.

Fortunately, a number of articles and blogs discuss Hibernian House and it can be examined through the example of 505. As mentioned before, Hibernian House is a series of individual spaces, studios and residences. In the past it was also the home to one of Sydney’s most successful jazz clubs, 505. SMH journalist Dan Kaufman reported on the space in 2009, stating it:

is housed in a dilapidated warehouse that looks like it came from a 1970s New York crime film. Even if you know the apartment’s address, it can still be difficult to find among the building’s graffiti-sprayed corridors and walkways and yet inside there’s usually a crowd of over 30 sitting on cushions and sofas listening to jazz. (2009, SMH)

In the same article, Kerri (the host) discusses that 505 may become legitimate if they find an appropriate venue; ‘The reason it [505] is underground for us still is because we haven’t found a better space that can beat it that still has the vibe’ (2009, SMH).

12 ‘Carriageworks is the largest scale multi-arts organisation of its kind in Australia and its vision is to be recognized as a multi-arts urban cultural precinct that engages and inspires Sydney’s culturally diverse communities. It produces and presents a diverse, multi-disciplinary program that explores contemporary ideas and issues by working with local and international artists from a range of cultures and communities, attracting over 100,000 each year’. (ArtsNSW, n.d.)

13 This word is evident of the irresolvable tension between myself as a researcher and the desire of spaces to not be researched.
Less than six months after the *SMH* (2009) article was published, 505 made the move to legitimise their space and efforts. In an interview, *Going Legit* with Marcus Westbury, host of 505, Glasscock (ABC Arts, 2010) says:

running gigs on the sly has actually worked out to our benefit in many ways ... it has meant that we were able to build up a solid audience base of dedicated music lovers who because of the nature of the space had to hunt it out, which meant we have a very respectful and appreciative base to now move forward with.

For some organisers, the irregular space becomes a stepping stone to begin legitimate ventures; they may not begin with this intention, but the transformation or viability of the space may make room for this development, as seen with 505. For many others who host irregular spaces, they would rather face and accept closure than take on the added load and cost that an owner of a legitimate space must carry. It is worth mentioning that there are spaces that function as legal spaces, but still try to embody the ethos of the irregular spaces they either once were, or are strongly affiliated with. Often, the aim of spaces that become legalised is to retain a fringe/alternative edge while embarking on a legitimate venture away from the regulatory confines imposed by councils and police. We can observe this through the example of Red Rattler, another space that has successfully incorporated DIY and irregular values into a legitimised space, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Since legally launching the 505 jazz club in 2010, the owners have ventured back into Hibernian House, and in 2011 opened 505 Theatre. The 505 owners appear to successfully straddle the divide between legitimate and illegitimate practices in a variety of urban spaces. The 505 Theatre, fondly referred to as ‘the little sister venue’, was presented on the 505 website as ‘the Sydney version of Berlin’s [sic] Tachele’ by the *SMH*, who fittingly misspelt the name of (the now closed) Tacheles,14 an infamous Berlin artist squat.

The 2014 505 Theatre programme hints at the ways in which these two venues work together successfully. The venue lists its aims as follows:

4.5 Dynamics of Closure and Renewal

It has been established that the focus of this research is irregular spaces; however, within the *Introduction* I discussed my feelings of disenchantment with the commercial live music scene. The closure of iconic music venues in Sydney, in part, motivated this search for alternative performance outlets. As my research has continued, I have documented not only the closure of irregular spaces, but also the closure of commercial live music venues. These two instances of closure are to be understood as separate entities, as irregular spaces do not close in the same way that commercial spaces do. Additionally, I am not suggesting that the closures of commercial live music venues is directly linked to the proliferation of irregular spaces. However, what I do gather from these occurrences is that there is a shared disillusionment with local council and government approaches to supporting corporate development ventures over creative practices, in both the music and cultural scenes within Sydney:

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14 Tacheles was located in an East Berlin ruin. The building was built in 1907 and was a former Jewish quarter. In February 1990, the building was taken over by a group of artists from around the world to provide free spaces for alternative lifestyles and artistic practices (Hross, n.d.)

15 A jazz club with a forty-year history located in Sydney. This venue hosts national and international musicians and claims ‘this iconic venue is renown world wide as the beating heart of Sydney’s live music scene’ (history, the basement)
Ultimately it comes down to the value we attribute to art and culture. Why is it more important for the builders next door to start drilling at 7.01am than for a venue to play music until midnight? ... Activities that are not purely money driven need external support, if we think they are important. But instead, we get vehemently anti-live music councils, ever changing and ever more costly compliance orders and regulations that seem fundamentally skewed towards residential property owners ... overzealous licensing cops, a glacial approvals process and mountains of red tape. It’s almost like they don’t want live music venues to survive. (Ozi Batla, 2013, p. 9)

Much has been written about the demise of live music in Sydney [and Australia].16 In my Introduction I introduced the work of Gibson and Homan (2004), who outline some of the reasons that live music met its demise in Sydney, highlighting problems like changes in consumer preferences, resulting in events like trivia nights and karaoke and the tendency for pubs and clubs to shift towards the more secure returns of poker machines. When the Hopetoun, a beloved Sydney live music venue, shut its doors in 2009, the reported reasons for closure supported Homan and Gibson’s claims:

This month the pub was hit with $3000 worth of police fines in a week for not having enough security guards on the premises. A fall in ticket sales and the decision to remove poker machines are also believed to have contributed to the venue’s demise. (Tovey, 2009)

While the dimensions and requirements for legal spaces differ to those for irregular spaces, both types of entity are under pressure, due to similar and shared actants: stringent legalities and a lack of support and leniency from those in power.

Having been quite active myself in the music scene from 2000 to 2006 in Sydney, many of the quintessential Sydney spaces where my band played or where I had photographed music acts, have closed or are facing closure. After the closure of the Hopetoun Hotel in Surry Hills, the Harp Irish Pub in Tempe was also shut after a dispute between management and the owners (Tovey, 2009; the Sandringham hotel followed in their footsteps, going into receivership in June 2012 (Levin, 2012). Spaces for creativity, culture and performance were fast disappearing and few places remained. The beloved Annandale Hotel has experienced a long battle in the attempt to ward off closure, by initiating schemes such as the ‘buy a brick’ campaign, which involved paying $20 to $250 for a brick with a plaque upon it ‘certifying you as a genuine fan of live music in Sydney’ (Mann, 2011). This aided the struggling owners to continue putting bands on the bill, but sadly in 2013, this venue was sold and its future doubtful. While there has been repeated press about ‘Saving the Annandale’, in December 2013, local residents received a notice of modification development consent, which enclosed a description of the upcoming plans for the site:

Description: Demolition of existing building and construction of a new mixed-use development comprising retail, commercial space and a 24-room boarding house. Modification includes internal changes, modified street awnings, windows and roof profile. (Leichardt Council, 2013)

These changes pinpoint the commercial and residential trajectories of development within Sydney. Local residents were invited to respond to these plans, yet as of July 2014, the Annandale Hotel was announced as being ‘revived’ by new owners. A controversial article by an anonymous ‘staff writer’ on the music.com.au states:

Fans of live music aren’t completely left out in the cold, with the Annandale acknowledging its history of live entertainment by providing room for local and international singer-songwriters, unplugged and bluegrass artists to occupy the intimate stage and fill the historic rooms with their traditional soundtrack. (2014)

This attempt to appease the music community caused outrage, which is evident in the [now deleted] comments on the website as the iconic music venue moved to ‘focus on food’ (themusic.com.au, 2014).

This loss of live music spaces is not a battle that NSW alone is facing. This loss is being experienced around the country. In Melbourne—often referred to as the cultural capital of Australia—the live music scene is working hard to combat these closures after experiencing blows with the recent closure of iconic venue The Tote. It serves well to remember that the state decisions made in NSW inevitably affect [perhaps indirectly] the music climate in other states. A local news story reports:

16 For a thorough account of this one should read, The Mayor’s a square: Live music and law and order in Sydney (2003); Vanishing Acts: an inquiry into the state of live popular music opportunities in NSW (2003); and History is made at night: Live Music in Australia (2012).
Australia’s live music venues have also been under a difficult climate both on and off the stage. Sydney took an unprecedented beating with a harsh lockout introduced as a bid to rid the CBD and Kings Cross ‘entertainment precinct’ of alcohol-fuelled violence. So it goes, it is now Melbourne’s turn to face the music, or lack thereof, as the historic Collingwood Venue ‘The Barley Corn Hotel’ of Johnston St hangs its head as its doors close for a final time. (Harris, 2014)

This closure is coupled with the imminent closure of The Great Britain Hotel in Richmond. Harris’s article provides a link to a list of some iconic Australian live music venues that have closed within the last two years: the list is devastatingly long and includes Sydney’s Sandringham Hotel (closed July 2012), Tone Bar (closed August 2011), and The Gaelic (closed April 2012); many smaller venues are not listed. Despite closures in Victoria, there have been positive approaches to live music, with the Victorian State Government introducing a new planning principle entitled ‘The Agent of Change’:

the proverbial holy grail of policy changes, in which new residents to an area are responsible for costly noise controls and soundproofing as opposed to placing the onus on live music venues. (Newstead, 2014)

If this policy were to be implemented in NSW however, the reality is that it would only protect historic venues [a listing that must be in place prior to residents moving in]. Unfortunately within NSW, when surveying the amount of recent closures in the Sydney music scene, the spaces still able to call on this protection are few.

In 2013, a Live Music Action Plan was drafted and proposed. This is a detailed and informative document that not only outlines Sydney’s live music past, but highlights the historical, economic and social benefits of music, and also sheds light on the decreased opportunities for performers in Sydney. In 2013, 2,268 liquor-licensed premises were recorded in the City of Sydney local government area; only 143 (or 6.3%) hold a live music licence with the Australasian Performing Rights Association/Australasian Mechanical Copyright Owners Society (APRA/AMCOS)17

17 APRA/AMCOS: these two bodies collect and distribute licence fees and royalties to songwriters and composers.

(AMTF, 2013). This type of document, which brings together a wealth of information about the scene, is a first step in the right direction. When pooled together, the facts surrounding the demise of culture and creativity are alarming. The document not only identifies the wide-reaching range of issues within the Sydney area, but it also recommends and proposes considered and innovative solutions to the issues. This includes investing poker machine capital into live music and recommendations for a live music precinct on Parramatta Road18. The Parramatta Road area (topological location of the recently discussed Annandale Hotel) currently houses Black Wire to Common Grounds, a venue included within my irregular space study, a dual-purpose record store that houses punk rock and metal gigs. This daytime record store-night time venue holds regular gigs, often picking up the slack when other venues are not available or have been closed. In the last four years, this space has become a constant for people in the live music scene. These recommendations represent a positive move towards ‘flexible legitimisation’, and if successful will become invaluable precedents to the ways in which protection of culture and investment into creative engagement can build a strong affinity with place. This will also become a site to watch in regard to the consequential changes that will follow the reinvigoration of this currently under-utilised space.

Approaches to legitimise and aid arts and creative practices within Sydney can be critiqued as being tied to economic outputs. This is evidenced in the Creative City 2030 [2013] document, that states: ‘A vibrant creative economy brings together artists, cultural institutions, creative entrepreneurs and enterprise to create, produce, connect and distribute cultural content, product or goods and services that impact the economy’ (p. 51). While this notion of creativity having a numerical figure attached to it is problematic, this is not always the case. ARTSNSW and the City of Sydney have collaborated innovatively to attend to the needs of experimental arts and performance within Sydney. The Frasers urban development project in Ultimo is a prime example of this, implementing an innovative approach to allow transitory arts practices to flourish within confined parameters, by investing in public art spaces and residencies. Frasers Property has been redeveloping the old Carlton and United Brewery site into a two-billion dollar commercial, residential and retail precinct named ‘Central Park’. (Quek, n.d.) Despite this large-scale development,
in the initial building stages, Frasers invested in temporary leasing for artists and established a successful blue print for future development companies to adopt:

In September 2008 Frasers Property embarked upon a ground breaking collaboration with local arts producers Queen Street Studio, transforming otherwise vacant warehouses within the CUB development site in Chippendale into a vibrant visual and performing arts space. Under Queen Street Studio’s management and with funding from Frasers, Arts NSW and the City of Sydney, Fraser Studios offered free 3 month visual arts residencies, performing arts residencies, workshops and subsidised rehearsal space. (Frasersbroadway.com.au, 2010)

The idea of cheap and free space was well received within the arts community, despite the clear compromise that the use of this space was a silent nod of support for the activities of a global company in ‘regenerating’ urban space.

This redeveloped space represents all that is new and shiny in urban development. An investment in green areas entices city workers and young professionals to enjoy their lunch under the looming residential apartments towering overhead. The industrial and decrepit former brewery site disappears rapidly as the building approaches the finished project. As the brewery site vanishes, as does the aesthetic disorder, surprise and sensuality wrapped up in the encounters of the past (Armstrong, 2010). The designed and regulated space empty of memories or narratives of the past. This description, although applied to urban spaces, can be just as readily applied to the alternative cultures that represent a sense of disorder, their existence holding secrets and stories about the city’s past.

Serial Space, an irregular Sydney space, was located in close proximity to the Frasers’ development site, as seen in Figure 12, this topological placement is important to consider. As with the relationship between LanFranchi’s and Carriageworks, these maps indicate the proximity of new and increasing development within inner city spaces and their geographical placement to irregular spaces. Serial Space:

ran from 2007–2012, and was an artist-run space dedicated to providing a platform for artists undertaking ambitious and experimental projects. Serial Space supported sound art, experimental music, electronic art, performance art and many other non-traditional practices and mediums. (serialspace.org)

Serial Space used the Queen Street Studio space when curating bigger shows. The final event of Serial Space in 2012, Time Machine, was held across various venues, one of which was the Queen St Studios. In the events programme, this was simply referred to as ‘Serial 002’. This shared use of space and resources reflects a harmonious relationship between the two entities and signals the visibility of this irregular space. Serial Space, while still irregular, was legitimised in a way that made it eligible for government grants, a funding stream available to few other spaces in this study. This classified Serial Space as an ARI (outlined in Chapter 3).

Serial Space’s legitimisation and increased visibility tracks a cycle that often reflects artists moving on, often ‘to bigger and better things’. Griffith (2012) discusses the fact that a lot of ARIs function as a launch pad for artists who are trying to legitimise their practice, while trying to make it in ‘the big league’. In section 3.3, I discussed the importance of ‘death’ to the nature and intensity of irregular space; however, often the death of a space comes too quickly and at the hands of others. In the instance of Serial Space, this was a self-termination that did not signal the end of something, but instead the host’s own intentionality to start something new. The hosts commented on their last event, stating ‘we did not intend this to be the outcome of Time Machine, and in no way does it mean that
Serial Space is no more. But it is the most logical time for Serial Space to change direction’ (Serial Space, 2012). The increased visibility and legitimisation of the space, coupled with their proximity to the development site, marked a fortuitous time to venture outside the bounds of the physical space to new endeavours.

Marcus Westbury is a key player in urban renewal within Australia, and supports this idea of reinvention, stating:

Creativity and culture—perhaps more than any other area of our lives—is in a state of constant reinvention. When we act as though culture is the product of fixed organisations and structures to be preserved and defended, we miss the point. Culture isn’t just about preserving the legacies of the past. It’s also about us. It’s about realising the unique possibilities of now. (Westbury, 2009)

While the closures of iconic experimental spaces dramatically affect the scene, it can be argued that these closures and consequent reformations are vital to keeping this scene alive, albeit a one that moves further from the city centre.

In a 2005 article, Creagh examines the struggle we have now become accustomed to via several stories, depicting the difficulty of finding cheap city venues for artists to show their work within Sydney city. Billy Gruner, a Marrickville warehouse host, stated ‘The closure of Space 3 and the Wedding Circle isn’t the end of the Chippendale arts revival, but it does indicate the way the wind is blowing—and that’s west ... It’s much cheaper, about a tenth of what we’d pay in Surry Hills’ (Creagh, 2005). This move west is documented by my project. In 2005, Creagh asks Gruner ‘Is Marrickville the next artist’s colony?’, to which he replies, ‘I’m certain of it. Some people think, “Oh God, you’ve landed in Pluto”, but it’s only six kilometers from the CBD’, he says. ‘We see this whole region as possibly the best location for ARIs in the whole of Sydney.’ Since 2005, Marrickville has thrived as an incubator of alternative arts and irregular spaces. This is further elaborated in the next chapter.

This chapter has demonstrated various actor networks and assemblages important to this research. It has made links across time and space, both historical and contemporary, while highlighting the detail of spatiality often neglected within urban studies (Farias & Bender, 2010). The purpose of the next chapter is to highlight the irregular openings and closures of cultural spaces, in an attempt to inform and track the conditions of urbanity surrounding both current irregular spaces and alternative arts and culture within Sydney.
CHAPTER 5
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REDEFINING SYDNEY’S ALTERNATIVE CENTRE AND THE SHIFT WEST
While the previous chapters highlighted historic and contemporary irregular spaces within Sydney, none of these case studies have been situated in the Marrickville region—the core site of my study. In an attempt to reflect the gentrification and movement of these spaces further west, evident within this thesis, I have also intentionally led the reader from the inner city, slowly out to the inner western suburbs. In Figure 13, there is a correlating map that numbers the spaces that have been introduced to the reader and we now approach number six—Qirkz—and the beginning of an in-depth analysis of the spaces that reside within the Marrickville region. This chapter tells a story about deliberations and negotiations of the irregular spaces in this suburb, how they connect, what they avoid and strategies for sustainment, all of which have shaped their dynamic character. These discussions outline key ideas that are synonymous with my understanding of irregular spaces and the ways in which they traverse mobility and transference in both physical and ‘more-than-physical’ formats and their volatile relationship with (in)visibility.
5.1 Marrickville as a Site for the Alternative

At the beginning of this project, I had not visited any irregular spaces within the Marrickville region and had only been exposed to the inner city spaces, many of which are now closed. Figure 14 documents my steadily increasing engagement with events in the Marrickville region from 2010 to 2014.

As stated in the previous chapter, with a focus on irregular spaces, Marrickville can be perceived as the new alternative centre of Sydney. It now houses what to my knowledge is the largest conglomerate of warehouse and DIY art spaces in Sydney. In this chapter, eight spaces (past and present) are drawn upon to demonstrate the threats and negotiations required to sustain the life and vitality of specific irregular venues. This is a more descriptive introduction to a number of key spaces within the Marrickville alternative scene, and outlines the direct effects that exterior forces have upon these spaces. This highlights the issues around policy, legislation, urban planning and development, gentrification and council support previously explored in Chapter 4, yet applied to the irregular spaces of Marrickville and its governing council.

Qirkz closed in 2010 and is an exemplar of an irregular space whose demise can be linked to over exposure and visibility. Qirkz was a Marrickville-based warehouse space that had a particularly and fittingly ‘quirky’ reputation, somewhere that people could experience a different mode of performance outside the mainstream. An SMH article ‘Going underground’ described the space, stating:

I find myself in a cavernous space filled with stuffed animals, statues, kitsch knick-knacks and at least 100 patrons sitting quietly on chairs as an acclaimed horn band play. I find a seat next to a couple drinking wine while a woman behind me cradles her dog and dances with it. (Kaufman, 2009)

This description of both the crowd and the audience aligns with the ethos emblazoned on the Qirkz website:

Legend has it that in the heart of industrial Marrickville exists a place where art and music coexist to inspire musicians and audiences alike! A space with no division between young and old—where synchronicity and talent collide in paella of colour and flavour! Where the greatest artists from Australia and abroad are rumoured to have played.

This place is known as QIRKZ... (www.qirkz.com)

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Figure 14. Increased Engagement, (Created by Author, 2013).
This space maintained music artists at the forefront of its endeavour, creating a space which exemplified the generous and tolerant attitude towards diverse creative expression that characterises many irregular venues. The kitsch environment was almost vaudevillian and had a focus on gypsy music (something that was hard to find elsewhere within the regulated music soundscape of Sydney).

Despite the welcoming haven of creativity within this space, Qirkz was forced to close by Marrickville Council, due to an inability to meet fire and safety regulations. While such regulations are an issue in most, if not all, irregular spaces, these issues come to the fore when spaces become increasingly successful, attracting larger audiences and becoming more visible. In a SMH interview, host Yaron Hallis reveals that some of Australia’s most successful musicians had performed within this space, including Clare Bowditch and Katie Noonan. Hallis boasts that Tim Freedman from Sydney band the Whitlams had expressed interest in performing some new material at the space. This example indicates that this fringe space provided popular musicians the opportunity to try something new. Unfortunately, including acts that fall within Australia’s mainstream in a venue trying to operate outside it, creates visibility and a surfeit of publicity. The increased influx of people within the space sounded alarm bells for the council and resulted in the venue being deemed inoperable. Hallis expresses pride that in the two years the venue was open, they never needed a security guard and ‘only one person ever threw up’ (Hallis, 2010). In many ways, this comment validates the punters who play a part in the alternative scene, highlighting their sense of personal responsibility and mutual respect for irregular spaces. This respectful behaviour situates the alternative scene in stark juxtaposition to the very serious issues in Sydney city, previously touched upon in the Introduction, where lock-out laws were seen as the only way to curb excessive drinking and violence. The mutual respect of the space, inherent within Qirkz, is found within the majority of irregular venues, as most people attend events for the environment and to experience the music and/or performance.

Despite Marrickville Council’s role in the closure of Qirkz, by all accounts the members seemed very supportive of their local cultural spaces, stating: ‘Marrickville Council is seeking to amend its Local Environmental Plan to facilitate the development of new land use zones throughout some industrial areas so that these areas can accommodate a level of arts activity within some of the smaller industrial buildings and sites.’ (Marrickville Greens, 2010)

The former mayor of Marrickville, Sam Iskander, released a statement professing that the council hopes Qirkz will be able to reopen, ‘I will be supporting him [Hallis] all the way because he is an outstanding artist. We will help him find a solution’ (SMH, 2010). After the Qirkz closure, Hallis went on to open the legal space called Camelot, which is still operating. This venue houses a lot of paraphernalia associated with the once illegal Qirkz, and a similar approach to entertainment and play is evident within the space. At the legal venue Camelot, events are generally quite expensive, not only comparatively to events held within Marickville’s irregular spaces, but they are also expensive compared to the legal live music spaces in Sydney. This venue offers a unique opportunity to engage with World, jazz and folk music, for which there are limited venues, yet the high cover charges indicate that Hallis is running this space as a profit-based enterprise. While this is completely warranted, it is important to note that the higher cover charges at specific spaces demonstrates their withdrawal from the community-based ethos of most irregular spaces, and their tendency to favour accessibility to those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

While there have been whispers that Qirkz is reappearing, there is still no sign of this, and in 2011 Hallis was quoted as saying, ‘The dream is that Camelot—the legal venue—and Qirkz—which is still the illegal venue, the underground space that we’re trying to legitimise—will coexist side by side’ (Zak, 2011). Despite this utopian aim, which shares roots with the aforementioned 505 approach, this dream has not yet come to fruition.

This attempt to create the values of irregular space within a legitimate venue can be found within Marrickville’s Red Rattler, a former warehouse purchased by five women who mortgaged their houses for the dream of a stable irregular-style space. This venture began in the hope of creating a legitimate performance space that was ‘not-for-profit’, in an attempt to stay true to independent artists and their ethos:

The Theatre was the realisation of a collective dream of five local artists, who wanted to create a legal warehouse venue to showcase alternative Sydney arts, performance and grassroots activism. The five ‘Rats’ had been hosting events for years at many of the illegal inner city and inner west warehouse spaces that have been shut down over the years (Lanfranchis, Space 3, love hotel, and many temporary squatted zones), and dreamed of creating an accessible venue that held all relevant licences to stay open, and would not be at the mercy of high rents and developers. (Rattler, n.d.)
The owners of Red Rattler became fed up with the temporal and fleeting nature of the spaces within the scene, ‘we’d be performing somewhere then they’d shut down and we’d move on to a new one’, said a co-owner, Penelope Benton. ‘We tried going to pubs and clubs but the energy was all wrong’ (The Age, 2010).

Upon entry to the Red Rattler, it appears aesthetically very similar to a number of the illegal venues within Sydney, despite a few marked differences. A familiar ‘Exit’ sign glows green above the door, and a fire exit and disabled access endow this venue with the extra necessities needed to license a performance space. However, these additions cost the operators $AUD 100,000 to safeguard this venue. Out the front a neon sign buzzes, displaying the space’s branded identity, an unviable luxury for illegal spaces, which often have little more than a street number marking their space.

Since the Red Rattler’s bold beginnings in 2008, the space has housed a number of the yearly/regular events that would have once been performed at irregular spaces, such as the NOW now, what is Music, ¼ inch and Sound Summit. The benefit of the Red Rattler is that it offers a similar ‘vibe’ to the illegal spaces without facing the continual threat of closure. The term ‘vibe’ is used here, (and throughout the thesis), to express a ‘feeling’ that is prevalent within this space. This terminology is appropriate to use when describing irregular space. Vibe has strong ties to the word ‘vibration’, which accurately captures the energetic intensity I attempt to describe through my images. It is the unexplainable movement, sounds and energies within a space that impact emotively and viscerally on experience. Vibe is a commonality in all irregular spaces, yet the specific vibe in each venue is unique to each space.

When booking international or large-scale acts where hosts have their bank balances on the line, this venue choice is a safer bet, without large compromises.19

While Red Rattler proudly funded this venture off their own backs, within four years, a call for crowd funding rang out, as the owners could no longer sustain the cost of a community-minded legitimate space. Through a Pozible20 campaign, this space successfully raised over $AUD 40,000 to keep their doors open. This substantial amount of money represents a community rallying around independent arts within Sydney’s inner west (and no doubt stretches further). However, it also highlights the hardships and unsustainable costs of running a space infused with non-commercial ideals. The sustainment of this venue by crowd funding reinforces this legitimate space’s important place within the Marrickville community and alternative scene. Red Rattler is a liminal space that provides a link between irregular spaces and the legitimate venues of the commercial world. It is effective within this study, as its location in Marrickville acts as a lifeline or safe haven for the hosts of irregular events in times of need (as evidenced in the use of this space for irregular collectives). It also helps to stimulate the creative community in a broader legitimate context.

The CAD factory, an irregular space closed in 2010, had a vibe not dissimilar to Qirxz in its eclecticism, yet the music and energy possessed a much more garage band feel. The performance space was littered with instruments, countless guitars hanging on walls amidst a sea of cables and chords. At times, it was so intimate you felt as though you were attending a band’s private garage jam. ‘From 2005–2008 the space saw a plethora of bands play and it became an infamous underground space for fun, trashy times and always interesting nights with great acts’ (cadfactory.com). The space originally began in Cadogan St, but the hosts were evicted, ‘an ordeal which has made us question the humanity of the big city’ (Cadfactory.com) Despite this closure, the hosts of this space posted an inspirational sign on their wall: ‘The CAD Factory is More Than Just a Physical Space’. As a reaction to this signage, aid was offered and a new warehouse was found within a mere 24 hours, reinforcing a space’s ability to move beyond a physical space to reform elsewhere. Essential objects and people move out of space to new locations where networks of association and meaning are (re) created and/or extended, demonstrating ephemerality and nomadism within these spaces.

The new CAD Factory venue space was located on Handley St. This new location hosted a series of events before disappearing in its city-based form entirely. CAD Factory, disillusioned by the Sydney scene, relocated its collective to a regional area of NSW, purchasing an old school house to continue creating and performing, in a space where funding is given more freely and local councils crave innovation and creativity:

We were amazed by the landscape, the access to space, the giant structures and machinery used in primary industry. The whole region spoke to us of possibilities for installations, making sounds from unusual sources, of working with local communities and the great Australia
Away from the static of a big city, we are able to focus all of our intentions and energy into artistic and musical explorations. (Cadfactory.com, n.d.)

This movement beyond Sydney to regional areas demonstrates the extension of irregular networks to different locales and entities. Wollongong, a post-industrial mining city, and the Blue Mountains, two hours west of Sydney’s centre, are often used as sites for growing experimental music scenes. The successful ‘NOW now’ and ‘¼ Inch’ events, which have in the past been located in Sydney city, over the previous few years began to expand their networks to regional sites within NSW. Byrne acknowledges that although there is an abundance of available and cheap space within these regional areas:

- these areas lack many of the other factors that make inner city industrial areas so attractive to niche subcultures. That is, the ability to form a close-knit community living in close physical proximity both to each other and to the facilities and employment of the city. (2005: 9)

The reliance on groups and networks is a vital component in sustaining the alternative scene and is explored further in the next section.

### 5.2 Collective Associations and Visibility as a Silent Killer

The notion of a close-knit community touched upon by Byrne (2005) above can be understood as a network of individual actors who unite to share a common goal or ethos. These groups are often labelled ‘collectives’, the name inferring the collective nature of their outlook. A collective is made up of a group of people with collective interests or aims. Throughout the history of Sydney’s alternative scene there have been various attempts to formalise collectives.

In Sydney, there are collectives bound by music or performance; these collectives host events or festivals across irregular spaces and regional sites and often the event itself is branded by the collective name. Collectives do not affiliate with a specific physical location, yet they are inherently linked to irregular spaces, as they become the sites for the collective’s events. A number of these collectives are born out of the Sydney alternative and DIY scene and some of these include: CAB SAV, which is both an artist collective and ‘short performance/music/comedy/dance/film night’ (Cabsav.com). Other groups include: the NOW now, an exploratory sound collective (discussed further in Chapter 8), Octopus Pi, a

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**Figure 15. Collectives, (Created by Author, 2014).**
collective that ‘organises unique events in independent spaces which emphasise the experience of the audience’ (Octopuspi.com), PL, a dance collective that has a penchant for uncovering undiscovered and forgotten private spaces’ (Pl.com) and Dorkbot, a group that brings together people interested in electricity, technology and science. The continuation of these kinds of events plays a big part in invigorating irregular spaces, keeping them alive and thriving. In Figure 15, I have connected the relationships between these collectives and some of their events inside irregular spaces and the Red Rattler – Red Rattler has been included to demonstrate the ways legitimate, yet alternative spaces, can anchor irregular networks. Both CABSAW and Dorkbot were formed out of Lanfranchi’s irregular space; this is discussed in the documentary (2010), where residents note the ways that these collectives and their events and festivals utilise various irregular spaces for their own means, bolstering and invigorating the scene, supporting the ideas present in intersecting networks (demonstrated in Figure 15). In general, the individuals who organise these continuing events and the individuals who run irregular spaces have a close-knit relationship; sometimes members of a collective are living within irregular spaces themselves. At times, the residents of an irregular space may use the name of their space to identify themselves as a collective, [for example, Dirty Shirlows is the physical space, and the Shirlows Collective is the human participants/hosts]. This often happens when the group of people who live within the space use the success of their existing space to organise an event under their space’s established brand.

Collectives exist physically but are often visible online, or at times can exist solely online. A number of the spaces previously discussed in this thesis were part of a group known in its final form as ‘Space Syndicate’. In 2011, as a reaction to the fractured ARI scene, Rebecca Conroy began an initiative known as ARSE (Artist Run Spaces Enterprise), which later developed into Space Syndicate:

ARSE is a cheeky way to poke fun at the entrepreneur or the creative industry that a lot of spaces are collapsing into [Conroy, From the ARSE end of the World]. The beginning of a conscientious move towards creating a sector, ARSE represents a coming together of artist-run spaces and ideas to provide an alternative to cultural production economy (cited in Griffith, 2012 p. 42).

Conroy’s original ARSE collective, which later transformed into Space Syndicate, is coupled with a website titled ‘Sydney Arts Run Space Syndicate’. There is a range of spaces listed on the website under ‘Sydney Spaces’. This combines a range of ARIs and a limited list of irregular spaces, but does not successfully encompass the wide range of spaces currently active within Sydney. Surprisingly, this website has a map embedded within it under the heading ‘Space Chart’. Online maps identify and expose venues, often by those not directly involved with running the space. The site was last updated in July 2012 by ‘Dillon’ [who now appears to be running the site]; this is the same name (and spelling) as an individual who runs a much more active Facebook site ‘Artist Run Spaces Sydney’. Within this open group, people post invites to events, articles about urban politics and discuss politically minded topics revolving around artists and DIY use of space.

A small number of irregular spaces have Facebook groups that you can join; yet most spaces create one-off Facebook events for their upcoming gigs, parties and performance nights. The level of public access to these groups is determined by the spaces themselves, the person running the event (the host) or the person setting up the Facebook site. The person setting up a Facebook site or event page, by all accounts does not actually need to have anything to do with the actual physical space. This is one of the key problems with virtual space, initially discussed in Chapter 2. The spaces that are cloaked in more secrecy ask that you private message (PM) for address details of the upcoming event, or they simply name the space with no address, assuming that those invited are aware of its location (based on the fact that they have been invited to an elite/secretive event).

In some ways, this PM-ing for details of the events is similar to the rave parties of the past, where you would phone numbers given on flyers to find out the address of an event on the night of the party or even earlier meet at train stations and other public environments and receive a map to get you to the venue. Some external party companies (mostly rave/dance party related) still withhold address information for events until the night of the party when tickets holders are emailed the address. This is where the networks of associations start to expand dramatically when we

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21 At times, these collectives also use the aforementioned legal Red Rattler and Marrickville bowling club, spaces that still embody a similar ethos of irregular spaces, yet offer the security of a legal event.
look at the mobility of networks across online mediums.

It is important to acknowledge the invisible divide that exists between the mediated world and the actual, physical irregular space. Increasingly, theory no longer draws a distinction between ‘actual space’ and ‘cyber space’, and instead connectivity has become a constant of digital networks in all lived spaces. Whether people are contacting others, taking photos, or are active on social media, the mediated world is within the pocket of almost everyone in these irregular spaces. It is important to recognise that while people are within a physical space, they are simultaneously connected to a broader digital space.

Digital and mobile interactivity becomes a problem for hosts when punters are using the territorialising networks of digital communication. In a practical sense, for the spaces’ hosts, this causes issues with ‘locative media’ (McCullough, 2006). People signing in or checking in at locations on social media, create alerts and digitally record an address that would otherwise remain hidden. The formal recognition of space creates issues around legitimacy and permanency, yet there is no way to regulate or remove people from their personal digital devices without enacting the top-down authoritarian directives not aligned to these spaces.

On a positive note, at Caravan Slam, an eclectic poetry event in May 2013, an international punter signed in on Skype to experience the irregular space performance and the crowd welcomed him like old friends, as he experienced the comfort and familiarity of the space through the screen. In the visual assemblage section, 9.2.3, a variety of pictures expose people on their phones and digital devices, reinforcing the digital mobility connected to irregular space.

This variety of modes of exposure creates problematic encounters for spaces that are sometimes unforeseeable. A space that encountered a range of issues, based on its successes and visibility was Dirty Shirlows. Shirlows is a large warehouse perched on an estuary in Marrickville’s industrial precinct. Due to the space’s sheer number of high calibre events, Shirlows became a name recognised within alternative music and performance circles throughout Sydney (and Australia). Yet, despite Shirlows’ increased exposure, it retained its gritty DIY vibe.

This exposure was magnified when Dirty Shirlows was awarded an FBi Radio’s Sydney Music Art & Culture (SMAC) award in 2011/2012 for the Best Collective. This award appeared among a list of nominees who could only be described as the opposite to underground, featuring names such as Australian idol runner up Matt Corby and the Aria award winning band The Jezabels. This award and recognition (while a great achievement for an artist-run collective), contributed to the demise of Shirlows. It is important to make a link here to Serial Space’s closure. In 2012, Serial Space’s last event, Time Machine, previously discussed in Section 4.5, was also nominated for a SMAC award; these awards signal success beyond a discrete irregular space. In a 2010 article, Critchley indicates the already fragile foundations of Shirlows when she recounts a host’s story, recalling ‘the knock at the front door in the bitter of early morning, the wasted ‘patron’ and the cops all at their front door, sniffer dogs straining on taut leashes. The police said “We know you have parties here”’ (2010). The already tumultuous relationship between Shirlows and the authorities was intensified by the space’s increased visibility. Shirlows appeared in magazine adverts and in radio broadcasts, reaching high profile media like Vice magazine, Time Out and Channel V’s gig guide (Critchley, 2010). Over time, too much exposure was responsible for a change in the types of people attending events at this irregular space. The venue changed from the ‘in-the-know’ minority, who respected the space and its aims, to an unknown larger public audience, looking for loose parties and a place to drink. Shirlows, like a number of irregular spaces, does not always use ‘formal’ security measures and as a result, on one occasion as a participant/researcher, I became uncomfortable in this environment when I was followed out of the venue into the otherwise deserted industrial street. These ‘types’ of actors are what I label ‘space invaders’, due to their lack of interest or continued investment in the scene; these are the people that disrespect space and/or the people within them. The scene itself is generally quite collegial, warm and accommodating and attendees recognise that organisers

23 See the work of ‘personal portable pedestrian’ for an insightful view of the ways that cultures engage with digital connectivity and distribution.

24 FBi Radio is an independent, not-for-profit radio station that supports Sydney’s music, arts and culture (fbiradio.com).
are doing their bit to contribute to a dynamic nightlife in Sydney. The attendance of ‘space invaders’ is no fault of the hosts and is a result of the information network made available via a variety of means, but largely via the internet.

In 2011, I attended Sound Summit, a Newcastle-based event focused on sharing ideas about creativity and music with a DIY focus. In a panel session featuring the co-director of Shirlows, members talked about the intricacies of warehouse life. A Dirty Shirlows representative discussed experiencing a range of complaints from Council and authorities. As a result, at times Shirlows went on a type of hiatus, disappearing off the radar for months at a time, only to reappear again with full force. This was rumoured to be an unofficial agreement with the authorities: that when the hype got too big, they would lay low. Finally, this approach no longer worked and Shirlows ceased having shows in 2012:

Because we didn’t have the thousands needed to legitimise Shirlows as a venue [install sprinkler systems, purchase a liquor licence, pay for private town planners, architects and so on] we were technically operating ‘illegally’. In 2012 Marrickville Council sent us a letter demanding that we cease all activity or face daily fines so we respectfully did. (Olsen, 2013)

This closure affected the scene in a similar way to Qirkz’s closure in 2010, and it could be argued with even more wide-reaching debilitating effects on the alternative scene. Earlier in this chapter, research accounts verify the council rallying to support irregular spaces after the advent of Qirkz’s closure stating, ‘It’s important that venues are safe, but it’s also important that local councils work to find ways that enable live music and performance arts to grow in our community’ (Marrickville Greens, 2010, p. 10). Yet despite the local Marrickville Council allegedly claiming to make changes in 2010 to support upcoming independent spaces, Shirlows met with a similar fate to Qirkz and feelings of disenchantment resounded throughout the scene. Since its 2012 closure, Dirty Shirlows has been heavily campaigning for their venue to be legalised or formally recognised as a cultural activity to the budding Marrickville scene.27

Unfortunately, it was later revealed that due to Shirlow’s topographical location (in the heavy industrial zoning area of Marrickville), there could be no commercial or entertainment development application [DA] approved for this space, regardless of the inclusion of disability access, fire safety and panic door installations. It is rumoured that in Shirlow’s beginnings, the space was registered as a tyre-retreading factory, an improvement on the days when the blood from illegal dogfights stained the concrete floor (Space Summit, 2011). However, the DA to transform this space into a recording/performance space was never followed through and consequently the misplaced DA identified serious issues surrounding the misluse of space according to regulation. The reasons why this DA was not followed through are not entirely clear, but it does highlight the tensions associated with transient residents and the mixed responsibilities of running an autonomous space.

The former members of Shirlows are now lending their candid accounts of warehouse living to Marrickville Council in an attempt to provide them with a detailed and honest discussion around irregular spaces within the area:

We’re excited about the good work Marrickville Council, City of Sydney, Leichhardt Council, the Live Music Taskforce and other local venues and creative spaces are undertaking right now which will go a long way in addressing the serious issues NSW independent spaces and licensed venues face. It comes too late for us but the future is bright for others. (Olsen, 2013)

This attempt to add to the legacy of future irregular spaces26 is a unique and inspiring action from residents of a space that contributed unprecedented cultural activity to the budding Marrickville scene.27

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26 At the time of writing this thesis, Shirlows was rumored to be operating again, covertly.
27 Despite the positive collaborations of the Marrickville council and the Shirlows collective, an 18 hectare re-zoning proposal of the Victoria Road precinct in Marrickville was fast-tracked to the Department of Planning Gateway Process, without proper community consultation (marrickvillegreens.wordpress.com, 2014). If this proposal is implemented, it will inevitably impact not only the Marrickville alternative scene and its irregular spaces but the entire suburb; socially, aesthetically and economically. The local arts community is rallying against this development and the council has professed ‘a community engagement process’ would be enacted ‘prior to receiving Gateway determination from the Department of Planning and Environment to inform its future decision making’ (marrickville.nsw.gov.au, 2014). This progress has occurred in the final stages of my research (September, 2014) and only time will tell of the future impact this probable development will have on the suburb, ‘watch this space’.
5.3 Tactical Approaches and the Birth of the Marrickville Warehouse Alliance

While the revelation of the off-limits heavy industrial zoning areas within Marrickville was unfortunate and detrimental to the sustainment of Shirlows, demarcations between the heavy and light industrial zones were made clear to the rest of the actors within the alternative scene. Fortunately Shirlows’ smaller irregular cousin, Midian, is lucky enough to sit just outside the heavy industrial zone. Despite this, Midian also closed not long after Shirlows. However, this space is apparently working to legitimise their enterprise and is confident about reconciling the space to the requirements of Council and authorities.

Prior to Shirlows’ knowledge that they could not be legalised, it was attempting to raise money to meet council regulations, install fire escapes and panic doors and meet the requirements around licensing and security provisions. Shirlows conducted a range of fundraising ‘Save Shirlows’ gigs at local spaces, one of these being at the aforementioned Red Rattler and another at Midian. In 2012, I attended a gig to ‘Save Shirlows’ at the Red Rattler. Inside, only a handful of people sat on the lounges watching the performers. The venue was not abuzz with life and energy and I was genuinely shocked at the turn out at the time I was there. Again, like all phenomenological research, this is only representative of the time I spent within this venue at this point in time. On that very same night, just down the road, another irregular gig was on at The Hutch. This space emanated heat, bodies pushing up against each other, making it difficult to see the acts at the front of the room. The Hutch was almost at capacity. The disparity in attendance between the venues suggests two differing hypotheses. Firstly, that the scene itself may have grown tired of the continued efforts by Shirlows to reform or legitimise itself, especially while others were still running their own spaces. This raises the question, did those in the scene believe it was time to pass the torch and move on? Or secondly, was the lure of a free and irregular gig at The Hutch (as Red Rattler is a legal space with an accompanying cover charge) a more enticing option for people within the alternative scene? If I were to hazard a guess, it would be the latter. The actors within the scene believe it was time to pass the torch and move on? Or secondly, was the

Located in very close proximity to Dirty Shirlows lies 2Flies, a venue space that functions successfully under a blanket of discretion. Addresses are never printed online and all event tickets are sold via a pre-event setup. All ticketed events are generally sold out and 2Flies cap all events at capacity. At events, a friend stands at the closed door and acts as a security guard. This is common practice at most established Marrickville spaces. How effective this ‘guard’ would be if trouble were to break out has not been verified, only due to the collegiality between punters and the safe environment. For the most part, they ensure discretion and that people leave quietly and do not linger at the entryways of spaces or on the street outside. In October 2013, it was rumoured that 2Flies was no longer operational in its current form, due to the residents’ rental payments subsidising the factory that conjoined the building.

Not far from here resides another irregular space (whose name will remain hidden in the context of the story), whose path to irregularity has not been easy. This space has experienced a number of council inspections (as have many irregular spaces), an attempt to ensure it was meeting the legal uses affiliated with the space. Ironically, during an inspection, a removalist truck sat across the road from the space, loaded with personal belongings that may have marked this space as a residence. This tactical and expensive approach was successful: the van went completely unnoticed and the inspection was cleared.

Nearby lies another irregular space, known predominantly for rave parties. In 2013, I arrived at an event to find four police officers questioning the host, who refused them entry and professed that it was a friend-only party (which it may well have been as I was turned away at the door). This space was previously shut down in 2010 [Critchly, 2010] and since attending the 2013 event, knowledge of future events has not been verified.

This account of closures, shutdowns, complaints and regulatory issues illustrates the trials and tribulations that hosts of these irregular spaces must endure. Despite repeated promises from councils and local government, very little has been done to aid or ease the pressures and restrictions placed on these spaces. When bringing together these case studies and examples, it is disheartening to ponder the amount of wasted time and money that irregular spaces invest to evade the authorities, when their real crime is hard to place. These attempts to negotiate the regulatory confines of the city disheartens those committed to vibrant cultural activity in Marrickville.
As a reaction to the closures, inspections and threats outlined thus far in the thesis, at the beginning of 2013, a number of actors within the Marrickville alternative scene formally came together to discuss their options and form an alliance that would forge tactical and skill sharing networks to aid the spaces’ progress in the future. A series of spaces identify as being a part of this collective, entitled the ‘Marrickville Warehouse Alliance’ aka the MWA, ‘a Sydney based arts/events crew that embody the principle of participation and community’ (Parkinson, 2014). Figure 16 visualises this network, indicating only the connections between the spaces, not the names or locations. The connections between the spaces are demonstrated further in Chapter 9, where I trace and link communality across spaces. A cooperative alliance is evidenced in the borrowing of a lampshade, a whiteboard or a rug between spaces, or the attendance of various members at a neighbouring event straight after their own (both conveniently timed to not clash). In some ways, the MWA represents former Lanfranchi’s resident, Torzillo’s vision, stated at the end of the documentary. She describes an ideal future: ‘seven Lanfranchi’s, different places that could intersect with each other, smaller and more manageable’ [Torzillo, 2010].

This chapter has brought together a series of examples that demonstrate the challenges and restrictions of irregular spaces, specifically those located within the Marrickville region. This chapter offers a nuanced perspective of the everyday ins and outs of irregular spaces and the problems hosts must face and overcome to continue as a viable entity. This gives the reader a more intimate, written account of irregular spaces before delving into the visual dimensions explored in Part 2 of the thesis.
Figure 17. Liminality, (Photograph taken by Author, 2011).
THE THRESHOLD

It is interesting how one’s relationship with place can be dependent on the blanket of night. A certain familiarity lies in the shadows cast by streetlights as I make my way towards my destination, my camera bag slung over my shoulder. I often marvel at the eerie quiet of the streets of Sydney in this industrial precinct. My footsteps echo against the bland walls of dormant industrial warehouses. Fluorescent lights glow sporadically from within square lifeless windows, encasing their unfamiliar worlds of former capitalist production. In the distance, the methodical sound of an industrial machine hums, bouncing off the bare walls framing the edges of the street. I stand outside what I know is an irregular space. Graffiti licks the exterior wall and indicates perhaps something is amiss here, that perhaps there is an element of resistance residing within these walls. Despite the marks rising up from the pavement, the graffiti is not loud and explicit in the way some graffiti can be, as though, by causing too much attention, the building itself may give something away. Perched on the edge of an estuary, a two storey warehouse stares back at me, the doorway is cloaked in darkness, yet I know that by passing through it, I will enter an alternative world of light and sound. The security gate that would be barred during the day sits open. The long shadows cast by the iron bars reach towards me, pulling at me as the shadows dance invitingly at the tips of my shoes. I step back, grab my camera and take a shot, capturing and immortalising the darkness that secures the anonymity of this place in external space, before I step within.

This section is posed as a threshold, ‘the threshold concentrates not only on the boundary between inside and outside, but also the possibility of passage from one to another’ (Eliade, 1959 cited in Relph, 1976). Upon attending an event at an irregular space, the door plays a large part in this encounter. The placement of walls, doors and windows are significant in the visual study of these places. Bachelard muses on the significance of doors in an understanding of space/place and questions their metaphorical and physical representations (1969). The notion of the door as a metaphorical and literal divide creates an interesting framing in my research, as these irregular spaces do not often have an open door. This is a trait that sets them apart from commercial spaces. The automatic opening doors of a large club or the open [even if guarded] door to the nightclub represent a completely different indicator of the experience held within. In a way, the open or welcoming door is symbolic of the venue’s legality, and the tendency for the space to be consumption-based. Irregular spaces are different, with their closed doors containing the noises, secrets and people within them. The closed door is a threshold into irregular space and a means to protect and confine the world within.

To experience and be a part of these spaces you need to talk to the right people, be connected to online networks or invest in the movements of a band or act. Yet even then, you need to stumble blindly down darkened alleys, take wrong turns and sometimes be confronted with disappointment. Your breath still gets caught in your throat as you push open a random door, slightly terrified of what you might find on the other side. Intriguingly, to step into a world of darkness, minimal lighting, loud noises and nameless faces is the comfort you are searching for. A place where you are no one or someone, and to be honest, it doesn’t really matter which, ‘a type of twilight zone has been created that offers musicians and punters not only flexibility, but also anonymity’ (Chatterton & Hollands, 2003, p. 211). The moment you cross the threshold from darkness into light, is a moment charged with exhilaration and uncertainty. ‘These zones [inside and outside] are defined by our intentions’ (Relph, 1976, p. 50). With irregular space, the walls represent the boundaries discussed by Relph. The space within becomes ‘inside’ and everything removed from that interior becomes ‘outside’. This crossing of the threshold indicates a precise moment, one where you move from the outside to the inside; the public to the private and in a moment, the unknown becomes the known.
PART 2: INSIDE–OUT
CHAPTER 6

PHOTOGRAPHY AND PHENOMENOLOGY

Parts of this chapter were published in the following:
The development of my methodological approach is embedded within the structure of this thesis. The structural intent is to introduce the reader to the ‘outside,’ exterior (yet interconnected) assemblages surrounding irregular spaces, before drawing them into the sensorial interiors ‘inside’ the spaces themselves. This offers the reader the chance to experience the places in a vicarious way, without actually visiting them (Relph, 1976, p. 52). Relph discusses that the degree to which a reader is transported to a place is dependant on the artist’s skills of description and on the reader’s own imagination and empathetic inclinations. The aim of this chapter is to introduce the reader to the visuality of these spaces, to trigger empathy and imaginings, revealed through my embedded role as a researcher. Relph describes this phenomenological approach as ‘a situation in which the person, as outsider, tries to be open to place and understand it more deeply. This kind of experience requires interest, empathy, and heartfelt concern. Empathetic insideness is an important aspect of approaching a place phenomenologically’ (Seamon, 1996, p. 5). Part 2 examines the theories informing my methodological approach and follows with a more sensorial, phenomenological account that draws on specific images to define irregularity, narratives and the transformation of space to place through experience. In my photographic practice, I aim to reveal and display a multisensory experience of these spaces and expose an understanding about alternative culture and the importance of compelling places of interaction within the city. The photographic image has the ability to reveal and communicate a researcher’s experiences in unique ways, as the camera is fundamentally an ontological apparatus. The researcher projects themselves onto any scene captured and is inescapably intertwined in the moment through emotive and physical connections mediated by the image.

Pink (2009) discusses this in relation to sensory ethnography, expressing the ways that the appropriation of artistic techniques can offer alternative ways of communicating ‘representations of the sensory embodied experiences of one group of people and/or ethnographers themselves to (potentially diverse) target audiences’ (p. 23–44).

Through this attempt to communicate the importance of hidden spaces and practices, I hope to emphasise the role my practice plays in articulating a hermeneutic phenomenology of place. Hermeneutic phenomenology is an appropriate methodology due to its grounding in the interpretation of reflective thought in this instance. Its engaged character, while not eschewing theory, always remains oriented towards a practice and process of interpretation (Malpas & Zabalba, 2010). This is appropriate, as in my research, I use hermeneutic phenomenology as a descriptive tool to document and interpret my reflexive research journey.

6.1 Situating My Research Within Design and Hermeneutic Thought

My undergraduate schooling and professional development situates my photographic practice within the discipline of design. Hence, I have never approached photography as a form of visual art, but more as a process and form of visual communication. In the context of this investigation, my practice is explained with reference to design research methods. There is an expectation in traditional schools of thought that a designer’s primary role is to problem solve (Braddock, 2010; Jonassen, 2000; Visser, 1992); however, visual communication design can expand this understanding. Schön’s notion of the ‘reflective practitioner’ strays from this idea and opens up a discourse for designers to explore situations intuitively and reflexively, with a view that ‘problems’ may not present themselves as such and ‘solutions’ may be multiple, or not the only design response.

Snodgrass and Coyne (1992) discuss the issues surrounding the use of design problem solving as a research methodology and suggest that perhaps the application of the ‘hermeneutic circle’ allows the researcher to identify as a ‘reflective practitioner’. They state that the more traditional ‘notion of problem solving destroys the complexity, subtlety and uniqueness of the design situation’ (Snodgrass & Coyne, 1992, p. 72). The hermeneutic circle is demonstrated through understanding, which is reached through a progression of interpretation within a circular process, in which ‘we move from a whole to the individual parts and from the individual parts to the whole’ (Debesay et al., 2007, p. 58).

Willis (2006) supports the delicate nuances of the hermeneutic circle, stating that the oscillation between interpretation and understanding in the hermeneutic circle ‘ushers in the possibility of learning and change’ (p. 83). This directly reflects Hans-Georg Gadamer’s own definition of hermeneutics that encompasses the art of understanding (Hahn, 1997). Schön’s (1983) notion of the reflective practitioner poses that ‘situations of practice are not problems to be solved but problematic situations to engage in’ (p. 31). This directly correlates to my photographic practice, as I engage with irregular space, recording actors and their transience through the lens of my camera, an act that I do not perceive as developing a solution to a communication problem. The camera can help tune into the significance of these everyday textures and the matter of things (Hunt, 2014, p. 159). Schön outlines examples of engaging with situations and how the practice of embodiment, engagement and reflection allows the situation to ‘talk back’ (Quist, cited in Schön, 1983). Willis (2006) echoes this notion, specifically in
relation to design practice, discussing the way that we as designers are responsible for designing our own world and how our world ‘acts back on us and designs us’ (p. 80). This conception of a design dialogue permits outcomes to be reframed and reconsidered as the research process continues, allowing for the open-ended nature of my photographic process to be continually reinvented. This in essence encompasses ontological designing, which simply put, analyses and characterises relationships between human beings and lifeworlds (Willis, 2006). As a theory Willis’ claims are:

- that design is something far more pervasive and profound than is generally recognised by designers, cultural theorists, philosophers or lay persons
- that designing is fundamental to being human—we design, that is to say, we deliberate, plan and scheme in ways which prefigure our actions and makings—in turn we are designed by our designing and by that which we have designed [i.e., through our interactions with the structural and material specificities of our environments]
- that this adds up to a double movement—we design our world, while our world acts back on us and designs us. (Willis, 2006, p. 80)

Willis’ definition ties together my core method of hermeneutics with ontological designing and reinforces the dialogue with phenomenology.

This combination of approaches considers the nature and agency of design, acknowledging that both human and non-human elements contain the ability to design and act (Willis, 2006, p. 81). There is a relationship here to ANT, which I also employ within my work. ANT demonstrates this agency by designating verbs to objects, ‘there is hardly any doubt that kettles “boil” water, knives “cut” meat, baskets “hold” provisions … locks “close” rooms against uninvited visitors … and so on’ (Latour, 2005, p. 71). To ward off criticisms, Latour clarifies that this does not mean these non-human actors ‘determine’ the action, but he instead suggests that they might ‘authorize, allow, afford, encourage, permit, suggest, influence, block, render possible, forbid and so on’ (2005, p. 72). In the same way that the hermeneutic circle allows for examination of individual parts and places them into a whole, ANT is concerned with the ability to ‘extend the list and modify the shapes and figures of those assembled as participants and to design a way to make them act as a durable whole’ (Latour, 2005, p. 72). This in essence describes the process of ontological designing as a network of actors creating assemblages.

ANT is not only concerned with the agency of human and non-human actors. ANT truly comes into being when the associations between these elements combine to form a network. Each actor within the network is as important as the next in constructing the whole assemblage. Each musical note, each sagged and worn couch, the small ageing posters and flyers taped to the walls, the misshapen light shade that has been carried from venue to venue and the expressions on the faces of the punters as they experience the space, all begin to constitute a network of associations, defining my understanding and experience(ing) of irregular space. This implementation of ANT allows for a way to track and link consistencies, but also change and flux, allowing networks of associations and understanding to form and dismantle at different moments in time, permitting mapping of the continual processes of becoming. The fluidity made available through combining ANT and hermeneutic phenomenology is essential to the explorative, experimental and intuitive process of photographing unknown spaces. The application of the hermeneutic circle is inherently a phenomenological act. Bachelard (1969) discusses the phenomenological nature of a circle, stating that being itself is round:

Images of full roundness help us to collect ourselves, permit us to confer an initial constitution on ourselves, and to confirm our being immediately, inside. For when it is experienced from the inside, devoid of all exterior features, being cannot be otherwise than round. (Bachelard, 1969, p. 234).

My application of the hermeneutic circle and hermeneutic phenomenology ensures a continual and personal interpretation and reflection, to map and link patterns of familiarity and significance. Jahnke (2012) touches on this notion, commenting that ‘designers often direct their interest towards situations and phenomena that may be inspirational and may spur new understanding without being problematic and in need of a solution’ (p. 32). In my practice, (past and present) I have often found that to fully understand the situation, you must wholly engage with it, without preconceptions of outcome, practicality or problem solving. It is then that the essence of the situation is brought to light. This engagement with a situation is a fluid and flowing process that responds to, if not stimulates, movement and change, through reflection and research:

In the hermeneutic circle one does not remain in the same place but constantly acquires new knowledge. As such, the circle is a positive opportunity for gaining new knowledge (Gadamer, 1977 cited in Debasay et al., 2008, p. 58).
Odman et al. claim that the ‘hermeneutic circle should rather be associated with a spiral in order to avoid deterministic assumptions’ (1979, cited in Debesay et al., 2008, p. 58). Ricoeur (1991) also adopts the hermeneutic spiral, stating that hermeneutics has to avoid relying on the convoluted dichotomy of explaining and understanding. While Ricoeur fundamentally shares some components of Heidegger and Gadamer’s theories, which are further explored below, Ricoeur departs from a purely ontological perspective and instead intertwines an ontologically driven interpretation and an epistemologically derived reflection to create the hermeneutic spiral. This permits a more fluid approach to meaning, allowing for a range of diverse interpretations to arise from the world and not just from history and tradition (Jahnke, 2012). Within Ricoeur’s application of the hermeneutic spiral, there is a considered shift, moving the ‘discourse from the work back to the practice’ (Jahnke, 2012, p. 35), and in my case, from the final photograph to the act of photographing itself.

Roland Barthes poetically discusses that the photograph is not animated and that he does not believe in life-like photos, but the photo instead animates him (1981). This directly links to my practice, as the intention is that my final photograph/artefact will not only animate the viewer, but will also shift the dialogue between practice, artefact and interpretation. Therefore, it will animate me, as a practitioner. This reflective notion allows for an approach embedded in movement and avoids stasis: the photograph can be viewed not only as a finalised artefact, but also as a transitory actor. As proposed by Ricoeur (1991), ‘the design, or the poem, or the ‘other’ is also something that is “thrown into the world” as a proposal to be interpreted, and thus it holds the capacity to open up new worlds’ (cited in Jahnke, 2012, p. 34). This idea of being ‘thrown into the world’ is a Heideggerian (1927) philosophy, meaning we are always already in the world first, before we can reflect on being in the world. Ricoeur twists this philosophy and applies this notion to the artefact, therefore giving agency to the non-human to invite interpretation.

In my practice, the photograph can represent the end of something (the act of photographing), but also the beginning of something else (the analysis of the viewer or the performative nature of the final image). These ideas are not solitary and exist in correlation with each other, a constantly evolving, moving and exchanging network of ideas, reflections and interpretation. Barthes’ (1981) work reaffirms this notion, stating that there is an undeniable link that cannot be broken between photographic agency and spectatorship.

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6.2 The Winds of Change

When beginning my research, I wanted desperately to save the spaces I am studying, to perhaps invent/design a failsafe approach or plan that would help sustain the life of the culture. In this way, I was embarking upon my research in the traditional role of ‘designer as problem solver’. Upon further inquiry, it became clear to me how intrinsically tied the ‘death’ and ‘redefinition’ of these spaces was to the vitality of the scene within which they thrive (as previously discussed in relation to the TAZ in Chapter 3). This revelation was only made available to me through a hermeneutic approach to my research. This can be understood as a circular pattern that allows us to move from our prejudices to encounter the ‘other’. This aligns with Jahnke’s (2012) arguments and Ricoeur’s attitudes that ‘to accept the involvement of the self in interpretation means also to acknowledge that the self evolves in these processes’ (Jahnke, 2012, p. 37) and therefore ideas and projections are redefined as an outcome of the practice. These complexities invite a response like Coyne’s (2005); that design situations must remain open-ended to ensure the diversity of the social dimension of design is considered.

Not only do I now know more about these spaces in an objective sense, but my understanding and aims changed through my insider knowledge of these spaces. I was consequently transformed by my ontological investigation. It became clear that more could be learnt and shared by simply engaging and ‘being in this world’ than by assuming I had a solution based on a short time-based inquiry. The notion of ‘being in the world’ comes from Heidegger’s phenomenology of being that he called ‘dasein’ (Malpas, 2010) and is explored further below.

It is important to note that my approach responds to the evolving and ephemeral nature of space that is fundamental to phenomenological method. ‘One of the phenomenological constructs used to understand and develop the notion of place is insideness’ (Cecil & Cecil n.d. p. 241) and ‘to be inside a place is to belong to it and to identify with it’ (Relph, 1976, p. 49). Physical transition to an inside space may be instant, but belonging in place is more accurately described as a slow reveal. The notion of insideness is reflected in disclosing either seconds (temporally) or parts (physically) of an environment slowly being unconcealed as I move through it (this transformation of space into place is discussed further in Chapters 8 and 9). My aim is that the viewer feels embedded within the environment (via the image), existentially experiencing the movement and radiant energy of the space. The application of this technique of insideness also allows the viewer to interact with the image, and deepens the viewer’s involvement in a temporal
process of interpreting this space and the actors within it, as they come to presence. Heidegger (1927) would call this ‘presencing’, to acknowledge the to and fro as one responds to and interprets phenomena.

It is significant that hermeneutic phenomenology differs from traditional phenomenology. In traditional phenomenology, the researcher is required to undergo epoché, which is known as the ‘bracketing out’ of any thoughts and conceptions you may develop. Yet, Heidegger believes this is nonsense, proposing that understanding is a consequence of human existence; understanding is not the way we identify with the world, it is instead the way we are (Polkinghorne, 1983). Heidegger believed that all lived experiences feed into your understanding of any given subject. Annells (1996) expands on this Heideggerian philosophy, indicating that hermeneutics is a process of interpretation that aims to bring an understanding of phenomena through language, and in my case through the image. Relph discusses this in relation to not only insideness, but also experience:

to be inside a place empathetically is to understand that place as rich in meaning and hence to identify with it, for those meanings are not only linked to the experiences and symbols of those whose place it is, but also stem from one’s own experiences. (1976, p. 55)

This situates the experiential nature of photography within space.

Barthes offers a unique insight into the idea of ‘bracketing’, akin to traditional phenomenology, mentioned above. Before discussing this further, it is notable that while Barthes writes widely on photography he is not a practitioner himself. Yet Barthes understands photography as a phenomenological practice: many of his ideas touch the intuitions of the photographer, ‘[t]he photograph, [the one I intend] represents that very subtle moment when to tell the truth, I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object: I then experience a micro version of death (of parenthesis)’ (1981, p. 15). Parenthesis here represents a melding of object, time and space, as opposed to a removal of objects from the experience. Barthes’ poetic description of phenomenological practice links to my own as it traces the networks of associations between subjects and photographer, and the merging of lines inside and outside the frame in specific spaces of time. To put it briefly, Casey (2001) states, ‘there is no place without self and no self without place’ (p. 406).

This phenomenological ideal can be understood and enacted by ANT—the photographer and the camera become actors in the network of recording

the image. The researcher projects herself onto the scene being captured and is inescapably intertwined in the moment through emotive, physical and mediated links and connections. Barthes furthers this notion, stating ‘I am the reference of every photograph, and this is what generates my astonishment in addressing myself to the fundamental question: why is it I am alive here and now?’ (1981, p. 91). This again reinforces the embodied act of photography and the researcher’s presence within that current moment of time and the trace they leave on the physical photograph. This acknowledgement of life presence unwittingly draws parallels to its counterpart, death. The ontological mode of capture freezes time, and therefore captures the death of a moment within these spaces, as they are perpetually closing. This highlights an intrinsic relationship with time and the temporal. That which is photographed can later disappear or die, but at that moment, the image that is taken and created represents my being in the world and the fullness and vital presence of that world.

Barthes (1981) believes that the photograph itself says of the referent that [it] is dead and is going to die (117). Crowther (2009) comments on Barthes’ notion, stating that ‘the paradoxical conjunction suggests a connection between photography and resurrection - not in the sense the photograph brings back the dead, but rather, in its radical affirmation that it represents something that actually existed’ [p. 143]. In essence, photography refers to time, or as Sontag (1977) states, ‘a slice in time’ [p. 15].

Sontag’s notion of a ‘slice in time’ is particularly relevant to my irregular spaces, as they shift and change in the face of closure or exposure. It is integral to capture events and occurrences within these spaces, as these moments themselves die and never occur again. While this can be said about every moment in time, the introduction of the camera changes the moment, capturing it and therefore actively making the image (and the actors within it) actors in history. This empowers the image and transforms it into an actual contributor to real and imagined spaces, a frozen moment, as opposed to a forgotten one. The assorted experiences happening within these TAZs are radical and anti-establishment in their constructs; therefore, the unique nature of these spaces ensures the events and experiences they hold can be sporadic or enriched.

Phenomenologically, the uniqueness of the experience adds value and meaning to the image. While these images are my depictions of the realities happening, they capture fleeting moments and include the temporal value of history. Barthes (1981) states that images ‘express temporal truth’ (cited in Crowther, 2009 p. 145); that these actors do actually exist within a specific period of time. This
acknowledgement of extant time is very important, as the TAZ can disappear and never be found again in the same form. This act of photography, and the agency of the image, creates a network between the living and the lived, the past and present, and potentially, the future. The image represents a very particular moment where I accompany a specific space or place, within time.

Merleau-Ponty (1962) discusses ‘being in time’ in relation to embodiment, highlighting the matter of the body, stating ‘the body is our general medium for having a world’ (p. 146). This connection between the body and the world is essential in understanding a phenomenological approach. It is integral to note that my being in the world is directly linked to my practice of ‘being in the space,’ hence, I record the space through the lens of my camera. In my practice and research, the camera is an extension of my body and works to ensure the viewer sees what I see. This can be understood in terms expressed by Marshall McLuhan’s (2003) theory of technology as an extension of the human body or more fittingly, as an understanding through design ontology (Willis, 2006) and interpretation in which the ‘designed being’ of the user acts back upon the tool (in this case the camera) with the intention of modifying the process (p. 80). This idea shares similarities with Latour’s (2005) object agency. Yet, Willis (2006) furthers this stating, ‘here we can think of equipment, appliances and other functional objects as having “horizons of use”, similar to Gadamer’s notion of interpretation as “an interaction between the horizon provided by the text and the horizon that the interpreter brings to it” (Winograd & Flores, 1986). Interpretation is inseparable from the ontological designing process’ (Willis, 2006 p. 83). When the image is taken, it is of the natural, exterior or existing world: the photograph as such and the object in itself share a common being, after the fashion of a fingerprint. Wherefore, photography actually contributes something to the order of natural creation instead of providing a substitute for it’ (Bazin, trans Gray, 1960, p. 9). It then becomes clear that the ontology of photography is inherently linked to the basic notions of our embodiment in the world (Crowther, 2009); our intuitive fascination with this [embodiment] is the basis of photography’s phenomenological depth (Crowther, 2009, p. 152).

6.3 Actor Network Theory Reprise

In Chapter 3, I discussed the ways ANT enables reinterpretation of the dualities existing between macro and micro, often found in geography and urban studies. ANT facilitates the mapping of urban networks delineated by the irregular opening and closing of cultural activities. ANT is also applied on a more intimate scale in my analysis, breaking down the barriers that exist between the dualities applied to human and non-human objects within irregular spaces.

ANT is crucial to my study as it activates a hermeneutic and phenomenological link (to be always present) between the camera, the actors that are captured and myself. This network is not fixed and finite. It can extend further to the final photograph as an object itself, which is then linked to the viewer: ‘every object is to be seen as an image and every image as an object’ (Bazin, trans Gray, 1960, p. 9). This creates a cyclical process of interpretation and redefinition. Bazin (1960) discusses this notion when debating the difference between traditional painting and the historical roots of photography, stating that when the camera was introduced, ‘for the first time, between the originating object and its reproduction there intervenes only the instrumentality of a nonliving agent’ [p. 7]. This undeniable networking between the human and non-human reinforces the importance of ANT as a theory for photography.

The fluidity of this approach enables the researcher to ‘move between frames of reference to regain some sort of commensurability between traces coming from frames travelling at very different speeds and acceleration’ (Latour, 2005, p. 12). This reference to frames and speed makes (for me) an undeniably photographic connection to the capture of these movements as photography is reliant on a combination of speed and light to create frames. Rutherford (2003) writes, ‘each fragment of the image or sound is like a found object to be put into play, to evoke new associations’ (p. 129). When shooting these spaces, I endeavour to capture all elements of the space. As mentioned previously, ANT as a methodology places the same emphasis on human and non-human actors, with no preference given to any one object over another (Law, 1999). While this is a unique attribute of ANT and aids my photographic process, it is also a common criticism of ANT (explored in Section 4.1), that it does not acknowledge hierarchy and order, but merely renders the social world as as flat as possible to ensure the visibility of links (Latour, 2005). The way in which I decipher these networks in Sydney is to link elements through visual networks of associations, resulting in the assemblages seen in Section 9.2.3. Flat but not static, these visual assemblages signify an evolving process and hence reflect time and flux, rather than constrained and inflexible networks. In my photographic imagery, I combat the ‘flatness’ of the network by reinstating specificity. The images are detailed ‘thick’ descriptions (Geertz, 1973), allowing for another layer of interpretation to be assembled within the network.
The benefit of using both ANT and assemblage theory is that it reveals the sense in which spaces emerge through the time-space dynamics of actors, ‘space, scale and time are rather multiple enacted and assembled at concrete local sites, where concrete actors shape time-space dynamics in various ways, producing thereby different geographies of associations’ (Farias et al., 2010, p. 6). This demonstrates that space is not a pre-existing construct or a given in which objects move around; it is made through performance and associations. This challenges the traditional conventions of space that define it as a capitalist construct of relations (Smith, 1982) or state strategies (Brenner, 2004). Actor networks are grouped together to create assemblages that allow for ‘a radical account of space and time as consequences, effects or even, dependent variables of the relations and associations making up actor networks’ (Farias et al., 2010, p. 6)

6.4 The Neo-Visual Turn

The image is as much a reflection of the ‘i’ of the photographer as it is the ‘eye’ of the camera (Clarke, 1997: 30)

Due to the multitudes of ways an image can be taken, used and rendered, it is important to review the academic field and the pockets within which photography currently sits. Historically, there is a strong tie between the use of photography in sociology and anthropology, where the camera is used to document experiences ‘in the field’ of research. Despite a similar date of origin in 1839, Becker (1974) quite critically outlines the differences between sociology as an academic discipline and the practice of photography, contesting the role of the social photographer and their subsequent lack of adherence to theory.

In Photography and Sociology, Becker critiques Bruce Davidson’s photographic work East 100th Street, Harlem (see Figure 18), where Davidson spent four years in the 1960s documenting life on a single block in Harlem. Becker (1974) insists that the photographs revolve around the ideas of suffering and the subjects as noble in the face of suffering:

In fact, photography and sociology have approximately the same birth date, if we consider that the first sociological publication was the work of Comte (which consequently gave sociology its name) and photography’s birth date as the 1839 public exposure of Daguerre’s method for fixing an image on a plate (Becker, 1974, p. 12).
It is not that these are incorrect, or that for any reason they should not be said. But they are not sufficiently complex to sustain the weight of a real exploration of society, which will inevitably show that things are more complicated. (p. 12)

There was (and still is) a tendency for photographers and photographic researchers of the social to focus on exposing those in low socioeconomic situations to influence politics and social change. Dorothea Lange, for example, who photographed extensively during the ‘Great Depression’, used photography to ‘document the severe economic distress of the time’ (Yoshiwara, 2009). These images can cause controversy regarding what a photograph is able to do (that the academic word cannot): to speak to the wider community in a visual form. In my opinion, Davidson’s images ‘speak’ a raw and hard truth. Yet, they do not victimise the people in the images; instead, they merely expose components of the everyday that would otherwise remain unnoticed. The images act on the viewer in a way that does cause us to suppose we now ‘know’ this world, but rather we are opened to it.

As I will explain below, many have argued there needs to be room for the subjective and reflexive in social research, to study the small and large, formal and informal nuances of actors. Photography allows for these nuances and permits other ways of seeing, especially identifying the complex visuals of a city ‘as both an image and an experience’ (Clarke, 1997, p. 75).

This is not to say there are no risks to photographic social documentation. As Hunt (2014) eloquently notes:

Whereas it has much to offer ethnographic investigations, photography is not without its critics and dangers. Uncritical floundering with a camera, false sense of knowing while skimming the surface, impressionable beautification of everything, trivialization and disempowering of the subject, and selectivity of the frame, all allow a photographer to cast images in problematic ways (p. 154).

Being aware of these issues in photographic research is one part of the reflective process, coupled with a critical eye and the constant process of re-evaluation and reinvention enacted through hermeneutic phenomenology. Becker (1974) states, ‘that in large-scale survey or experiment, the researcher can seldom change the way he [sic] gathers his data once he had begun’ (p. 12). The introduction of digital technology has rendered this a moot point, due to the ability to view the taken photograph instantaneously. Within my own hermeneutic approach, what I learn affects the ways in which I continue to research and gather information.

In his critique of Davidson’s images, Becker mistakes immediacy for simplicity. Davidson’s images were taken over a four-year period, a study involving immersion and considerable meditation over time. The photographic outputs evidence an authentic practice. Like my study, these images draw attention to the complex ethical nuances involved in photographing a particular social scene and the economical and political factors that incubate them. The intent of my images is not to victimise those fighting for/claiming space in Sydney, but to liberate actors through visual representations of space and place.

My use of ANT aims to set this study apart from a traditional ethnographic or anthropological study, due to the inclusion of, and agency given, to the non-human. My pairing of ANT and hermeneutic phenomenology is not a common approach. Therefore, to tease out the difference of my approach, it is worthwhile briefly discussing the disciplinary contexts within which visual research is more typically used. While more contemporary social science studies favour a reflexive approach, anthropology still battles this notion from within its own discipline.

Becker tends to draw on examples of sociology when discussing the photographic image, yet during the early twentieth century, anthropology also began to establish itself as a scientific and academic discipline, one which readily draws on the image. At this time, visual anthropologists began attempting to find a place for the visual in the positivist realm (Pink, 2003). However, the work of Pink and Rose (2001) aims to illuminate a new and contemporary approach to substantiate the contributions of the image within an academic, anthropological context.

Pink (2003), in her article ‘Interdisciplinary agendas in visual research: Re-situating visual anthropology’, surveys the aims and interests of academics using visual methods within a range of disciplines:

As we delve into the ‘new’ visual research literature, it becomes clear that contemporary visual researchers from different disciplines have common interests: reflexivity, collaboration; ethics; and the relationship between the content, social context and materiality of images. (p. 179)

Pink goes on to discuss a range of examples of visual research, which disclose a documentary intent framed as an ethnographic or anthropological approach [the tendency to use the visual to study humans and their consequential cultural formations]. Visual anthropologist Ruby (2000) insists that to be ethical, visual research should be a collaborative process with those within the study,
representing the voices of the informants (Pink, 2003). My research strays from this and avoids collaboration in the traditional sense: there is evidence that this collaboration or inclusion can be problematic if the authorship of the image is effaced. The prominence of the ‘author’ is diminished in the visual anthropological study as it aims to collaborate with the subjects and embody objectivity. Within design, the idea of ‘designer as author’ (Poynor, 2003, p. 121) is explored in the works of Barnes (2011): ‘the creation of content and form are in dialogue from the start’ and it is the ‘separation and tension’ between designer and author’s pathways that “generates ideas and qualities that could be produced in no other way” (Mau, 2000 p. 37 cited in Barnes, 2011, p. 91). Barnes’ (2011) thesis Revealing the Geo/ graphic landscape of the everyday: A practice-led investigation into interdisciplinary geo/ graphic design process is exemplary in the way it traverses the interdisciplinary relationship between designer as both producer and author and the ways in which visual communication, as a practice-based and outcome driven discipline, can intersect with the realms of human geography and anthropology.

Human geography represents a space in between the social sciences and the natural sciences, which is a good place to situate my photographic research. ‘Attending to the micro-geographies of place—to objects and their component parts—may reveal much about our cities and the dynamic forces that shape them’ (Hunt, 2014, p. 159). A resurgence in image making within geography has seen a number of geographers (as well as sociologists and anthropologists) turning to the visual within their research. This has been explored in visual mapping projects and cartography, and also through the renewed interest in urban photography: ‘urban photography describes image making that engages critically both with the city and with photographic traditions—mainly uniting the inquisitive eye of the documentary photographer with the immediacy of street photography’ (Hunt, 2014, p. 151–168). In the context of academic practice, this has been defined as ‘visual urbanism’, ‘an intention to make sense of research and interact with urban life through lens-based media or other forms of visualization’ (IAVU, 2012 cited in Hunt, 2014). Heading the push into visual urbanism is the Centre for Urban and Community Research (CUCR) at Goldsmiths, University of London, which includes sociologists Halliday, Back and Knowles, who provide a wide-reaching range of work that displays the strength of urban photography in the academic realm.

The general pairing of the urban with photography fits my methodological approach. While a broad fit, its theories are embedded within human geography:

Photography is part of geography’s recent groundswell of visual culture production and part of what Tolia-Kelly (2012, p. 135) calls the ‘neo-visual turn’. Instead of acting as commentators external to artistic processes, cultural geographers have begun engaging directly with creative arts practice and energising the discipline as a result. (Crang, 2010 cited in Hunt, 2014, p. 155)

In a lot of ways this description is the flipped version of my own process. Crang describes a swell of geographers who now engage with photography. I would position myself as a photographer, utilising my practice to engage with the urban and human geography.

While my work is aligned with visual urbanism, my predilection is to focus on the inside, as opposed to exteriority. This is a tendency in the discipline of visual urbanism. Despite this, my work is situated within the urban context. What I am capturing moves inherently through the urban, it occupies the urban and exists within the urban. So with this in mind, I would like to frame my work as visual urbanism.

My photography of the urban engages in design-led, reflexive and human geographic research. Hunt discusses the neo-visual turn drawing on Dwyer and Davies, who state that geographers are connecting with ‘artistic practices [that] provide a way of folding uncertainty into the act of producing an account’ (Dwyer & Davies, 2009, p. 93). Hunt continues this discussion in relation to space and the ways that this approach sees space as unfolding (Hunt, 2014). The unfolding nature of space is intrinsic to this study and again preferences the sense of movement inherent within these spaces. As a motif for thinking about space differently, a fold ‘is matter … doubling back upon itself to make endless new points of connection between diverse elements’ (Meskimon, 2003 cited in Springgay, Irwin & Kind, 2005, p. 901). The fold also aligns with a key aim of this research, which is to avoid a view of a city informed by binaries, and think about the points of connection that exist around and within the urban. In the visual assemblages found in Section 9.2.3, the viewer must engage in the act of ‘folding’ and ‘unfolding’ to view the visual assemblages. This subtle reference exists to honour the established sense of connections demonstrated throughout the thesis.

Urban photography often gets referred to as street photography (for a detailed explanation of the history of urban and street photography see Hunt, 2014).

29 Urban photography often gets referred to as street photography (for a detailed explanation of the history of urban and street photography see Hunt, 2014).
CHAPTER 7

ANALYSING THE VISUAL
Chapter 6 explained my hermeneutic phenomenological approach and situated my photographic practice within the emerging discipline of visual urbanism. This chapter engages directly with visual examples that explore, exemplify and speak to my aesthetic style.

When analysing the photographic work of others, it is difficult for me to separate style and content. Having been a practicing photographer for some time, I may admire photographs, but would not say that they influence my style in a visual sense. I am more inspired or influenced by words and music, and have an interest in converting the emotions they evoke into imagery. Having said this, there are photographers whose work has inevitably influenced me, or whose work helps to illuminate my own aesthetic. I can definitely tie a thread around all that inspires me as disparate revelations about hidden worlds, evidenced by photography’s ability to expose something that is not accessible within the everyday, whether this is empty, decaying and forgotten spaces (as in Marchand and Meffre’s photography) or the revelation of hidden cultures, full of intricate relations (as in Clark’s photography).

I found writing about other photographers’ works a surprisingly challenging task, as having not taken the images I am removed from the emotive stories informing them. Instead I prefer to silently let the images move me, their poetic nature fill me from inside out. Therefore, words about the images themselves are hard to write. By analysing the work of others, I intend to outline the philosophy and features of my approach, while validating the photographic medium of my practice.

7.1 Style and Content

Within photography there is a range of established stylistic genres such as fashion, portraiture, editorial, landscape and photo-journalism. I believe my photographic style is unable to be placed within any one mode of photographic categorisation. Instead, it includes partial components of landscape photography (see the photographic works of Mitchell, Cosgrove, Halliday), street photography or urban photography (see the photographic works of Halliday, Coleman and Tester), and object photography (see the photographic works of Benjamin and Flusser).

My work is inclusive of people but struggles to be identified as portraiture, due to my reliance on non-human actors that share equal significance with humans inside the frame. I also use conventions of landscape photography, but my images are part of an assemblage that form deeper relationships with interior entities. Below I discuss a range of photographers and photographic images that fall into these predefined categories, yet ‘speak’ to my work and have helped me to better understand my practice.

7.1.1 Subcultural photography

What follows is a type of visual literature review. Much has been written and theorised about the photographic image, and there is a responsibility to explain the photographic lineages from which my imagery draws. From a vast discourse on photography, I have tried to mobilise photographic research that is closely applicable to the stylistic approaches and urban subjects within this project. There have been countless photographers who have captured cultural movements throughout history and a number of them have been influential within my photographic practice (see Yang, Tillmans, Erdt, Lachapelle). However, I will refer to a limited number of examples in this chapter to express ideas relevant to my practice. Figure 19 is an image from Nick Knight’s series, Skinheads, which documents the prevalence of skinheads within London between 1980 to 1981 (located in and around Petticoat Lane). Knight (1982) confesses in the introduction of his book Skinhead that when he started photographing this project, he knew none of the East End skins. In many ways, his situatedness as an outsider parallels my own positioning at the beginning of my project, a stranger to the irregular spaces of the inner west of Sydney. Despite Knights ‘outsideness’, he presents an enriched and provoking documentation of a culture struggling to retain its identity.

Knights’ placement within the culture naturally changed as the project continued. When analysing these images, I notice there is a tendency towards more posed images than the work of some other subcultural photographers. The reasons for this can only be speculated upon. On the one hand it may have been a method of Knight to ask actors to pose in certain ways, or in contrast, it may have been a result of the ostentatious nature of the skinheads and their desire to be noticed and/or recognised. Bogre (2011) discusses this notion of the insider versus the outsider, stating that commonly there is a tendency for critics to assume that only the insider has the right to photograph inside that culture. This specious argument ignores the reality that insider truth is not necessarily more accurate than outsider truth” (p. 4).

In my own research, I am not aiming for a more ‘truthful’ representation; instead I intend to document the transition from outsider to insider more succinctly, the slow immersion from space into place. This is, in part, addressed by my visual networks, which include multiple images to counteract the representational fixity of a singular image. Bogre’s arguments reinforce the inherently subjective nature of photography and contest the notion of ‘truth’, an idea explored through this chapter especially in relation to journalistic photography. Despite the arguments
surrounding truth and representation, as a viewer, there is an undeniable intrigue in looking from the outside in to an unknown world. This is exemplified in the works of photographer Larry Clark, particularly in his series *Tulsa* (see Figure 20). Clark’s images are equally horrifying and captivating, displaying the life of a boy who transforms into a man throughout, trapped inside a nihilistic and drug-riddled culture. This series has an intrinsic relationship with time, as the images slowly reveal a decline in the individuals reoccurring within the photos. At a certain point within the series, there is a marked change; the distressed faces of those living a life of addiction replace carefree youth:

> The revolutionary and unique aspect of his photographs is—to this day—the closeness and intimacy between him and the documented persons and situations. As opposed to a classical photo-journalist who views an unfamiliar world from the outside, Larry Clark does not only take an interest in the life of his protagonists. Far removed from any form of voyeurism, he himself is a fundamental part of the scene he photographs. It seems as if he has a familiarity with the persons portrayed rather than just observing them. Without Larry Clark, photography would not have freed itself from the constraints of objectivity [Larry-clark.net, 2012].
This series was published as a book (which I experienced in my early twenties) and was also an exhibition, (which I experienced in Berlin, 2012). The contrast between viewing these photographs on the white walls of a gallery and the more intimate experience of seeing these photographs within a book was striking. When digesting these images in the book, a more personal experience is had; I found myself able to become absorbed in this alternative world and was free to explore the crude and sometimes perverse images, without the exposure of viewing in a public gallery. This conflicting experience (of the gallery versus the book), was influential in helping me to choose the final format for my photographic outcome. While my work does not necessarily deal with the same sense of voyeurism that Clark’s work does, the book allowed a more intimate and private reading of the culture, and in my case, the spaces. In addition, an exhibition of my photographic work would engage in a sense of exposure, which would conflict with the ethical aims of the research.

The work of both Knight and Clark pays homage to two very different cultures that, without the intrusion or inclusion of the camera, might have otherwise remained hidden and excluded from cultural history records. These examples explore two different outcomes: the outsider taking photographs of a culture, as seen in Knight’s work and in juxtaposition, the insider documenting his own subjective day-to-day encounters, as exemplified in the work of Clark.

When undertaking an image analysis there are two main areas to consider: content analysis and visual analysis. These two factors inform and reflect each other, but there are marked differences between them. The content of both photographers’ series engage with ideas of rebellion and the subversive, emotions that equate with a type of emotive darkness and moodiness. However, when undergoing a visual analysis, aesthetically it is notable that both series are filled with a lot of light and a bleached treatment to the shade contrasts within their images. Clark uses light within his images as a way to expose a harsh reality, bringing the subversive, and risqué acts into well-lit situations. This offers a marked contrast to my own work. In my images, details are born out of the darkness, colours, shapes and objects fading and receding into shadowy backgrounds. For me, this contrast in visual style indicates varied intents and varied levels of engagement with the actors within the images. The bleached quality of [often day] light within Clark’s work emphasises the normality of the drug taking and sexual acts in his every day life, and his placement as an insider within this realm. The darkness and limited use of light in my images speaks to the hidden and discrete nature of irregular spaces and their ability to quickly and quietly recede into darkness, disappearing.

7.1.2 Objects too have meaning

Peter Coles shoots a range of interesting objects that are found in natural and urban environments. Figures 21 and 22 are from Coles [mid-1990s] series featuring a variety of shoes found in and around the suburbs of Paris. This work was a response to an increased closure of thrift shops (second hand stores), and as a result people began donating their shoes to the city. These images capture the shoes poised, waiting for their next inhabitant. The viewer’s attention is drawn immediately to the shoes, probably once fashion items, spurring us to ponder the personalities that once inhabited them and the narratives behind them being left on the street. Coles changes the connotations and meanings of the objects when capturing more than two shoes, pairs; he sets forging relationships between the objects and proliferating the networks of association.

Another photographer whose work addresses the mutability of urban matter is Richard Wentworth [Figure 23] (Hunt, 2014). Hunt analyses Wentworth’s ongoing photographic series Making Do and Getting By noting that particular focus is given to the temporary associations that exist between ordinary, urban objects:
Two worn planks leaning together alongside a cement mixer, or a clothes hanger jamming a clouded window, show how objects move across space and time through their lives, and through the lives of humans and non-humans that interact with them. Highlighting the utility of mundane materials also captures the capacity and potential of their matter. [Hunt, 2014, p. 161]

This reflects the agency objects can have within a photo and their equal importance in the reading and interpretation of an image. This sense of agency is also mimicked in the photographic object itself and its continuing agency. Quite early in this project, I began reflecting upon and writing about the objects captured within my imagery, in a very similar way to the ways in which Hunt analyses the works of Wentworth. For example, in Figure 24, a sense of home is exemplified through the objects captured within the image. This is the entry to a successful (now closed) irregular space. There is an event occurring within this space at the time of capture and outside, the entry is scattered with objects that hold everyday significance. A paint roller sits propped against the right hand wall, next to it a cluster of power and extension chords, and an assortment of cleaning products adorn a hot water heater, a leftover roll of material leaning against it. A washing machine and sink sit silently, incapable of escaping the growing ferns that climb steadily up through the cracked concrete and attach themselves to the security bars clinging to the windows. These everyday items evoke a sense of entering a personal realm made available to punters through passion and trust. They represent more than just the everyday; they represent the breaking down of barriers of outside and inside, private and public. These objects embody agency and create assemblages, made up of other actors [not necessarily positioned within the frame]. [T]he photograph allows us … to admire in reproduction something that our eyes alone could not have taught us to love’ [Bazin, trans Gray, 1960, p. 9]. Hermeneutic phenomenology allows an intimate reading of the everyday objects and actors that create a specific understanding of space and ANT allows links to be made between these actors (both inside and outside).
Figure 24. Now closed, (Photograph taken by Author, 2011).
7.1.3 Space/s

An empty space can be filled with the traces of human and non-human interaction and the space itself is filled with the same sense of agency that individual objects can carry. The absence of physical bodies in spaces is often countered by the presence and trace of former life. When a space is photographed empty, without any warm bodies to fill it, it conjures up a different set of emotions and reactions. There is something about empty spaces that suggests notions of memories and times past. This conception of the forgotten or the abandoned is exemplified in the works of Yves Marchand and Roman Meffre. These photographers provide quintessential examples that interrogate bigger questions surrounding the ‘social’ elicited by empty spaces. Marchand and Meffre’s work is primarily concerned with architectural ruins:

Ruins are the visible symbols and landmarks of our societies and their changes, small pieces of history in suspension. The state of ruin is essentially a temporary situation that happens at some point, the volatile result of change of era and the fall of empires. This fragility, the time elapsed but even so running fast, lead us to watch them one very last time: being dismayed, or admire, making us wondering about the permanence of things. Photography appeared to us as a modest way to keep a little bit of this ephemeral state. (Marchandmefre.com, n.d.)

Marchand and Meffre’s most renowned work captures the ruins of the American city, Detroit, as seen in Figure 25. The images in this series serve as evidence of the fallen American Dream of manufacturing supremacy and document the deserted buildings and structures that once housed and supported a world of thriving industrialism. Their series includes images taken within a year of each other; the continued decay within these spaces is surprising and haunting, but also highlights the role that human forces have played in the increased destruction of these spaces, as objects are clearly removed or destroyed. These photographs question the absence and presence of the human, highlighting the role human forces play in sustaining a living space, as well as the role they play in increased destruction. While free of any pictures of individuals, the human traces are clear and there is an undeniable beauty in the fallen.

In juxtaposition, Martin Eberle, in his works on Temporary Spaces, captures the empty spaces of Berlin’s infamous clubbing scene:
Spanning over a period of 10 years, Martin Eberle’s stunning photographs are the first to document these locations as they really are. By radically reducing them to their hardware, the empty space, juxtaposing run-down facades and lovingly crafted interiors (from improvised to hysterically glamorous) with architectural brutality, he perfectly captures their legendary, ramshackle hipness (Hellige & Klanten, 2001).

Although the images are stark with the absence of physical human bodies, the spaces are filled with the traces and detritus of their having been there. While in my work I have some empty space photographs, I like to pair them with the inclusion of people as the spaces change dramatically and come to life when inhabited by human and non-human actors.

Within Eberle’s work (see Figure 26), some images appear as frozen moments taken after an event, capturing human destruction in a different way to Marchand and Meffre. The space is filled with the debris and objects that allow you to imagine the happenings that had recently occurred. In contrast, in other photographs (as demonstrated in Figure 27), we see the space paused in anticipation. The photograph appears to be taken mere moments before people flood into this space. Here, instead of the empty space carrying destruction and an aftermath, it appears inviting and prepared. Like Eberle in this instance, I use the empty spaces as a chance to poetically capture the space pregnant with possibility, using the ambient light to create an emotive quality within the space, carried through the objects and interaction with human actors of the past and future. Eberle’s Temporary Spaces collection is a revealing account of underground material cultures and spaces; an important historical account of the Berlin scene and a testament to the importance of documenting hidden cultures and spaces.

7.1.4 Photographs of photographers

Bradley Garrett, an urban explorer who uses photography and video as visual research methods, believes that photography can be empowering and open new avenues for research. A pioneer of utilising visual methods in ‘risqué’ environments, Garrett (2014) states that photography and video are not ‘shortcut methods, they are sensitive, difficult work’ (p. 137). Despite this, it must be acknowledged that the increased access to image production afforded by digital cameras and online mediums (Flickr, Facebook, blogs, Google maps, youtube) has changed the ways in which images are viewed. The increased saturation of images in the digital world places more pressure on the photographic researcher (and the professional photographer) to reveal something different or striking about a scene: those who are masterful in their craft can still instil intrigue or create a visceral impact within an image. In his chapter ‘Worlds through Glass: Photography and video as geographic method’, Garrett discusses how one of his participants noted that he took photos of different things to them, specifically noting that he was ‘always taking pictures of people taking pictures’ (Garrett, 2014, p. 143). I also have a tendency to take photos of other people taking photographs or recording the space. This is evidenced within the visual assemblages in 9.2.3 and elaborated upon in section 7.2.3. This action highlights the researcher’s interest in turning the camera back on a situation, capturing what others would not, and focusing on reactions, not catalysts.

Why do I focus on people taking photographs? I think on some level it is to capture the various ways people utilise the photographic apparatus of a camera when experiencing a scene. I am intrigued by those who look at the screen representation (on their phone) of the event happening in front of them, and those who still watch the real scene unfolding before them, yet have a documentation device capturing a different angle. Sometimes I capture intrusive and aggressive photographers and at other times, subtle and soft documenters, these are all included in the visual assemblages, which serve to pose as modes of comparison.
The concept of the camera as an interrogation tool is explored in Figures 28, 29 and 30. While these images may appear to be out of context, for me, they portray the potential ugliness of the outsider photographer. There is a sense that a photographer, when positioned as an outsider and too comfortable in that role, has a disregard for the actors within it. I utilise the images below as a means to dissect the ways in which other photographers can engage with a scene, and as a preface to the delineation of my own practice, expanded upon in the following section.

Figure 28 and 29 demonstrate two equally shocking photographs of the same incident. Both these photographs capture the death of a fifteen-year-old girl in Haiti, post-earthquake. Due to the increased looting, police were advised to shoot their guns into the air. One of these stray bullets hit and killed Fabienne Cherisma, a fifteen-year-old girl, while she was carrying picture frames back to her home (pictured). In 2011, Paul Hensen’s image (Figure 28) was chosen as the Picture of the Year in Sweden. A few weeks later, Lucas Oleniuk’s photograph (Figure 29) won the National Newspaper Awards in Canada (the reel photo, 2013). These images of Fabienne became iconic symbols of the Haitian earthquake and the problems surrounding the aftermath (Prison Photography, 2013).

We have seen this type of iconic photographic representation in news journalism before. See the ‘Napalm Girl’ by Huynh Cong Ut (1972).
The reason for including these images is due to the photograph released later by Nathan Weber (Figure 30), documenting the sea of photographers swarming the death scene. Weber has purposely focused on the individuals capturing the photo, as opposed to the victim. The different framing of these three images exposes two sets of social issues. The first award winning images (Figures 28 and 29) capture the horrific social aftermath of a natural disaster and the implications of authoritarian intervention. The third image (Figure 30) crudely exposes the role of the journalistic photographer, revealing how the subject subsumes the photographer. By all accounts, the photographers pictured here are simply going about their business, much as the looters are. However, without the revelation of Weber’s photograph, the photographers, and their dubious ethics, would remain hidden. These images highlight a polarity of photographic approaches and confirm that my work is not a purely documentary-based study. This is due to the objective nature of documentary photography, which suppresses the hermeneutics governing my own research approach. These photographic examples bring in to question an array of issues within the context of my work and my photographic ethics; they highlight the need to avoid exploitation, and also to step back from a scene at hand. Sometimes photographing the people photographing can say more about the social than the object itself. These examples acknowledge the powerful impact of photography and the ways in which (re)framing can affect the way an image is taken in.

7.1.5 An ally

In 2014, I stumbled upon the work of a Hungarian photographer, Simon Moricz, who captures the ruined and abandoned buildings that have become revalorised pubs in Budapest’s seventh district:

Each ruin pub is unique, but they all share certain similarities. The main ingredient is usually an abandoned building, preferably with a vacant lot nearby to hold picnic tables and a few beer taps. Add to that a bit of thrift-shop decor and a healthy dose of hipster vibe, and the result is what you might get if you crossed a chill Berlin squat with a smallish Munich beer hall. (Baker, 2011)

See also Kevin Carter, photograph of a Sudanese child being stalked by a vulture (1993).
The social situation within which these pubs are situated is not unlike the context of my study. The difference is that in Sydney, the fight for space is cut throat, and there are very few unused/abandoned spaces in the inner western suburbs. This space race is a phenomenon I have often pondered upon, as Australia has such an abundance of space per capita compared to its European counterparts. Yet, European cities such as Lisbon, Portugal are filled with entire vacant suburbs, not too far from built-up economic centres. Places like Budapest have abandoned Jewish quarters, areas that are attractive due to their low rental prices and interesting buildings that often look like they are condemned (Foran, 2013). While there are many photographers who capture the rehabilitation of these decaying ruin pub spaces, the work of Moricz blends a myriad of senses not present in the other documentary images. His mix of human and non-human actors, low lighting and deliberate framing resounds with me so deeply, it is almost as though I could have directed the photographs.

Moricz and I speak the same nuanced photographic language, to the point that if you were to pair our projects together, as demonstrated in Figures 31 and 32, one could speculate whether we set out with a collaborative goal. In Figures 31 and 32 we see two images taken worlds apart, with (what I assume) is no knowledge of the others’ working processes and outcomes. Not only do the images capture similar actors, but the overall framing and approach to lighting is also similar. Interestingly enough, it is not only the visual aesthetic that represents similarities between our projects. In Budapest, a similar debate exists around the political, economical and developmental context surrounding these spaces as in Sydney. These similarities experienced in alternative spaces, worlds apart, reinforces earlier discussions surrounding artists being the ‘shock troops of gentrification’ (Deutsche, 1999, p. 151):

‘In the early 2000s, there was a clear antagonism between the developers and the ruin pubs’, says Alexandra Kowalski, a resident of the Jewish quarter and assistant professor at the Central European University who recently completed a study of historic preservation in the area. ‘Ruin pubs were gaining traction as meeting places and a sort of hallmark of the neighborhood, while the developers were planning to build towers and tall buildings and completely change the look of the area’. (Foran, 2013)

Moricz’ transient nightscape places are presented through an online multimedia piece, paired with music and the sounds of people mingling. I have searched the internet for the photographs outside of this context but they are proving difficult to find uncoupled from this multimedia delivery. It is hard to analyse how the images would be viewed without this added sensorial context, and I find myself questioning whether the addition of sound is necessary to convey an understanding about these spaces.

7.2 Me, my camera and I

Susan Sontag (1977) says it is very hard to interpret a photographer’s work without reference to their context and style. Having examined the stylistic endeavours of other practitioners, I would like to explain my moral and aesthetic stance as a photographer. I have intuitively applied these principles to the techniques and practices that have formed over my ten-year photographic career and in this project. This will help the reader to understand how context and style are important parts of my approach and will reinforce the hermeneutical nature of my practice and the importance of time, change and reflection. As mentioned before, the implementation of the hermeneutic circle requires a shuttling back and forth between ideas, theories and practice, to achieve understanding. In the following sections, I explore my groundings as a practitioner and the ways in which my pre-established ideas around practice feed into my current understandings about capture. This grounding in the past, coupled with my theoretical and methodological approach, has informed my emerging practice in this project. Through reflection and theoretical exploration, I have continually reassessed both my creative practice and the outcomes I have created.

7.2.1 In the dark about light

Photography is principally about light and time. I do not use any light altering effects in my photographs. By stating this, I mean I do not use a flash/studio or fill lights throughout this body of work. These photographs all use available lighting, as I feel introducing artificial light creates something alien and changes the representation of the objects within the frame. As a photographer, light is one of the key tools with which you work to produce any image. Lighting creates drama, atmosphere and sets a particular mood and feel to any given space. With this in mind, I shoot to keep the scene as ‘real to life’ as possible. Susan Sontag echoes this notion when discussing the photograph, stating ‘the picture may distort; but there is always a presumption that something exists, or did exist, which is like what’s in the picture’ (Sontag, 1977, p. 5). I aim to make the picture as close to (my) reality as possible, so that the two become somewhat interchangeable.
As a result of using only available light, my images are often quite dark, responding to a mood established through the lighting within spaces. I shoot these images at a high ISO, which creates a grainy and ‘noisy’ effect. In traditional photography, this effect is generally not desirable as it removes the clean lines that sharply identify individual elements within the image. My work intends to capture the sound, atmosphere and ‘vibe’ of any space photographed, an intention that can be brought into particular relief by the project of photographing music spaces that have specifically profound noisiness and energies to render with light (see Figure 33). For me, there is a poetic beauty in the ‘noise’ of the image. It is as if within these dark forbidden spaces, there lies a certain type of static, tiny dots of atmosphere and emotion that create tension and carry sound to the audience (and in turn my camera). This is how I bid you to view the ‘noise’ in these images, as a part of the network of information that aids my phenomenological rendering of space. It is important to note how my role as a researcher and photographer becomes integral to the translation and narration of these images. My being in the world is connected to place through the capture of light, materiality and time that belongs to place.

7.2.2 Let me frame it for you

In 2004, I was asked to tour with Blink 182 on their Australian national tour, photographing the band live. Armed with my ridiculously unprofessional equipment, I road tripped the east coast of Australia with one of the world’s most successful alternative acts. It was at this point (photographing the same band perform the same set for nine nights in a row) that I realised how important place context is to a photograph. While I aim to have a pleasing frame to any image, there is an importance placed on including objects and people (human and non-human ‘actors’). The aim is to reveal something about the current moment in time and help contextualise the performer. I do this by including a range of actors, such as the crowd, the musical equipment, the performer’s stance and/or the lighting. These references can be subtle, they can simply include the tattered corner of a rug or the hand scrawled marks scribbled on a beam supporting the stage. Yet, each referent should be enough to infer values about the space and or time the image was taken.

For instance, Figure 34 tells us much more about the space itself than the actual performer. Extreme close ups of a performer’s face, although capturing emotion, often fail to capture context, therefore failing to tell the viewer anything about the story or the time/place that it was taken. Figure 34 captures a reflection of a performer in the mirror while the onlookers are staring transfixed by the performance. If this were merely an image of the performer on his own, the viewer would not have access to the ‘vibe’ created by the music. In framing the image this way, there is a disruption to the subject-object dichotomy—in this instance the ‘punter’ is associated with the performer in a more oblique way than a frontal stance would entertain. This aids negotiation of various networks between actors to form a variety of non-traditional assemblages. Not only does this aid an understanding about heterogeneous assemblages, it also informs the viewer about the performance by examining the relationship the performer has to the other actors in the room. A room filled with people sitting and leaning against walls indicates a more relaxed or experimental music event. It is also important to note

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31 ISO stands for International Organization for Standardisation. The Speed rating accompanying an ISO indicates the amount of light needed for correct exposure. Higher ISO rating enables you to shoot in lower lighting conditions but consequently creates a dense grain structure to the image.

32 In traditional photography, the term ‘grain’ defines the visible spots that make up an image. In digital photography, the same term is labeled ‘noise’
that the way the photograph is taken renders the identity of the performer irrelevant. In this way, it also differs from more conventional live music photography as this is not a photograph of a performer, but of the contextual and consequential traces the performance enacts.

This performance is an all-encompassing experience for those watching the event. The use of the mirror creates an interesting blurring of barriers within the space. I have composed the image in such a way that the person standing throws off the traditional hierarchy of a performance, where the performer stands above the crowd looking down. This is to create a commentary on the breaking down of traditional boundaries and dichotomies that exist in these spaces. The girl highlighted in green sits indoors, smoking a cigarette, an act that is disallowed in all commercial venues and in some cases, not even permissible outside commercial venues on the street, due to strict regulations. This act, combined with the painted graffiti walls, reflects a DIY approach and the relaxed values that exist in irregular venues. In my practice, non-human actors (such as the cigarette and marked walls) are all as crucial in tracing the network and the assemblage they form as the main subject. In most cases there is no ‘main subject’, but rather a point of interest within the image that I have intentionally chosen to become the focal point to help inform an understanding of this alternative scene. Although my research aims to capture this alternative scene, it is also an attempt to liberate the documentation of space and its integral role on live performance. In Chapter 8, I continue this analysis of images, the objects within them and their associations to define irregularity.

While I have an intention when framing these images, I believe the image must not spoon feed the viewer information, but rather allude to what else is happening inside and often on the edges or outside of the frame. In Occam’s Razor, Bill Jay (1992) discusses the concept that the photograph is slippery. This notion refers to the viewer’s inability to view and study a photograph, and simply stay there. Jay (1992) discusses that the heart and mind continually slip off, leading your thought process to a range of unique and bizarre locations and associations: ‘provoking mental and emotional meanderings into geography, psychology, politics, biography, sociology, popular culture, art history, science, morality and a myriad of other connected fields until each picture seemed to resonate with the whole of human history’ (p. 10). Often when I frame my images, the actor is frozen, looking off to the side of the image, so that the focus is not on the performer but the setting of the performance and the importance of space and time outside the frame. The photograph encourages the viewer to move around the image and to ‘slip off’ and wonder what else is happening within the space. Although the photograph is a snippet of time, it leads the mind to other places and times, connecting the past with the present and the future, reinforcing the temporality of the image:

Every photograph has temporal dimensions, of course. The time of exposure, historical time, time of development, cropping, the time of reception and circulation—like any other cultural artifact, photographs are caught up in a web of varying temporalities. In that sense, a photograph, like any artifact or cultural document, is never fixed, but made in each viewing circumstance [Drucker, 2010, p.23]

To demonstrate this notion of movement, temporality and slippage, it serves well to take one space and analyse it visually for its representation of ephemerality and the photograph’s ability to straddle the past and present. Midian is a space that embodies temporality in the way it is repurposed and evolving. The interior and decoration differ dramatically from event to event, ensuring that with each visit to the space, the walls speak in another way to those within them. While this ephemerality is implemented throughout the entire space, it is well demonstrated when looking at imagery of the ‘foyer’ area that I have defined as a liminal space. This is used as a chill-out, or a talking space for people to mingle. As these rooms are the first point of interaction from the outside world, they often undergo significant changes in styling and decoration depending on the event. Stevens (2007) discusses these types of in between, liminal spaces: while designed for practical purposes, these spaces can also allow for a variety of playful social behaviours, reflecting their material significance. Figure 35 shows the very first room in Midian that you are ushered into. This is where the host stands, asking for donations and scrutinising the security footage of the space outside. The host ensures that the front door to the venue is firmly shut before allowing you to cross the threshold and open the second door, where you enter into liminal space. The small first room has a draped curtain hanging against the wall, covering something unknown, the counter and dim lighting increases anticipation as you wait to see what the interior will reveal.

In Figure 36, I capture what I first glimpsed from the threshold. Two dismembered and disfigured dummies bathed in two pools of contrasting light, one red, and one green. The curling stitches swirl across the bare chest of the female torso and the lighting creates two very different reactions to these strange actors. In Figure 37, we see the room transformed as I now stand inside the space looking back at the space where the dummies formerly sat. Couches and chairs litter the space and in the five months that have passed since the last gig, we see that the
Figure 35. Open door, 20-5-11, (Photograph taken by Author, 2011).
To aid the sense of slippage, please view left to right.

Figure 37. Green light, 7-10-11, (Photograph taken by Author, 2011).

Figure 36. Dummies 20-5-11, (Photograph taken by Author, 2011).

Figure 38. Armoury, 4-5-12, (Photograph taken by Author, 2012).
dummies have disappeared and the walls have been repainted and redecorated. Remnants of paint dribbled on the floor are evidence of the transformational project that may have recently just occurred. The green light still pointed at this humble liminal area, yet the combination of new actors creates a completely different feel to the space.

In Figure 38, another period of months has passed and we see the space completely transformed again. On the left hand side of the image, familiar black paint marks can be seen on the wall, visible in the previous image, but now accompanied by an addition. Above these paint marks we see hand painted lettering referring to the ‘armoury’. The front room itself is now structurally different and has long benches and tables installed. All of which, during this specific event, is covered in foil. In the FBI radio interview with Michel Freeman (discussed Section 4.2), Luke and Seb (members of Sub Bass Snarl), discuss attending an event in the 1980s where an entire basement on George St., Sydney was covered in foil. This act, a homage on the part of the hosts to the earlier event, connects the space aesthetically to the former rave culture and to its allied ethos.

In Figure 39 we see a front-on shot of the foil covered tables and a plaster head perched upon the bench. Exposed pipes or tubing frame the image, which have also been encased in foil. The space successfully creates an ambience of fun and play, the DIY approach loosely applied, apparent in the details as seen on the edges of the seats and the small rips in the foil, resulting in decorations reminiscent of a school play.

In Figure 40 we see a series of screens displaying 1980s computer games. The screens are installed inside solid, wooden boxes, which were not at all apparent...
in the previous images, an event occurring six months after the above ‘foil’ event. Framed on the left hand corner of the image, we see the remnants of the last event, the foil encasing the now exposed rope in this front room. While there has been an inclusion of computer screens and the foil has mostly disappeared, this piece of remaining foil creates a historic trace to the space’s former uses and throughout this series of images, a remnant of the old seems to always remain, supporting the notion that ‘space is nothing but the inscription of time in the world’ (Kofman & Lebas, 1995, p. 16 cited in Crang, 2001).

This type of liminality is explored visually through the spaces and the photographs, and also through the interweaving notion of the liminal researcher, absorbed in the space but absent from the aesthetic changes. The slipping in and out represents my own experiences and interactions with these spaces at a variety of times. It is only upon reflecting on these images that I am able to make the visual links and trace the residues of foil between the past and present events as analysed through my hermeneutic practice.

These images demonstrate the importance of the researcher’s positioning within space across time:

- Our body and the bodies of others are central to the practical accomplishment of fieldwork. We locate our physical being alongside those of others as we negotiate the spatial context of the field. We concern ourselves with the positioning, visibility and performance of our own embodied self as we undertake participant observation. (Coffey, 1999, p. 59).

Coffey is a sociologist and while her comments about the positioning of self and visibility resonate with my work, it is important to note the preponderance to ‘bodies’ and the human within sociology. While this still applies in my work, this is extended to non-human actors, as previously outlined. This is exemplified in the Midian series showcased above, as it is the objects, as human traces that signify change and time, rather than the human bodies within the spaces. By capturing the utility of ordinary objects like dummies, paint drips and worn chairs, the photograph inscribes the potential of their matter (Hunt, 2014), creating associations and inferring past memories.

Clarke (1997) echoes this notion with his poetic reference to the mind and its wanderings, stating that the ‘mind is a leaky organ: forever escaping its “natural confines” and mingling shamelessly with body and with world’ (p. 53). Marks (2000) expands on this, arguing that vision can also evade its traditional categorisations and manifest, like the mind, as a leaky organ of sorts; therefore, we see with our entire bodies and not just with our eyes (p. 148–149).

Mitchell (2005) has questioned the impact of a more multisensory media culture on the view that western culture is ocularcentric. Ocularcentrism is a ‘perceptual and epistemological bias ranking vision over other senses in Western cultures’ (Watson & Hill, 2012, p. 191). Mitchell (2005) elaborates on the embodiment and multisensory nature of the visual, stating that there is no longer ‘visual media’ as such, that all media are ‘mixed-media’ and therefore they present the viewer with a range of sensory experiences. Michael Taussig (1993) discusses this notion in relation to the term ‘mimesis’. He identifies that when experiencing an image, there can be a sensory, tactile relationship between the viewer and the object, which in this case, is the photograph. Taussig (1993) refers to this as mimetic perception, an active closing of the gap between the viewer and the image. This in turn creates a bodily reaction to the image, evoking the senses and creating a ‘visceral experience’ (Rutherford, 2003, p. 137). This concept of mimetic perception identifies with Merleau-Ponty’s explanation of the seer; ‘[I]mmersed in the visible by his body the seer does not appropriate what he sees, he merely approaches it by looking, he opens himself to the world’ (cited in Ingold, 2000, p. 64). These ideas of embodiment stray from the traditional understanding of ocularcentrism towards a wider engagement with the sensorium. Massumi (1996) also discusses this idea in relation to affect, indicating that there are two different ways affect can be explored: through rupture, explained as a sudden explosion or shock; and through what we have come to know as embodied spectatorship. This immersion in an alternative world of experience or understanding is a core aim of this research, as these hidden spaces that are so integral to the dynamics of a cultural and global city are fleeting, disappearing. The use of the photographic medium to capture this is just as integral as the subject matter itself:

‘[T]he camera has formed a conduit enabling absence to touch present observers, like delayed rays of light arriving from stars already long vanished. This enigmatic experience, in which the immediacy of the absent invades the security of the present, is central to the camera’s ambivalent relation to figuring the past. (McQuire, 1998, p. 109)

This relationship between present and past is highlighted in the relationships that exist between ‘when’ the image is taken and ‘what’ the present version of the space has become. The transient nature of these spaces means that the spaces, performances and experiences had within the walls of each venue may
never happen again. My studies provide evidence that if there is to be another event within the space, it will never be the same as the one before it. These places do not become stale and sanctioned, intentionally ‘refreshed’ to offer varied experience. While not expanded upon in detail here (but discussed in Chapter 6), it is important to also remember that the past and present relationship is linked not only through the space, but also through the agency of the images’ ability to continue as an actant after the event.

### 7.2.3 Distance does wonders

As a photographer, I do not consciously interfere with the scene at hand. I do not manipulate, direct or move subjects/actors to aid the image. I do, however, carefully consider framing, lighting and choice of subjects when taking an image. I move myself around within the space (when possible) as opposed to moving actors to create a false or ‘set up’ moment. When in these spaces, I maintain unobtrusiveness by creating a physical distance between the subject and myself. Intrusive photography, where the photographer is too close to the performer or individuals being photographed, changes the dynamic of the scene they are about to capture, making people feel uncomfortable and act differently:

> Between photographer and subject, there has to be distance. The camera doesn’t rape, or even possess, though it may presume, intrude, trespass, distort, exploit, and, at the farthest reach of metaphor, assassinate - all activities that, unlike the sexual push and shove, can be conducted from a distance, and with some detachment. (Sontag, 1977, p. 13).

In the early days of photographing these spaces, it became a ritual, to enter the space and stand at the back, behind a group of people, in a dark corner. This is materialised through my photographs. Darkness at this point was my friend. An incredibly lit venue instilled fear and doubt in me. I often suffered from ‘imposter syndrome’; who was I to be capturing the amazing events happening at these places and what if someone asked me about it? Slowly, as time progressed, I relaxed, I came out from the dark and started to become more embedded in the space. That said, the times when I was covered in the sweat of the crowd beside me and left with the smell of others on my skin was an important time within my research, it was the slow immersion of being within these spaces that has effected the documentation process ever since. This complete immersion is demonstrated in Figure 41. Here, I use the crowd as a purposeful buffer and framing tool for

![Figure 41. Beard face. (Photograph taken by Author, 2011).](image)

![Figure 42. Camera high. (Photograph taken by Author, 2011).](image)
the face of a bearded male, intently staring at the band in front. This particular gig was in a very small room, the temperature was hot, and it was almost hard to breathe, like stepping into a car that has been left in the sun all day. Due to my being quite short, the view of the performers was almost entirely blocked out. With no intention or way to push to the front, I experienced the performance in glimpses and sounds and the best way for me to be subjected to the act in its entirety was through the faces of those who could see, those taller than me, those with a better vantage point. Enjoyment and concentration etched on their faces, beers poised at their lips, appreciation shared between people discussing a song or experiencing a moment.

As you can see in Figure 42, another photographer is experiencing a similar issue and is raising their camera in the air as an attempt to capture a more holistic view of the band and audience. Not only does this cause increased visibility and attention to the photographer, but it is also not a practice I would generally engage in, based on years of experience photographing bands. However, in the spirit of trying new things, I raised the camera and took a picture, the image was blurry, but more than that, the disconnect that existed between myself and the image was immeasurable. It was as though I was looking at an image someone else had taken, due to the fact that my eye had not been pressed to the viewfinder and I had not consciously framed and deliberated over the actors captured. While this was an option for capturing the space, it was at this point that I really understood how vital my experience of the space was to the documentation. If I felt cramped to the point of claustrophobia inside a space, as I did in these previous images, then that needs to be translated to the viewer. This project, as previously expressed, is not about the performer on stage and capturing the best angle of the lead singer, it is about contextualising a phenomenological understanding of space and place as explored experientially through the lens of my camera. While the heat in this space was unbearable, the vibe was electric and it was from here that I took comfort in the confines of other bodies around me. When a space was not necessarily full or the audience were sitting (this is often due to the kind of performance that requires attentive and quiet audiences) I too would sit, (as seen in Figure 43), and shoot through the people watching, or shoot from the perspective of others in the room, wanting to capture what it was that they were experiencing, as opposed to a superficial view. Engaging in these practices began to solidify my place as an empathetic insider.
Due to the sensitive approach I apply to my photographic practice within spaces, I marvel at the visibility of other photographers when attending events. In Figure 44, I have captured a photographer taking a photograph. Using her flash, the space becomes completely illuminated: the quality of the light and the presentation of the space is completely affected. The ambient tones and natural lighting are bleached with the intrusion of the white light. The photographer crouches in the corner of the room, bouncing the light off the ceiling to make a more natural and what appears a less flash-infused photograph. This particular moment in time exposes the nature of this type of intrusive photography and its predilection to the end product more so than the practice. This change in the aesthetic environment reinforces why I do not use any light altering techniques within my work.

This chapter has explained my aesthetic and ethical stance as a practitioner-researcher. Drawing on examples of both my own and others’ photographic work, I have further informed the reader about the phenomenological perspective of the thesis and my accompanying visual work.
CHAPTER 8

THE SENSORY FOLD
The following two Chapters 8 and 9, serve to address my core research aims, which question the ways in which the fluid, adaptable, creative and alternative dimensions of Sydney’s irregular performance spaces are revealed and explored through my phenomenological investigation.

This chapter returns to my ‘definition’ of irregular space to offer visual evidence of my argument. For the most part, the discovery has been interpreted phenomenologically and is presented as a type of unfolding for the reader. While photographing these spaces, my definition of irregularity has slowly taken shape; it has been defined and subsequently redefined as a part of my hermeneutic process, aligning with my methodological approach (which infers gathering the parts to understand the whole). Within this chapter I use key images that speak of the definitive points of irregularity. Figure 45 displays a mind map that constituted an early brainstorm about the ways in which I recognise and define irregularity. This was developed further, in conjunction with my images and practice, which bring to life the ideas, anecdotes and ethos I have discussed throughout the thesis that are synonymous with irregular spaces.

As discussed in the Introduction of the thesis, my definition of irregular space was informed by academic work that delineates and/or defines spaces of alternative and temporal cultures (Bey, 2007; Chatterton & Hollands, 2003) or the emergent and illusive nature of physical and ideological spaces/places (Soja, 1996; Vanclay et al., 2008). As outlined in Chapter 2, my irregular space definitions were developed through my practice-orientated process, my physical immersion inside these spaces and also through the continual interpretation of my images. Due to the elusive nature of these spaces and their inherent immanence, it should be understood that the ‘definition’ I offered in the Introduction is not a precise checklist, it is instead posed as a way to highlight irregular traits and points of different within and around the spaces that separates them from mainstream or regulated performance spaces. In Chapter 6, I discussed the slippage that exists between images, the tendency for ideas and imaginings to bleed over into other images. This is also mimicked in the slippage between spaces. Not all spaces fit the criteria I offered in their entirety. The list is merely a way to navigate disparate, heterogeneous elements into a concise whole as a result of my observations and phenomenological photographic practice.

The visual journey in this chapter begins with the outside/exterior of venues and captures these spaces, cloaked in the dark of night. By beginning with darkness, I emphasise my role as the observer at the start of this project, inaugurated in darkness, in both understanding and participation. Introducing images of the outsides of spaces and their context within the night time city is a strategic attempt to place the viewer in external space, before revealing the interiors, replicating my initial journey into and through spaces. Due to this expression of a journey, the tense and pace within this chapter shifts as I attempt to reveal the spaces in real time as a type of unfolding. In doing this, the chapter takes on a type of linearity, yet it gives expression to a series of inter-relationships of time and space that confound simple linear organisation.

In disclosing irregularity, networks of association begin to form. In this chapter, I acknowledge the relationships between actors that exist within individual images. This analysis of singular images represents how an image is normally viewed, in isolation—as a single entity, a form of representational fixity. This becomes the basis for the further analysis and networking enacted in Chapter 9, where images begin to be analysed in contingency with those around them. In this chapter, I reflect on an image, referring to its visuality. I undertake a visual analysis, which refers to the pictorial properties of the image, such as the composition, the colours or the lighting. However, at times the network expands to include my own personal account or narrative of taking the photograph and the experiential component that has formed as a result of the phenomenological act of capturing the image. My analysis in this chapter slips between the past (the moment of capture), the present (the viewing of the image) and the future (what the image conveys or projects). These meanings are linked to my understandings of what irregular space is (or is not) and how these moments and the consequential images begun to define my understanding of space and place on a deeper level, a process that is continually explored in Chapter 9.

![Figure 45. Irregular mind map. (Created by Author, 2010).](image)
Figure 46. Pactech, (Photograph taken by Author, 2013).
8.1 A Space that has a Relationship with the Night and Darkness and 'Sleeps' or has Another Role During the Day.

As previously outlined, the city’s night plays an integral role in the definition and understanding of these spaces. The fact that these spaces come alive in the night designates the night itself as a kind of actant in the irregular space network:

At the approach of darkness something strange and extraordinary happens to a city, which cannot be exhaustively explained by such cursory formulations about aesthetic appearance. Something becomes apparent which I dare to call the 'mythical quality' of the city. (Kunert, 1986, p. 9)

The photographs aim to capture the mythical qualities associated with irregular spaces, revealing things, which cannot exist in the written word alone.

This relationship with the night is important to note, as these irregular spaces function under a blanket of darkness, both real and metaphorical. This connects the notion of immanence surrounding these spaces and highlights the ways in which they emerge from darkness. As we can see in Figure 46, the streetlight barely illuminates the door of this irregular space. The lock-out bars seem well placed to protect the PACTECH products, listed as the relevant business on the panel above the door. This mismatch of exterior signage to interior use is a key indicator of irregularity. Irregular spaces feel no need to remove or discard misleading signage; they instead adopt this as a type of visual disguise. The non-descript graffiti tags that haphazardly adorn the bricks are a common, albeit discrete, indicator of the irregularity of a space. In this image, the empty, wet streets are free of people, and from the outside there is no way of knowing that behind the doors of number 8, over two hundred people are hidden in the internal space. They adhere only to the unspoken rule, to come and go quickly and quietly.

The geographical location of these spaces is also important when analysing how they interact with the external city. The majority of spaces have no active night time neighbours. Adjacent warehouses sit empty, with no one to complain about the range of eclectic sounds pouring from the space. However, next to Midian, a bread factory that operates through the night highlights an arbitrary juxtaposition. In Figure 47, on the left hand side of the image, you can see the interior bright white light of the bread factory. Workers prop their boots up against bread cartoons and lean against the building, smoking cigarettes, staring accusatorily as you slink inside this discreet venue. This juxtaposition encapsulates the vast beauty
of circumstance and utility within the night time city. Shift workers labour away in factories while their enigmatic neighbours engage in sex parties, bondage nights and punk rock shows, depending on the agenda for that particular evening. In Figure 48, we see the night time bread factory is now closed. The white hum of light on the left hand side of the building has disappeared; the street is empty and the workers’ cars have left. In some ways, this darkness is comforting, shrouding me in shadow as I approach a venue, no one to see if I accidently knock on the wrong door and no prying eyes staring questioningly as I document the entry to the space. At the beginning of my studies, the darkness was terrifying as it represented the unknown; this changed as I gradually found comfort in darkness, as I used and borrowed from its powers of concealment.

8.2 A Space That Operates Under a Blanket of ‘Invisibility’ and Discretion. A Tenuous Relationship with Exposure, These Spaces Teeter on the Danger of Recognition and the Obverse Relationship to Promotion

Most irregular spaces require individuals attending an event to stay in doors and out of sight, keeping people off the street to avoid drawing any unwanted attention to the space. Invisibility is a necessity. In Latour and Hermant’s Paris: Invisible City (2006), the authors discuss the way real cities have a lot in common with Italo Calvino’s invisible cities (p. 2). When discussing the fictional city Marozia, Calvino (1972) states ‘If you move along the city’s walls, when you least expect it, you see a crack open and a different city appear. Then an instant later, it has already vanished’ (p. 155). This aptly represents the opening and closing of these spaces and their elusive visibility to those on the outside.

A code of silence and a compliance with this notion of invisibility is solicited by way of instructions disseminated to individual actors. This is exemplified in Figure 49; the handwritten and cursive nature of the signs makes the directives relatable and commonplace. The tone is non-authoritarian and speaks to the binding nature of the relationship established between those attending the event and those organising it. This signage is stuck to the back of the door that leads into and out of the space. This placement reinforces that the door stays firmly closed throughout the event, unless punters are slipping in or out. The closed door and the accompanying sign become a visual reminder for guests when exiting the space to remain quiet and as invisible as possible.
While the majority of irregular spaces abide by this practice of discretion, there are events I have attended where actors have not abided by these codes. As we can see in Figure 50, a group of people are congregating outside the space. This event was a dance party event run by an exterior company that prides themselves on the temporary use of spaces in Sydney, stating on their website ‘The evolution of PL has seen it become infamous for uncovering undiscovered and forgotten private spaces’ (pl.net.au, n.d.). On this evening, they were responsible for unveiling a new space, Vogue Studios. This space is not a residence, which means there is no particular ‘host’ affiliated with the space. When punters are aware of this, there is a change in behaviour towards the space itself, as it becomes more of a disposable entity, unlikely to hold events again. On the right hand side of the image, a green light is captured, silhouetting actors within the space. This glowing beacon is highly visible from the street and breaks the pre-established boundary that keeps people hidden. On the left hand side of the image, two groups of punters are seated on the ground, smoking cigarettes, illuminated by the white floodlight revealing the space’s identity. They are visible from the street, yet stick close to the walls huddling in the shadows. The floodlight is another feature not usually found outside irregular spaces. Over time, these spaces can transform into more lasting irregular spaces and practices of invisibility are further adhered to; at other times, the space disappears after having played a fleeting yet influential role in the irregular space network. The more a space has to lose (the more established the space is due to time spent on its creation), the more invisible and protected it becomes.

8.3 A Taken-Over or Claimed Venue Space that is not Native to Performance

For Heidegger the Raum of dwelling meant far more than an indoor space. It is, as he put it, a clearing for life that makes possible such activities as building and cultivation, making things and growing things. (Heidegger, 1971, cited in Ingold, 2008 p. 1797)

Due to these being claimed and transformed spaces, more often than not, they do not have a traditional stage/performance area. The space might serve multiple functions and the room that houses performances during the night may be a lounge room or artist’s studio during the day. Due to the fluid and temporal nature of the spaces themselves, at times a stage or elevation is bought into the space and at other times, the performers are immersed within the crowd, or a rug is positioned as a type of separation of space.

To understand how noise is expelled and received within these spaces, and the ways in which it can transform a space, it is worthwhile to study the advent of one particular performance group the Splinter Orchestra, who has performed across a number of these irregular spaces. The Orchestra is one of the few groups of its kind in Australia. This group formed in 2002 and its twenty-plus members make up a large-scale electro-acoustic improvising ensemble. Despite the Orchestra’s large numbers there is no leader or conductor, and their sound creates a stark minimalist feeling (http://thenownow.net/splinter-orchestra/).

The Splinter Orchestra was born from the previously mentioned collective, the NOW now (thenownow.net/splinter-orchestra). The experimental disposition of the group’s music aligns with the nature of irregular spaces as they reject hierarchy and traditional musical structures; instead, the musicians embrace autonomy and self-direction. Every set of the Splinter Orchestra is uniquely different (as there are no prescribed songs/notes/sound). However, the venue itself and the actors within it play a huge part in the way that the sound is delivered. Different venues foster different sounds and experiences, this is based on the established brand of the space, the visual treatment of the space and the actors inside the space.

The very first time I saw this collective perform was at Serial Space, 2011 depicted in Figure 51. Certain individuals sit out of view, leaning against concrete pylons, their entire identity hidden from the audience. The performers sit on the floor or on a collection of mismatched chairs. Their faces are mostly shrouded in darkness or turned downwards, except for those faces lit up by the glow of their computer screens as they use digital technology to create sounds. While there is autonomy between the performers, there are certain individuals who stand out among the group. This may be due to their unique instrument or perhaps the way they compose themselves; for example, the actor playing the alto saxophone.33 As you can see in Figures 52, 53 and 54, there is a range of shots of this same performer across different venues and events; there are varied levels of proximity to the performer dependent on where he [or I] are positioned within the room. It is important to note that two years had passed between the first time I experienced this group and the second. When I returned to analyse my photos between the two

33 Playing a wind instrument with a balloon is an example of what is called ‘extended techniques’.
Figure 51. Obstructed view, 7-7-2011 (Photograph taken by Author, 2011).
To aid the sense of slippage, please view left to right.

Figure 52. Player 1, 7-7-11 (Photograph taken by Author, 2011).

Figure 53. Player 2, 13-1-13 (Photograph taken by Author, 2013).

Figure 54. Player 3, 27-6-13 (Photograph taken by Author, 2013).
events, I found that the same individual was the main focal point within both sets of images, providing a constant across space and time.

When this collective later performed at the space Exit, the ratio of performers to punters was almost even. People experiencing the performance lie and sit, scattered on the floor, as seen in Figure 55. It takes me about ten minutes to realise the man beside me has been slowly building up noise with some scattered implements on the floor in front of him. The ambiguity of who is a performer and who is an attendee creates an atmosphere of excitement, but also uncertainty. A small child wanders around the venue, touching instruments and giggling, adding to an increasing awareness that everything is an instrument and that the focus is on making sounds. Some confident audience members move around the room while the performance is playing out, making others aware that different corners lend themselves to different instruments and acoustics. When there is a lull in the music, the foil and tape stuck to the window (as seen in Figure 56) blows in the wind, crackling like distortion. This emphasises that the space itself, with its high ceiling and concrete walls, is an active member in the creation of the sounds the audience is experiencing. Byrne, a member of the Splinter Orchestra collective, writes about the affinity between the warehouse space and the production of sound:

Figure 55. Floor, (Photograph taken by Author, 2013).

Figure 56. Window, (Photograph taken by Author, 2013).

Figure 57. Frame (Photograph taken by Author, 2013).
The warehouse space’s only codification is as a space of production, as a space of potential and so the constructed space of the warehouse performance mirrors the ephemeral nature of sound itself, a fleeting glimpse into the impossible. (Byrne, 2005, p. 3)

The space captured in Figure 57 fosters many possibilities. The main room spills into a front room via a curtain that creates the divide. While photographing this experience, I wandered into the back room, watching through the cut-out hole in the wall. In my work, there is a pattern of utilising a pre-existing frame with a space, to box in a combination of actors. It creates a type of reframing, or a more directional approach for the viewer. In this instance, I stood back, staring into a room where the audience and performers seemed to spiral out to the edges of the space, a strange circle of interaction that occurred organically. One actor within the orchestra recedes into this front room where I was standing, continuing to make noise with his instrument in a non-traditional way. The already chaotic and disorienting sounds within the space are exemplified by the confusion of the sounds entering the space through the draped curtain and open window frame.

In Serial Space and Exit (Figures 51–57), the white, blank walls seemed to be a fitting canvas for this experimental collective to paint with sound. In other spaces, the elements of home impede on the space, changing the experience of performance and immersion. Spaces that are also filled with the objects of a home are more cluttered, busier and incite a different vibe than the white walled concrete spaces.

I have discussed earlier that a number of irregular spaces are also homes. The visual sediments that exist within the spaces are pervasive like a tea cup or clothing. For instance, in Figure 58, we see the juxtaposition of a beer bottle and a cup of tea, teabag hanging from its edge. This image encapsulates the diversity and dualities found in irregular space. This image signifies what irregular space represents in a social sense, capturing the harmonious environment that exists as a party/event venue (through the beer bottle), but also as a respected space and residence [evidenced through the representations of the tea cup and tea bag], symbolising home in the way that a plastic or paper cup does not.

There are a variety of ways that these spaces function as houses. Some have a large downstairs area with bedrooms above. In other spaces, the bedrooms are directly off the main space and by simply turning a doorknob you might enter directly into someone’s personal world. I like to focus on the doors and divides that exist within and partition the space. In Figure 59, I have turned my back to the performance/stage area and focus directly on the bedroom door behind me. A collared shirt, that looks particularly like a children’s school uniform, hangs from a coat hanger beside the door. This established space holds regular and frequent events: the act of allowing punters into their home has now become normal and traces of the hosts day-to-day engagements are found scattered throughout the space. To the right of the door, a large stack of wood and materials resides, indicating a construction job in progress. The door itself is red and an ‘Angels Bar’ sign hangs askew upon it. The suggestive narrative I draw from the associations of objects leave me pondering the unknown actors behind this door. Walter Benjamin (2006) discusses the notion of enigma in relation to narrative, stating ‘We simultaneously perceive all the events that might conceivably take place here. The room winks at us: what do you think might have happened here?’ (p. 28).

These assemblages hint at ideas and becomings, leaving the reader to suppose and imagine. In Figure 60 we see a door; spatially this sits to the right of the fox in Figure 59. This door is void of a handle and the trace of a lock that has been removed sits in the place of the handle. Scratched in to the same red paint, is a love heart that states ‘Till Def do us part’. This, scrawl, along with the stickers and surrounding graphics, combine, alluding to a different personality from that we would associate with the previous door. The third door within the space, sitting

![Figure 58. Cuppa. (Photograph taken by Author, 2012).](image-url)
Figure 59. Angels bar, (Photograph taken by Author, 2013).

Figure 60. Till def do us part, (Photograph taken by Author, 2013).

Figure 61. Watered down, (Photograph taken by Author, 2013).

Figure 62. Bath time, (Photograph taken by Author, 2013).
to the right of these two closed doors is wide open, as shown in Figure 61, quite an unusual occurrence at one of these spaces. Inside we see a bundle of clothes, bags of things, and the neck of a guitar. Interestingly, the details about the characters that reside behind these doors, in this instance, are clearer from closed doors and their traces, than by access to the room itself.

The Hutch is a residence—the evidence is pervasive and exemplified in Figure 62, where towels hang on the wall outside the bathroom, dangling beside a wall plastered with sexual imagery. I feel confronted by the intimacy of the two actors inferred by their towels and marvel at the nature of irregular space where the private becomes public. The people within these spaces who live, work, and organise these events from this space manage a variety of social rhythms. There is a fragmentation of time as the hosts juggle private lives with the exposure of their home and lived experiences in the form of social gatherings. (Crang, 2001, p. 191).

8.4 A Venue Run by Hosts Whose Sole Purpose is not for Commercial Gain

‘Money is a lie – this adventure must be feasible without it – booty and pillage must be spent before it turns back to dust’ (Bey, 2007, p. 29).

As previously outlined in various ways throughout the thesis, these spaces function as not-for-profit enterprises. While some events charge for entry, the variations in prices are generally on the low end of the scale. In Figure 63, we see a hand written sign that asks for donations. The sign itself seems to be written on the backside of a previous sign and black gaffa tape sticks the sign to the wall. Instantly, it becomes obvious that the sign is temporary and that the exchange of money for services/goods does not hold a place of importance in the space. The hand written scrawl seems rushed, the top line appears to have been written prior in pencil or pen and as an after thought; it has been traced over in blue texta, an arrow and ‘thanks’ added to the sheet. Despite this donation area being available, looking further in to the space, the room is filled to the brim with people, pushing out towards the entryway (where I am standing to take the photograph). Instead of the sign pointing towards a bucket or collection box, it points directly to the back of a person. By chance, the punter wears a jumper, which depicts a dinosaur towering above an illustrated city; serendipitously another interesting network of association is created between the signage and the print on the jumper.

This DIY approach to signage is common in irregular spaces, as previously mentioned in regards to keeping punters off the street; the hand-rendered sign is suggestive, without ordering the individuals inside the space. At regulated, commercial venues, a large source of income for the venue operators is through alcohol or food sales. At irregular spaces those attending an event often bring their own alcohol. Time spent in these spaces revealed bespoke bars, that is, tables or kitchen counters functioning as a site to share, exchange, and/or purchase alcohol. Some spaces have ‘proper’ or more official bars that appear similar to those in commercial space. In Figure 64 we see a set up that is typical of irregular space. A ripped piece of cardboard pokes out from underneath a large cooking pot that is filled with mulled wine. Punters are invited to pour themselves a cup and make a donation. The bottom of the sign asks for the cups to be returned, this is due to the hosts using cups from their kitchen cupboards. The self-serve nature of the drink, and the fact that it is a warm winter beverage further conveys the sense of home, as discussed above.

Next to this, among a clutter of household items, vegetable greens and discarded beer bottles sits a top hat [as seen in Figure 65]. On the left hand side of the image, out of focus we see the handle of a red kettle, behind this a hand
written sign pops out of the black top hat. Upon this is ‘Put some bling-bling in thha thing-thing!’; again, we see a similar colloquial dialogue being drawn upon between punter and host where money is being referred to as ‘bling’—a slightly embarrassing commodity. The placement of the hat is separate to the actual alcohol and quite frankly, could be missed on the table full of objects and clutter. For me, this emphasises a relaxed approach to monetary exchange. Not only was this specific event free, if a punter was so inclined, they could wrangle an entirely free evening out of this event, as no one policed the donations or consumption to profit from alcohol sales.

This lack of policing donations is even more evident in Figure 66. In this image, no sign asking for donations or money is in view. The table is covered in red felt and upon it we see a series of items, pertaining to a house party. Two boxes of ‘goon’ sit on the barely lit table. Cups are stacked on the table behind it and empty beer bottles indicate that the party is underway. The real focus of the image

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34 ‘Bling-Bling—flashy jewelry worn especially as an indication of wealth; broadly: expensive and ostentatious possessions’ (Webster dictionary).

35 ‘Goon—cheap wine drunk out of a cask/box, generally accompanied by a low price tag.’
is on the small music case on the table. The hosts have opened this, relying on the familiarity of those in the space to make a donation if taking a drink. The empty music case is used by buskers the world over and seems fitting here, as audience members are invited to choose whether or not they think the experience is worth paying for. As you can see inside the case, coins and notes appear, reinforcing the relationship between punter and host, and the mutual respect and understanding associated with the conventions of the space.

8.5 A Space that Deals with Political, Experimental and Alternative Performance Subject Matter that Encapsulates ‘Play’ and/or ‘Resistance’;

‘There is a politics of space because space is political’ (Lefebvre, 1972, p. 59).

Thus far, the thesis has outlined the type of acts and performances that occur within the spaces. However, it is through viewing the images that the reader will get a true sense of the diverse sounds and sights happening within irregular spaces, and the interplay between the political, the playful and the strange.

Figure 67 depicts the back of a group of young adults, who gather and sit in quiet awe as the performer plays his traditional Turkish bagpipe. Traditionally, bagpipes are the belly or insides of an animal; in this instance, the entire animal is still intact. The performer clutches the instrument that is still adorned with its horns and fur. From the goat’s mouth a flute-like piece protrudes, creating a captivating relationship with the haunting tune. The juxtaposition of elements surrounding the performer adds to the surreal nature of the performance and the audience sit motionless. Three dangling mirror balls and an ornamental tree frame the performer; a strange clash of new and old worlds of sound frame the performer.

The irregular space depicted in Figure 68 invites playful engagement. Located at the back of the main space, this space has a skate ramp. As captured in the image, the wall behind the skate ramp is covered in mattresses. On the right hand side of the ramp, a gaping hole between the mattresses exposes a piece of

\[36\] As discussed in the Introduction, this definition was adapted from Chatterton and Hollands, (2003).
Figure 69. Pina colada. (Photograph taken by Author, 2013).
This graffiti depicts sharp teeth, ironically visible in the exposed wall, free of any mattress protection. From the open mouth, fish bones spew out, positioned as the main focus above the mattresses. On the left hand side of the ramp, ‘Skate at your own (ghetto) risk’ is scrawled in faded print. An attempt at Occupational Health & Safety (OH&S), yet it draws on the colloquial and quirky humour also used on other hand written directives, found within these spaces. The skate ramp is not utilised at every event and is dependent on the punters attending a specific event, dictated by the music.

Irregular spaces invite events of all kinds of topical and diverse subject matter. In 2013, a Marrickville based space held a Science Party. At the entryway to the main space, a bike-powered pina colada machine is positioned, as seen in Figure 69. Individuals jump on the bike and pedal to power a blender that creates them a delicious and reasonably priced five-dollar pina colada cocktail. Presumably, the money goes to the collective responsible for its creation, who are committed to renewable energy resources. The image captures the scene free of human actors, which allows the viewer to move around the image, considering the heterogeneous elements and their significance. The bike sits jutted against a corrugated iron wall, solidifying its lack of mobility. On the right of this wall, another set of fish bones is illustrated, a mark the venue must associate with as part of its brand. Graffiti and haphazard characters appear on the esky, the counter (which is a makeshift bar), the floor and the bin. Hand signage of various sizes adorns the walls and on the counter a small sign rests above a bowl, stating ‘change our survival’. This request for donation activates the politics of irregular spaces that survive without secure monetary or exterior support.

Figure 70 was also captured at the Science Party. Minutes before, punters crowded in to watch informal demonstrations at the tables. This image was taken after the first of several science experiments in the act. After the ‘scientist’ was done, the band began to play and the crowd dispersed to watch the performance. The table remained littered with a dangerous mix of objects: plastic cups brimming with various explosive and smoking liquids, fruit, beer bottles (in the process of being drunk) and sound equipment. Punters who did not stay to watch the band filtered into the front, liminal space. People sat on the concrete, conducting DIY experiments, as seen in Figure 71. This sense of play, engagement and interaction, pervaded by risk, was inspiring and exhilarating: at times, it made me a little nervous. While I speak of the liminal space as an entry point, it is also important to note its role as an exit point. This is why the term ‘liminality’ most accurately describes these spaces; the points of entry and exit to the venue or to a specific
experience within the venue is variously determined by the host, performer or punter.

In Figure 72, I have captured the screen of a film night showcasing a documentary that highlights the importance of music within the community. While the rest of the room is shrouded in darkness, the room was filled with the cheers of the crowd who passionately support the plight of live music depicted by the film. A real sense of community engagement with a common cause was felt within the space. This connects these spaces to the broader sociopolitical context previously outlined, regarding the loss of music spaces within Sydney.

An attempt to capture the emotive quality of sound is a reoccurring aim of my photography. In Figure 73, text is utilised to enhance the musical score played by the performer. Haunting tunes transfixed the room of punters. In this image, the space is much darker than usual; this aids the audiovisual presentation, but it also sets the sombre scene created by the music. The music paired with words created an emotional and moving performance and the stage became a perfect set for this exposition of injustice (evidenced in the words on screen).

8.6 A Space that Operates in Some Sense on a Basis of Illegality, Whether it be Through not Acquiring Relevant Licenses, Allowing Punters to Bring Their Own Alcohol or not Conforming to Fire Safety and Operational Health and Safety Regulations

In previous chapters, reference has been made to the contentious issues surrounding licensing and operational requirements for venues and the role the inability to meet these can play in the demise of an irregular space. This section explores some of the factors seen as controversial within these spaces, and highlights not only the alternative approach to meeting legalities, but also the ways in which the relaxed approach inside these spaces in part defines their irregularity.

At most of these irregular spaces, alcohol is present, though there seems always to be a level of decorum in regards to consumption. In Figure 74, a group of individuals have left their cask of goon, plastic cups and beer bottles among the cushions to watch a key song of the set happening on the other side of the divide. The red sign hanging from the roof states, ‘stop and refresh’; beneath this, the graffiti on the wall portrays a face that is framed by two banners. On either side of
Figure 74. Stop and refresh. (Photograph taken by Author, 2011).
these banners sit inkwells, liquid pours from these down towards the cushioned area. The image has been framed so that the liquid on the right appears to be pouring directly into the light, which functions as a type of vessel. The lines on the light shade aid in creating a feeling of the liquid dribbling down the light towards the ground. This reinforces the link between these elements, both conceptually and visually.

Alongside drinking, the presence of people smoking inside these spaces is another trait that defines the space’s irregularity, as it is no longer legal to smoke inside any licensed venue or commercial club. In Figure 75 a punter is captured drawing on a cigarette. The actor leans back comfortably against a wall and a projection of light falls upon her face, clearly displaying her within the venue. This exposure of light upon the actor highlights the normality and acceptance of this act. Visually, I framed the image so that the human actor is contrasted with the dancing row of red lights, out of focus on the right hand side of the image. When capturing the photograph, a strong link between the glowing ember of the cigarette butt and the lights framing the stage occurred. In a number of my photographs, there is a focus on this glowing light of a cigarette in a dimly lit space. By framing these actors, I attempt to draw out this notion using visual motifs. The naked flame, in the form of cigarettes, lighters, candles and other smoked substances, all form part of the irregular landscape and contribute to the lighting and smells within the spaces.

Figure 76 was taken at an event at Serial Space entitled ‘Robotwars’. The audience surge forward towards a glass tank that displays makeshift robots fighting each other, the crowd cheer on their favourite robot while the inventor’s faces are etched in concentration. The event itself was family-friendly and children stood close to the glass, a feeling of safety and security filled the space. At this event the red and white plastic tape captured in Figure 77 separates the audience. Within irregular spaces, security and safety measures are placed, but in an ad-hoc way. It is hard to say definitively if these are sufficient, but it is clear the hosts take utmost responsibility for those inside their spaces. This image captures the tape knotted to the back of a wooden chair. A bucket sits on the chair, perhaps filled with something to weigh it down. Out of focus on the chair sits a red bag that I assume contains a fire blanket; under the table the outline of what appears to be another fire extinguisher can be seen. When photographing this space in 2012, I was not actively looking for signs of security or safety, but upon returning to my images, I felt drawn again to the haphazard and personalised nature of the safety approach and felt touched by the ripped ends of the tape and the hand-woven knots. The red
Figure 77. Red and white. (Photograph taken by Author, 2011).
within the image, which is normally quite affronting and symbolises danger, seems somehow warm and quaint, not threatening and authoritarian. This photograph reinforces for me the responsibility that these venues take towards the safety of their punters and reflects the mutual respect to the space that is then returned.

In this chapter, a series of images have been used to demonstrate my discovery of and journey into irregular spaces. For the most part, the discovery has been interpreted phenomenologically and is presented as a type of unfolding for the reader. These images are grouped under categories that define irregular space, to demonstrate how the photographic practice generated a clear sense of the actors of irregularity. In doing this, it was shown that one image could represent more than just one element of irregularity. All the images within this study (and the accompanying book) contribute to an understanding of irregularity in one or more ways. This chapter has drawn out the objects, qualities and notable elements in these images, while demonstrating the slippery edges between image, definition and experience. To demonstrate the transferrable qualities of these images, take Figure 68 as an example: the skate ramp. This image represents a sense of play, yet it shows the ways the physical space has been adapted and changed, and it also shows an irregular approach to OH&S. I invite the viewer to continue to draw together different elements of irregularity found within the collection of images.
CHAPTER 9

DEMONSTRATING NETWORKS AND CONNECTIONS
In Chapter 8, I addressed the fact that both Chapters 8 and 9 explore what can be revealed about irregular spaces through a phenomenological investigation. Chapter 9 continues to look at my work phenomenologically, but also asks how can this investigation contribute to an understanding of both the networks these spaces form and how they inhabit the wider city networks that sustain, nurture but also potentially threaten them?

Chapter 8 defined irregular space, while this chapter first traces connections and networks within the space, exploring how these connections contribute to a sense of place. Secondly, it discusses how these networks come together to form larger assemblages that define the spaces further. Assemblages are enacted through the use of ANT, which creates networks across space and time.

Within my work, I have used ANT to identify links and networks that are activated on a micro and macro scale: from image to image, between image and viewer, between the camera and myself, between actors within the image, between actors and space and between one space and another. After doing this, the work felt constrained, I was not enacting larger networks across multiple spaces that ANT allows in its methodological approach. I wanted to look at the longer networks explored across spaces, and the assemblages they form, as opposed to isolated networks.

To address this, the chapter begins by establishing string lines to identify links and networks, and then moves on to analyse their connectivity. The chapter builds towards my visual assemblages that consider connectivity on a larger scale across multiple spaces. A collection of photographs are physically grouped together to create visual assemblages that give a sense of association, permanency and continuity to the ephemeral, while providing a bottom-up ontological lens for understanding social complexity (DeLanda, 2006). The way in which I enact these connections by drawing string lines is informed by Italo Calvino’s account of the fictional city ‘Ersilia’. This excerpt is vital to understand these networks. In my case, the photographs and the associations they form still remain even after the space (or moment) is gone. There is also a hermeneutic tie to the strings and threads that connect the subcultures of the past to the present:

In Ersilia, to establish the relationships that sustain the city’s life, the inhabitants stretch strings from the corners of the houses, white or black or grey or black-and-white according to whether they mark a relationship of blood, of trade, authority, agency. When the strings become so numerous that you can no longer pass among them, the inhabitants leave: the houses are dismantled; only the strings and their supports remain.

From a mountainside, camping with their household goods, Ersilia’s refugees look at the labyrinth of taut strings and poles that rise in the plain. That is the city of Ersilia still, and they are nothing. They rebuild Ersilia elsewhere. They weave a similar pattern of strings, which they would like to be more complex and at the same time more regular than the other. Then they abandon it and take themselves and their houses still farther away. Thus, when travelling in the territory of Ersilia, you come upon the ruins of the abandoned cities without the walls, which do not last, without the bones of the dead which the wind rolls away: spider webs of intricate relationships seeking a form. (Calvino, 1997, p. 44)

As with Calvino’s city, my strings are ‘links’, connections that map associations and give form to the relationships between actors, as the photographs capture heightened moments of cultural intensity or vibrancy. However, they are also a material reminder of the volatility of such spaces, such that when the links become too onerous, the space is left, but not forgotten. The memory or moment lives on through the image. This ties these spaces to a nomadic near and distant future.

This chapter serves as a traditional thesis analysis chapter; however, here I draw on the inherent ideas of networks of association and connectivity previously explored throughout the thesis and bring this to life visually.

9.1 Networks of Connectivity

What became apparent throughout the process of capturing these spaces was that ultimately, I was capturing a range of connections and becomings—a process of places forming, warping and/or slowly gaining momentum and declining. Throughout the project, I was not just defining how the actors related to each other, but also how they related to my experiences and my interpretations. This chapter explores the connections I have felt or have observed within irregular spaces as a means to demonstrate the ways that space transforms into place ‘as a consequence of enriched experience’ (Tuan, 1977). The purpose of the following sections is to explain the connections between actors in irregular space and the ways that these intimacies convert space to place. The chapter is contributing to a slow build, revealing multiple layers of association within the images. The connections I have initiated here are continued in larger visual assemblages at the end of this chapter.
9.1.1 Physical connections

Touch, the haptic sense, in fact provides human beings with a vast amount of information concerning the world. (Tuan, 1974, p. 7)

On a very simplistic level, I visually interrogated the way that people connect with the space physically—the way that they positioned their bodies as actors within space, whether this be observing how close they pushed to the stage or capturing their physical connection to the space. I feel drawn to deciphering and categorising this information, but this involves a different observational sensitivity. While capturing these physical connections, a pattern of photographing people’s feet/shoes within spaces started to emerge. This notion was birthed out of a variety of circumstances. At times, the space was full: being short, I could not often see a lot from the back of the room. I was fascinated with the way that light escaped in between people’s feet on the ground, the patterns that it would make and how this indicated the movement or stillness of the audience. In Figure 78, I have captured the sharp point of a high heel inside an irregular space. Contrasted beside this is a white sneaker. These two shoes represent different styles and the diversity present within these spaces. The wide range of actors in the spaces contributed to heterogeneous assemblages and always enriched the experience as no sense of uniformity or conformity was evident.

9.1.2 Marking the physical space

Space disguises itself—puts on, like an alluring creature, the costume of moods. (Benjamin, 2002, p. 161)

Through my practice, I have captured photos demonstrating how individuals physically connect with spaces, yet I have also noted the traces that individuals leave behind. For the most part, these marks are a form of graffiti and in some spaces, like Dirty Shirlows, the graffiti is more dramatic and becomes an ephemeral part of the way that punters experience place. We can see this in Figure 79. While in general the graffiti within these irregular spaces is somewhat curated or commissioned, the range and variety of approaches within this space is vast and haphazard. In Figure 80, we see a wall covered in a variety of artist approaches: if you look closely, you can see the blue graffiti piece on the left of the image actually frames a small doorway, which leads into a living quarters. This small half-size door becomes almost obscured by the wall marking that formulates into a face, the open mouth engulfing the doorframe. Next to the wall a skeletal figure is perched, sitting as though alive on the lounge, wearing an explorer’s hat. While this skeleton is an object and not a piece of graffiti, it is symbolic of a similar approach to the traces left on and inside the space.

The graffiti and visual marks in these spaces elicit responses based on the type of space created. In Figure 81 we see a different approach to graffiti, utilising character illustrations and strong graphics. In Figure 82, the face is a ‘piece’ that emits a sense of permanency and has resided in the space for a long time. In contrast, the jellyfish imagery on the left of the photograph, was purposefully painted to match the ‘under the sea’ theme of the evening’s event. 2flies undergoes a great deal of preparation and change when staging each event. They ‘dress the space up’ and completely change its appearance for each event. This is acutely evident when looking at the stairwell in Figure 83; we see the painted walls leading upstairs to the chill-out room. As you can see by looking at the staircase, the entire floor to ceiling area has been painted in the under the sea theme. The same level of care and precision has been applied to the room at the top of the stairs, as seen in Figure 84. This finely tuned design has been painstakingly well thought out, down

Figure 78. High-heel, (Photograph taken by Author, 2012).
Figure 79. What’s Cooking, (Photograph taken by Author, 2011).

Figure 80. Skull door, (Photograph taken by Author, 2011).

Figure 81. Flies, (Photograph taken by Author, 2013).

Figure 82. Face, (Photograph taken by Author, 2013).
to the small black seagull marks on the wall. The extravagance of these events is astounding. These events are not only changed through the marks on the walls and the objects within the space, but also the lighting is altered for each event, painting each room in varied colours that are synonymous with different moods.

This sheer commitment to an event is also reflected in the immersive enthusiasm of the participants who attend these events. As you can see in Figure 85, an actor adorns a light-up jellyfish hat; he stands poetically underneath the sea of hanging jellyfish above him, the paper streamer tentacles dangling into the space, framing the roof of the venue, creating a bizarre association of living and non-living objects.

Often the marks, objects or traces that contribute to creating this sense of place are small and discreet, appearing in tucked away areas of the venues. It is these smaller inscriptions that often have a more intimate appeal to me, as seen in Figure 86. A scribbly hand-drawn illustration of a girl holding a balloon floats on the wall with the expression ‘fuck yeah’ above it. These smaller marks are only revealed when a more intimate connection with a space is established; they require an exploration of the space in finer detail. A quickly executed illustration differs greatly to the structured and elaborate ‘pieces’ captured in Shirlows
Figure 86. Fuck yeah. (Photograph taken by Author, 2013).
and 2Flies, designed to have immediate impact and surround the guests when entering a space.

Chmielewska’s (2007) work suggests that forms of graffiti present a range of insights into the complexities that exist between place and the practices of writing. For me, these marks play a part in converting space into place, as the traces use language or image to directly address the punters. McCullough (2008) takes this notion one step further stating, ‘The city itself is an inscription’. When taking this into account, I like to poetically frame these spaces as inscriptions on the city scape, sometimes hidden but still a vital part of defining the elusive beast. In Figure 87, a completely different approach to graffiti is shown through an LED graffiti display, ironically sitting next to a painted piano. Behind this, the unlit wall is covered in actual graffiti lines and tags. This juxtaposition questions the use of digital technologies, yet it is important to note the range of artists and graffiti-based outcomes that temporally fill these spaces and provide a source of rich visual analysis. This digital trace also makes reference to locative media (discussed earlier) and the ways in which punters’ digital interactions can leave temporal or lasting marks on space.

9.1.3 Inter-personal connections

The other core connection I observe is between actors, both living and non-living. Figure 88 captures a physical connection between human actors; this was one of the defining categories of space to place transition that I noticed in the early stages of this project. To capture intimate moments between actors within spaces feels almost like a gift, an invitation to the inside/private aspects of people’s lives, exposed (albeit briefly) for me to freeze in time. Figure 89 is again another favourite of mine. It depicts a moment between two people, and although their identity is not apparent, one can read their age, which differs from the majority of those in the space, yet they are not out of place in the eclectic environment. The varying degrees of intimacy and connection between disparate actors is a key player in the transformation of space to place. I am invited into other people’s worlds of connection: their sense of comfort is almost transferred to me, through the act of capture, redefining space as a place. In Figure 90, the image shows two men dancing, holding on to each other, and swirling around the dance floor, drinks in hand, swinging them from side-to-side in time with the music. This series of shots again captures a stolen moment of intimacy and for me, helps to describe the specific spatiality and practices within these spaces.

In Figure 91, I photograph another intimate moment between actors, this time of a different nature. This image captures two individuals kissing. The capture of this intimate moment is from afar and does not intrude on the experience of the two people. This image is enhanced by the oblivious nature of the actors and their immersion within the environment and space. There is a poetic symbolism in the light not hitting these two, instead falling on the loudly dressed male dominating the scene. This darkness that shrouds the individuals again works to reinforce this sense of intimacy.

With Figure 92, when taking this photo I was attempting to capture the movement and connection between the actors within the image and the material link between the two outstretched hands and the bottle of alcohol. This sharing of alcohol tells us much about the performers within the image. Firstly, the unruly nature of swigging from the bottle represents a rebellious or ‘rock’n’roll’ type feel, but the sharing of this drink represents camaraderie. After this photograph was taken, the bottle was handed to an audience member who lived in the space as a way of thanking him for organising the night. This individual went on to take
Figure 88. Hugging, (Photograph taken by Author, 2010).

Figure 89. Moments, (Photograph taken by Author, 2012).

Figure 90. Camaraderie, (Photograph taken by Author, 2013).
a massive ‘skol’\textsuperscript{37} of the liquid while the crowd cheered him on. While this is all interesting, I feel there is a mode of the unexpected present in this image that was not anticipated.

When reflecting on the image afterwards, it became clear that there was a significant connection between the motion of the ‘figure’ on the t-shirt and that of the outstretched arm of the performer. Not only does this work to directionally lead the eye along the image, it also creates an interesting duality between actors. The fact that the ‘figure’ on the t-shirt is holding a gun pointed at the unseen man creates an interesting juxtaposition to the bottle of alcohol. This creates a fascinating social statement about alcohol, but also plays a part in representing the strong tie these spaces and events can have to ‘death’ or closure. This revelation represents my cycle of practice and reflection. Initially, I am draw to the aesthetics or emotive qualities of a moment, which I then capture through my lens. Afterwards, I pore over all of my images. More often than not, the images I have taken encapsulate the connection, mood or actors that I was aiming for. However, from time to time, upon reflection, I am able to re-interpret my own images in a new way, notice things that were initially unseen and make connections to other images or actors that I have captured in the past.

9.1.4 Personal connections

Invisible threads are the strongest ties. (Nietzsche, 1988, p. 219)

In Chapter 6, I discussed the notion of slippage that occurs within an image, the way that the mind wanders connecting photographs with past and present ideas and memories. As humans, we are ‘meaning-making machines’ and seek closure in all aspects of our lives, be that physically and also physiologically (Koffka, 2013). We seek to find form and place meaning and onus on visual elements that we decipher in the world.

Often, in my photography, I am drawn towards eclectic collections of actors and the ways that they connect with each other and appeal to or invoke memories. Bachelard (1969) discusses the ways that individuals interpret an unfamiliar house by reverting to their childhood memories and recollections of their own houses

\textsuperscript{37} To drink something all at once, without pause (Cambridge online dictionary).
[see also Tuan, 1977]. Cecil and Cecil [n.d.] discuss the fact that we recreate environments like those experienced in our youth stating:

Throughout one’s existence, one’s personal geographies (life-spaces) change. As infants, the world is focused in a locally (home)-centered, parentally-oriented, highly ‘place’ bound life. As one ages, life-space extends to its spatial maximum during adulthood where one becomes spatially unbounded, has a high degree of mobility, and is capable of identifying and associating with ‘places’ as one has identified them in youth and continues to create like-places in adult years. (p. 234–235)

The authors allude here to the fact that we recreate environments like those experienced in our youth. It seems fair to say that we are also drawn to objects that incite this same sense of memory. My relationship with Figure 93 draws heavily on memory and the elements that represent home and comfort. The collection of actors, the colours, the textural qualities apparent within the imagery and the three dancing lights trigger a sense of nostalgia in me. As a child, I longed to play the piano and briefly had lessons in a dark neighbouring house. My brother and I fought constantly over a wooden rocking horse that when won, I would ride proudly, until the hard seat pushed painfully against me, but that prize would not be forfeited. Once a cousin visited and rode the rocking horse with a soiled nappy. My brother wielded that against me in the future. My longing to ride the rocking horse was thwarted by the jaunts of my brother who made reference to the incident with my cousin, an attempt to hide the fact that he was now considered too big to ride the rocking horse, but hated that I still could, ruining the joy this object once gave me. There is something about this collection of actors that stirs something deep inside me. I took several pictures of this exact setup on the night, never feeling as though I actually captured the essence of what I saw, or perhaps it was an inability to fully capture what it was I felt. This is a similar feeling to what I felt when capturing the opening image, Figure 1 of Melrose Hall, the site of my younger punk rock days. This image for me highlights the peculiarities around phenomenological research, the ‘concern with the differences between lived and represented times’ (Crang, 2001, p. 187); but ultimately this focus on time felt experientially is a part of the phenomenological account.

Figure 93. Memories, (Photograph taken by Author, 2013).
9.2 Visual Assemblages

By applying ANT, the varying levels of detail and intensity become limitless as the networks can then branch out to other spaces, cities and countries. The range of associations is also limitless, as defined by the researcher:

It [can] extend its influence and reach beyond a single locale into other locales, tying these together in sets of complex associations. There is, therefore, no difference in kind between ‘macro’ and ‘micro’ or ‘global’ and ‘local’ actors; longer networks can simply reach further than shorter networks. (Murdoch, 2005, p. 70)

To extend the networks across space and time, a reflexive approach to the imagery and the resultant pattern formations must be considered, enabling these visual assemblages to be understood as the analytical component of the thesis. The accompanying book displays the spaces in themselves. In contrast, here the photographs of spaces are grouped together and are not separated into their individual entities, as a means to identify networks that stretch further across the spaces.

To enact these visual assemblages I identify iconic and notable elements, patterns and associations in my images. This is demonstrated through the visual assemblages in section 9.2.3. When discussing these patterns of association, I draw on actors that appear within the photographs and combine them with remarkable points in my memory. To fathom the role that the imaginary and memory play in these connections, I draw on the work of Italo Calvino (1972), who discusses fictitious cities and the ways in which they are imagined through the mind’s eye, in this instance referring to the city of Zora:

Zora has the quality of remaining in your memory point by point, in its succession of streets, of houses along the streets, and of doors and windows in the houses, though nothing in them possesses a special beauty or rarity. Zora’s secret lies in the way your gaze runs over patterns following one another as in a musical score where not a note can be altered or displaced. The man who knows by heart how Zora is made, if he is unable to sleep at night, can imagine he is walking along the streets and he remembers the order by which the copper clock follows the barber’s striped awning, then the fountain with the nine jets, the astronomer’s glass tower ... the alley that leads to the harbour. [p. 15]

These entities and patterns that make up the city of Zora in Calvino’s description are evocative of my own process of pattern-recognition. Actors, who were at first captured intuitively within the space, became part of a recognisable pattern as I continued this work. As in Calvino’s description, none of them necessarily hold ‘a special beauty’, but instead they speak to me. These human and non-human actors possess emotions, characters and agency that when connected or linked to other photographs, come together to display assemblages about place. For example, Calvino talks about the streets, the houses along the streets, the doors and the frames that exist within the fictional city Zora. In a very similar way, Visual Assemblage 1 on page 257-258 consists of photographs that inform the physicality of irregular spaces. This includes images of the night time street, and the doors and the frames within the spaces themselves. This assemblage displays an order and understanding about not only irregular spaces and the ways in which they traverse the city, but also how I map, capture and interact with alternative and unknown spaces of irregularity. This assemblage of doors, windows and frames opens up into more assemblages. This sense of entering into and through the spaces is represented through the act of unfolding: a literal unfolding of the page will continue to reveal these further linked entities. When these pages are folded back, in place, the varied networks are then reconnected.

In Bindings against Boundaries, entanglements of life in an open world, Ingold (2008) dissects Gibson’s (1979) theory of ‘furniture of the earth’, critiquing that objects of the earth are more than just that, and that the ‘objectness’ of things (or in Heidegger’s (1971) terminology ‘over-againstness’), creates boundaries and therefore closes objects off to the world:

It [the world] is continually coming into being around them. It is world, that is, of formative and transformative processes. If such processes are of the essence of perception, then they are also of the essence of what is perceived. To understand how people can inhabit this world means attending to the dynamic processes of world formation in which both perceivers and the phenomena they perceive are necessarily immersed. [p. 1801]

My complete immersion within this process has resulted in emergent formations and reinventions of actor networks and assemblages, made up of not just objects or ‘things’, but of ideals, colours, lights, moods and sounds among other, sometimes indefinable things. Often once I identify these networks and the larger assemblages they constitute, they deform and reform again, in another
way. For example, within assemblage 2 on pages 259-264, the entirety of the assemblage speaks to the ways that actors connect with space. However, within this, a smaller assemblage exists that captures punters experiencing sound inside the spaces. This is an attempt to capture immersion and also demonstrates my perception of those receiving sound. In the following Section 9.2.1, I discuss the different processes I went through to visually create these assemblages, and in section 9.2.3, the final visual assemblages can be viewed. The fluidity associated with establishing these connections relies on the creation and/or identification of networks that are constantly moving (sometimes still forming, sometimes no longer existing) when I return to a space. My connection with the actors comprising the network may be fleeting, due to their reformations, closures or reinventions into completely different entities, or the process of them coming into being. Some of these connections, relationships and fluidities I can only recognise after the fact, as immersion can often blind me to what I am surrounded by. It is with this mobility and temporality in mind, that I pose that this is, and always will be, a temporal work, a moving piece of history that is still defining and redefining itself.

9.2.1 Explaining the process

To gain an understanding about my own intuitive processes and patterns, I first began connecting images on a smaller scale. Previously, I established the way actors connect across singular images. In Figures 94 and 95, I analyse the relationship between two photographs, and therefore two disparate moments in time—here closely linked, at other times, years apart (for example, the way I used the images of the Splinter Orchestra performer). While this invokes Clarke’s earlier notion of ‘slippage’, in this instance, the network is made for the viewer. The narrative and the almost visible cord that joins the two photographs (on and off frame) create stories, while also answering questions about the connections. When viewing the book of photographs accompanying this thesis, the viewer is left to make these connections themselves. However, as seen in Figures 94 and 95, I have begun to draw a physical line between the two different images. On their own, the images can ignore the wider context of the room and audience. By placing them side-by-side, the link is physically established. In doing this, I have tried to capture the way that the sound moves through space: a visible chord that pulls the crowd
towards the performer. While this was interesting, the fact that these two actors co-existed in the same space at the same time did not activate the network to its full ability.

Hence, a further process of connecting and assembling images was undertaken. I began by first using a whiteboard, printed images, string and magnets. Much like the mapping of a crime syndicate in a movie, I physically connected elements of the spaces to aid the sorting of these images, as seen in Figure 96. Here, I utilised different coloured string for different established categories. This was undertaken quite early in the project and represented a turning point in my research when I realised that all the spaces and all the photographs had one connecting actor in common: me (a point I have by now made thoroughly clear). I then continued on to digitise this map using Prezi software (see the screen shot in Figure 97); this allowed an alternative exploration of the networks, but I found limitations to the program that did not allow me to fully present the spaces as I wanted. At this early stage, I was placing these spaces in relation to each other, based on their topographical placement and increasing the size of the dot. The dot size marked their presence, dependent on their influx of activity [which roughly coincided with the original mapping processes found earlier in the thesis].

After these initial experiments in 2011, I continued to trace the patterns that emerged visually across irregular spaces, either as a result of their materialities or through my phenomenological placement and interaction with the spaces. This approach enabled me to discard the geographical placement of these spaces in larger urban areas, and instead the networks and connections became about their materialities (as opposed to their topographical location). These assemblages of images began to express the ways in which I experienced and understood irregular space and contributed to my understanding of these spaces as ‘places’: evoking specific points of memory. The lines I was drawing between the photographs built the network of irregular spaces in my memory, similar to Calvino’s imaginary cities.

Through brainstorming and mapping, I began identifying categories that constituted smaller and larger assemblages. In February 2012, I pored over thousands of my images, with a specific goal in mind, and began to notice patterns within the images. These patterns were given a category heading and separated into groups. Each pattern that I had captured inside a space was linked to the spaces themselves, as seen in Figure 98. Spaces, like CAD Factory and Society that closed very early in my study, revealed fewer patterns. As my
As my research continued, new patterns emerged and the associations multiplied, this is visualised in Figure 103. It was only through this process that I was able to identify what networks of association the assemblages were made up of. From this, I attempted to visualise the networks through photographs, as evidenced in Figure 99. This allowed me to make groupings based on physicality, experiences or actors within the space. However, this seemed too prescribed, deterministic and sterile in approach. This realisation encouraged more experimentation about how best to assemble these networks. While reflecting on my images, I started to notice the transitory actors that appeared within and moved across spaces. Firstly, I laid these side-by-side, as seen in Figure 100. By demonstrating these links, the transitory nature of the spaces was honoured and the community ethos of the scene was brought to life. Figure 100 captures two different spaces, months apart. The image on the right depicts an event, which was originally scheduled to be held at the space on the left. This event was cancelled at the original (left) location and relocated to another space (the space on the right) due to fears about exposing the space at that point in time (because of increased surveillance on the site). To ensure some consistency within the relocated event, items (such as the lamp) were carted to the nearby venue. It was important to me to visualise the tactical approaches I had thus far written about in the thesis. In Figure 101, further connections between spaces are established. This is visualised in the movement of the objects between spaces across time, demonstrated by the lamp—previously discussed—a rug, which moved from one space to another with the relocation of a human host, a white board, which was borrowed from a space for a friendly event that involved handball. (The whiteboard has since been returned but has not been wiped clean and is still covered in the scores of the actors from the previous events), and lastly a sound table scrawled with Dirty Shirlows’ name on it appears inside the venue of Midian at a ‘Save Shirlows’ event (previously discussed). There is also continuity mapped with performers across spaces or the nomadic appearance of particular significant punters or hosts across various spaces and times. I ask the reader to follow the lines and discover these connections.

After undergoing this process, I realised that when these actors are combined and analysed across space and time, the temporal autonomy of the spaces I have been building towards is further enacted. As assemblages, these images comment holistically on alternative city scenes.
Figure 99: Original networking, (Created by Author, 2012).
Figure 100. Transferable actors - set, (Photograph/s taken by Author, 2012).
Connections between space/smallest spaces:
1. Midian
2. The Hutch
3. Boxcar Racer

Figure 101. Multiple actors across spaces, (Created by Author, 2012).
My visualisation processes then transformed as I decided that the physical line I had been drawing between the images was not needed: the link was made visually and sensorially through the images. These became networks that infer visual patterns; the viewer can scan their eye along the rows of images (from left to right) taking in a holistic sense of the spaces, as seen in the final images found in Section 9.2.3.

The categories I had originally defined were quite closed. For example, as seen in Figure 102; this was an early assemblage that I was working on. It captures different approaches to decoration within the spaces. The category of ‘adornments’, which visualised the way the spaces were decorated, seemed to stifle the reach and breadth of the network. Instead, I expanded these assemblage categories to include a larger focus. This can be seen in Figure 103: on the left hand column are the original, smaller categories that I then grouped together to form the larger category on the right hand side. This enabling more complex visual assemblages. These smaller categories still exist, yet they are now paired with other assemblages that ebb and flow in relation to each other. The layout works to reinforce that these images come together to make larger assemblages. At times, the images within the assemblages are repeated; this honours the slippage of these spaces and the idea that assemblages are emergent entities. Parts, or images in my context, ‘may be detached from it [the assemblage] and plugged into a different assemblage in which its interactions are different’. (DeLanda, 2006, p. 10). For example, on page 258 the image in the third row down on the left, is grouped to demonstrate a door in space; whereas later on page 273, the focus of the image shifts and it is grouped due to the marking on the wall.
9.2.2 Explaining the final visual assemblages

The visual assemblages within this book are to be seen as one final, larger assemblage that represents irregular space within Sydney between 2010 to 2014. This is made up of smaller assemblages that can be broken down to represent the finer detail inherent in irregular space. The folding of the smaller assemblage categories into the larger assemblages is demonstrated in Figure 103. The larger categories present are listed as headings within the visual assemblages; please refer to Section 9.2.3 to view these. As previously established when viewing the photos of slippages, the assemblages are intended to be read from left to right (across the double page). However, the folded page allows the reader to unfold and assemble the networks in there own way, as all the networks come together to form one large assemblage.

The grey square, positioned inside the assemblage is a purposeful design decision and is used to refer to a grey card. A grey card is used in photography to create consistency, it creates a reference point for light and exposure. It is generally used when the light has changed in some way, and this is a symbol of the shifting focus of the assemblage. In this instance, this small grey rectangle (card) is a reminder of the reflexivity of this research. It symbolises the time a photographer stops and takes stock of the photo shoot: my inherent practice of halting and reflecting, allowing the image to talk back to me and determine my course of action. The images are not provided in a chronological order; instead, the images are organised intuitively and visually, to honour the connections I have identified between them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial smaller assemblages</th>
<th>Final larger assemblages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outside of space/s 1.1</td>
<td>Physicality of the space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doors within space/s 1.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frames within space/s 1.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physically connecting with space/s 1.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecting to phones in space/s 2.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behind actos in space/s 2.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actors interacting in space/s 2.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actors photographing in space/s 2.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actors smoking in spaces 2.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumption in space/s 2.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of home in space/s 3.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adornments in space/s 3.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performing in space/s 4.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening in space/s 4.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signs in space 4.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Markings on space/s 4.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lights within space/s 4.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 103. Merged assemblages, (Created by Author, 2013).
9.2.3 Visual assemblages
9.2.4 Challenges of the assemblage

Due to the continual change affiliated with these spaces and their corresponding evolving network, this has been a truly challenging project. I have struggled to map and capture immanence and becomings. This chapter has attempted to render, in visual assemblages, the networks that link irregular spaces together in space and time, with the common thread being myself and my experience as a practitioner-researcher. These networks are assembled to visually connect associations that speak to the wider alternative scene within Sydney, and serve as a way to document the complex ontological nature of the city and its scenes. In doing this, I try to look beyond singular places and instead focus on the connectivity of a whole.

Due to the ephemerality of the spaces I have been investigating, a phenomenological account seemed fitting. The notion of place was constantly being redefined, replaced and changing as I moved through and experience spaces. This does not mean that actors within [irregular] space do not have a communal sense of place (Boschetti, 1996), but this can never be fully conveyed through an external account, no matter what my immersion within the spaces. Instead, I used photography to capture space and its transition into place, as per my experience. However, one person’s understanding of what constitutes place is a mix of personal ‘experience, emotion, memory, imagination, present situation and intention’ (Ralph, 1976, p. 59). This variation is individual and carries in part the beauty of a phenomenological reading; yet it also invites critique due to the representational fixity of the image and the subjective nature of the self in place. To combat the dismissal of a subjective study, I applied ANT and assemblage theory to display my aesthetic and social assemblages of networked images that formed as a result of my visual-phenomenological investigation. These assemblages link seminal and notable elements, as a way of reflecting on and analysing patterns of self, place and irregularity within space.
CHAPTER 10

CONCLUSION
Irregular spaces are a necessarily invisible, albeit vital, part of Sydney's urban fabric. My photographic imagery and subsequent methods of capture serve as a model that can be adapted to address and contribute to the urban imaginary, helping to define and understand the way that space becomes place through immersive experiences. My use of ANT is key in understanding my images, my role as photographer and the associated actors in irregular space. The resultant visual assemblages offer an alternative way of viewing Sydney anew as an object, which is continually re-assembled at concrete sites of urban practice, or as representations of the limitless processes of becoming (Farias, 2010). Akin to my hermeneutic phenomenological process, this thesis has unveiled the intertwined pieces that contribute to a phenomenological understanding of these spaces, to illustrate the assembled, granulated being of the city.

10.1 The Future of Irregularity

Throughout the thesis, I map the rise and fall of irregular spaces through time and the ways in which they are affected by external entities. ANT is used to avoid the binaries associated with inside and outside, public and private and space and place. ANT instead links the internal workings of the city [the space inside] to the complex being of the city. Part 1 of the thesis, 'Outside In', outlines an historical interpretation of irregularity in Sydney, and secondly explores the ways recent or existing irregular spaces have impacted on the physical and ideological components of contemporary Sydney city. Through this exploration, the thesis considers the influential nature of gentrification, urban planning and development, while also exploring formal initiatives to support the arts in Sydney (such as the City of Sydney cultural policy). This information draws together a range of sources that inform the current urban climate in Sydney and demonstrates the nuanced relationships between irregular spaces and formal bodies/collectives, and the associated hurdles that irregular spaces evade or come up against.

In examining these factors, I introduce the reader to the fine grained details of the spaces, revealing intricacies and events associated with the performances and practice that are further explored visually in Part 2 of the thesis, ‘Inside Out’. While this project and the spaces it tracks are in a constant state of becoming and flux, there are some notable patterns of repetition in the alternative scene. Spaces seem to eventually close or be closed. The temporal life of these spaces is an inevitable component of their being. I hope that this document discloses spaces of irregularity without endangering their existence and that it sheds light on their importance and ability to function as self-regulated, dynamic entities. I hope this document has provided a sense of the level of scrutiny these spaces experience when exposed or discovered by the wider public, effectively highlighting the 'red tape' these spaces must navigate when they are aiming for permanency. As I state in my Introduction, this project is not a call for cultural policy or protection. Instead, it has sought to provide an alternative way of viewing the city and its affiliated cultural entities, as zones of ‘temporal autonomy’, as well as to show the vitality of a scene that operates by tactically navigating, negotiating, bending or flexing the rules. For irregular spaces to survive, to procreate, to transform and emerge, an approach that encompasses elasticity must be adopted by external parties. I hope this thesis has availed a deeper understanding about the fluid and necessarily invisible nature of the spaces that contribute to the vitality of Sydney.

As my research has progressed, I have seen a number of irregular spaces mature through more formal collectivisation, as previously discussed in Chapter 5. The formation of the MWA has allowed the actors affiliated with spaces to pool resources and literally form networks that connect the spaces to each other more formally [see Figure 14]. This formation of a supportive network enhances the future[s] of inequality as a unique mode of inhabiting the city in space and time, with the potential to stretch further and reach more diverse entities.38 This collective support allows actors to ratify grass roots activism and events; therefore claiming their ‘right to the city’ and wider space, while invigorating the urban landscape in their own way.

There is an increased chance that the city which incubates these spaces will alter with the implementation of a new cultural policy for Sydney (which is now only available in its draft stages). This policy does profess that an action plan will be provided to address ‘any systemic or “red tape” barriers that inhibit creative initiative. This could include, for example, developing a pre-lodgment or advisory process involving building approval, planning, health and building and cultural staff to support the creation of non-traditional and temporary live music and performance venues’ [May, 2014, p. 25]. Upon initial inquiry, the document has provided a sense of the level of scrutiny these spaces experience and the importance and ability to function as self-regulated, dynamic entities. I hope this document has provided a sense of the level of scrutiny these spaces experience when exposed or discovered by the wider public, effectively highlighting the ‘red tape’ these spaces must navigate when they are aiming for permanency.

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38 Formal collectives born out of the MWA are not bound by physical Sydney based irregular spaces and as a collective have organized regional events and nomadic events that foster the ethos of irregularity in ranging locations.
Activities/Strategies

- Strengthen and encourage creativity in the public domain and non-traditional venues and spaces
- Support initiatives that reduce cost and logistical barriers to participation
- Deliver new opportunities for individual creative expression
- Increase the range of opportunities for lifelong learning and exposure to local and global ideas
- Support cultural education and access programs for children and young people
- Support appropriate infrastructure and spaces for community-based creative activity
- Ensure new developments anticipate cultural uses and impacts
- Review regulatory and planning instruments to encourage a diversity of cultural activities, clusters and hubs
- Support development of cultural venues for spectatorship
- Develop work spaces for professional artform practice
- Coordinate cultural priorities and artform policy agenda with other tiers of Government
- Support affordable housing for creative workers in Sydney
- Facilitate affordable access to equipment and spaces for professional artform practice
- Reduce/eliminate red tape barriers for creative initiative
- Support networking, collaboration and training opportunities for creative workers

Cluster Outcomes

- Barriers to accessing/participating in cultural activities are mitigated
- Community has access to an extensive range of learning and creative skill development opportunities
- Creativity is visible in the public domain and village precincts
- Cultural infrastructure and surrounding businesses provide a complementary hub of activities and opportunities for engagement
- Adequate supply of affordable and appropriate facilities available for creative use
- All tiers of government provide supportive and coordinated policy and operational responses to cultural issues across all scales
- Cost and regulatory barriers for artists developing their work are minimised
- Increased diversity and innovation of artistic output
- Cultural organisations are financially sustainable and have effective management and governance

Figure 104. Strategic Framework, (City of Sydney, 2014)

reoccurring terms ‘temporary’ and ‘visible’ should be investigated to assess the benefits for and effects on self-regulated spaces, such as the irregular spaces within this study. In their current state, broad public inclusion in these irregular spaces would pose a destructive influence as the ‘official recognition of alternative culture, the “kiss of death”—a process that by definition stifles innovation and commodifies difference’ (Shaw, 2005, p. 150). The necessity for these spaces to rely on invisibility and discretion means they are not open to greater cultural or economic integration. While the effort to integrate is not necessarily a bad thing in and of itself, it would transform these spaces into something other than they are now, which would not always be positive and beneficial to the actors involved.

While this thesis is a testament to the importance of flux and change, a top-down approach to temporality often results in councils or related enterprises deciding upon the lifespan of cultural entities from the outside. While this can sometimes be successful, temporarily stimulating the arts community (as explored earlier in Chapter 4 in relation to the Frasers development programme), I would argue that the temporal nature of cultural spaces needs to be organic and bottom-up to fully allow for a fluid creative process and dynamic spatial formation. At this draft stage of the cultural policy process, it is impossible to assess the real life implications or benefits it will have on irregular spaces. Until these developments come to pass, I will continue to assess and document changes, or to put it simply, ‘watch this space’.

10.2 Understanding Place Through Experience

When beginning this project, my understandings of space and place were informed through the interpretation of academic texts, and were therefore taken ‘out-of-place’ (Barnes, 2011, p. 342). As my research progressed, I began to move beyond theorising about space and place, and instead began to enact the situated nature of embodied space through my practice unfolding in real time. In Part 2 of the thesis, I explored my immersion as a practitioner within these spaces. My practice enabled me to open myself up to the world around me and allowed a transition to occur in which I was no longer simply theorising about place, I was actively engaging with the processes that underpinned the conversion of space into place over time (Tuan, 1977). The shift from the unfamiliar to the familiar was intuitively born out of a contemplative approach, aligning with Schön’s (1983) theory of the
reflective practitioner. This allows the situation to remain ‘open-ended’, therefore enabling the world around me to ‘act back on and design’ me (Willis, 2006). Through engaging with phenomena and placing myself inside these spaces, I was able to reflect on my imagery as a record of my own fluctuating experiences.

This transition was phenomenological and based upon my own experiences within irregular spaces. While my immersion in space influenced this conversion from space to place, it was coupled with my approach to the spaces themselves. Throughout the thesis I have drawn heavily on the work of Relph (1976) and the terms he uses to traverse the binaries of inside and outside. Approaching an unknown space as an ‘empathetic insider’ is integral to the phenomenological reading of a space, as it infers an interest, empathy and openness to understand the space and experiencing it deeply (Relph, 1976). It also references the ‘partial’ quality of my experience: it is not and never intends to be an assumption about others’ experiences. The importance of my slow immersion into the spaces is reflected in the overall structure of the thesis, as I have tried to mimic the experience for the reader, slowly allowing the world to open up to them through vicarious insideness, a deeply-felt secondhand involvement with place (Relph, 1976). This research project truly reflects a journey from outside to inside these spaces, a journey of discovery, full of unexpectedness and change.

Throughout this process of immersion, what is most remarkable is how the unfamiliar became familiar: how certain spaces got a hold of me. In the thesis, I use Calvino’s description of strings as networks that link the spaces together, links that remain after the physical space has disappeared. Through this research process, I have felt bound by multiple strings and links to spaces that have disappeared and entities that have changed and evolved into new entities. With each emergence, the string that links me to a place is pulled, reconnected or joined with another already existent string. After completing my practice-based research, I moved out of Sydney. Now in the final stages of writing about these sites of irregularity, my stomach clenches and I feel the pull, not to Sydney itself, but to the spaces that have become so familiar to me. Places that will be forever embedded within my memory, but more importantly, immortalised in the images that I have taken. The separation I feel is ironically eased and made sad by the fact that many of the spaces I have photographed are gone. This flux and the constant reminder of the mortality of these spaces reinforces the importance of the image to capture what is always in process and ephemeral. All photographs are *momento mori*. To take a photograph is to participate in another person’s (or thing’s) mortality, vulnerability, mutability.

Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time’s relentless melt’ (Sontag, 1977, p. 15). The focus of this project is to disclose how time and space can change and liberate varied outcomes. Soja (2010) explains that our geographies ‘take on material forms as social relations become spatial but are also creatively represented in images, ideas and imaginings’ (p. 18). In my research, the image is the means of disclosure and it informs and comments on change, while capturing the dimensions of space that are later assembled to comment on the social relations and their contribution to the urban imaginary.

### 10.3 Future Directions

I hope my practice-based investigation contributes to the understanding of photography as an integral method of studying and investigating our cities. In the same way that ANT enables a stretching of networks across local and global divides, I would like to build on this basis of imagery to create larger assemblages with longer networks that speak more holistically to irregularity across nations, creating a material and unfolding history of alternative scenes. The theoretical and historical research I have undertaken to frame the spaces has been integral to my practice, but I also wanted to show how the image can bring to life and reveal something that cannot be wholly explained in words. Without the images, an understanding of the multisensorial nature of the scene could not be fully gained. In this investigation, a vital cross-fertilisation of images and words combines to full reveal the multisensorial dimensions of irregular space.

This cross-fertilisation forms a large part of this thesis’ original contribution: it brings together ANT, assemblage theory, photographic practice and hermeneutic phenomenology to analyse the dynamic and ontological being of the city, realised through visual assemblages. These assemblages contribute a vital component to understanding the alternative tissue of the city and how it functions, coming together to represent irregular spaces and their contribution to the urban imaginary.
Figure 105 captures the now closed irregular space, Dirty Shirlows. The brick walls are painted black, covering the haphazard tags and graffiti in the form of a skull and crossbones and tentacle-shaped waves that once adorned the exterior of this space. The daylight renders the space as normal, its mystical quality, previously captured in Figure 17 (when the space was operating, full of vitality and shrouded in the darkness of night) has dissipated and the building seems to characterise defeat in its attempt to look mundane. A new door replaces the old one; here, an out-of-place heavy mahogany slab of wood sits solidly closed. The original steel bars that formerly hung despondently from the doorframe have been removed, and I find myself questioning whether they ever served a purpose on the old venue. At a quick glance, the exterior of the space does not seem out of the ordinary. Despite this, a small trace of the previous place’s rebellion remains on the right hand side of the image in the form of residual graffiti. A curled tentacle appears from between the cracks in the buildings. The partially revealed tentacle of a much larger animal evokes a sense of movement, representative of the space slowly moving and curling away from the previous material space into new spatialities. This visual element links the present space’s relationship with its former use and highlights the organic being of irregular space. Although formally closed, the sense of the place is still present and open to new heterogeneous networks and assemblages.
REFERENCES


Homan, S. (2003). The Mayor’s a square: Live music and law and order in Sydney (1st ed.).


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Event invites


The Smith St Band's warehouse party THIS FRIDAY! Friday 18th November https://www.facebook.com/events/2439612778990669/

Leard the Charge Secret Warehouse Party, Sat Aug 24 2013 http://allevents.in/events/leard-the-charge-secret-warehouse-party/4843244304989905

‘The great Green Debate’ http://serialspace.org/events/event/
The Great Klepto Debate: 'That Property Is Theft' http://serialspace.org/events/event/


Figures (in order of appearance)

If not otherwise stated, all figures are photographs or designs created by the author.


