

THE PSYCHOGEOGRAPHY OF URBAN ARCHITECTURE

THE PSYCHOGEOGRAPHY OF URBAN ARCHITECTURE

DAVID PRESCOTT-STEED



BrownWalker Press
Boca Raton

The Psychogeography of Urban Architecture

Copyright © 2013 David Prescott-Steed

All rights reserved.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the publisher.

BrownWalker Press
Boca Raton, Florida • USA
2013

ISBN-10: 1-61233-695-7
ISBN-13: 978-1-61233-695-4

www.brownwalker.com

Cover photo by Julie Borninkhof

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Prescott-Steed, David, 1975-

The psychogeography of urban architecture / David Prescott-Steed.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-61233-695-4 (pbk. : alk. paper) -- ISBN 1-61233-695-7 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Architecture--Psychological aspects. 2. Geographical perception. I. Title.

NA2540.P74 2013

720.1'9--dc23

2013010201

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	VII
CHAPTER 1	
Introduction	11
Wandering in the City: A Non-linear Narrative	11
Lose Yourself in Melbourne.....	16
Self and Society.....	22
The Structure of the Book	27
CHAPTER 2	
A Historical Context	35
Conceptualising Early Modernity	35
Theory of the Dérive	43
Alternative Solutions.....	47
CHAPTER 3	
A Contemporary Context	51
Experiencing Late Modernity.....	51
Commodity Culture	52
Novelty Culture	56
Standardisation.....	57
Pseudo-individuality.....	59
The Cost of Stability	60
CHAPTER 4	
Engaging in Late Modernity	71
Critical Thinking.....	71
Thinking and Walking	75
Praxis	81
Cultural Reflexivity.....	84
CHAPTER 5	
Defamiliarisation	89
Viktor Borisovich Shklovsky (1893-1984).....	90
Craig Raine (1944-).....	95
Georges Perec (1936-82)	98
Jim Henson's 'Uncle "Traveling" Matt' (1983-7, c. 96 episodes)	103
Reflecting Upon Defamiliarisation	106

CHAPTER 6

Making Theory Actionable 109
 ‘Qui Vive?’ at the Entrance to the City..... 109
 Idealising a Nomadic Aesthetic..... 110
 A ‘Pilot’ Walk Around the Belly of IKEA 116
 Post-Pilot 127

CHAPTER 7

City Walking 131
 Phase One..... 131
 Phase Two 145
 Phase Three..... 151
 Phase Four..... 159
 Phase Five..... 162

CHAPTER 8

Conclusion..... 171
 Exploring a Representation of the City 171
 Final Comments 173

References 177

Index 183

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book explores the relationship between thinking and walking, its theory and its practice, in the context of everyday life. I am fortunate enough to be able to share mine with two very special people—my partner, Julie who has always encouraged me to go out and get some fresh air, and my daughter, Olive, a curious little alien, in the presence of whom so much seems strange again.

I would also like to thank my friends and peers in Melbourne and Perth and hope that you enjoy this experiment in creative cultural praxis.

To question the habitual. But that's just it, we're habituated to it. We don't question it, it doesn't question us, it doesn't seem to pose a problem, we live it without thinking, as if it carried within it neither questions nor answers, as if it weren't the bearer of any information. This is no longer even conditioning, it's anaesthesia. We sleep through our lives in a dreamless sleep. But where is our life? Where is our body? Where is our space?

....

To question what seems so much a matter of course that we've forgotten its origins. To rediscover something of the astonishment that Jules Verne or his readers may have felt faced with an apparatus capable of reproducing and transporting sounds. For that astonishment existed along with thousands of others, and it's they which have moulded us.

What we need to question is bricks, concrete, glass, our table manners, our utensils, our tools, the way we spend our time, our rhythms. To question that which seems to have ceased forever to astonish us. We live, true, we breathe, true; we walk, we open doors, we go down staircases, we sit at a table in order to eat, we lie down on a bed in order to sleep. How? Where? When? Why?

—Georges Perec
(‘Approaches to What?’ from “L’Infra-ordinaire,”
in *Species of Space and Other Pieces*, 210.)

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Wandering in the City: A Non-linear Narrative

A close-up image of an ornate bed post which has what looks to be a thick red cord tied around the top, the length of which trails off towards the floor, out of view. In the unfocused background, a woman can be seen straightening the white top sheet of a large bed. We don't know her name and we don't know what her voice sounds like. All we know about her is what we can see on the surface; she is wearing a white shirt and a knee length black skirt. Her hair is tied back so as not to get in the way during work. Perhaps she is wearing her work uniform; the clothes that signify her laborious, routinised identity.

She can still be seen in a long shot taken from down the hallway, stroking the bed to take out any residual creases. She seems to take pride in the task; executing it with care and consideration. Nobody else is around at this time; just her, involved in her labour, and me, an anonymous voyeur. The length of the red cord is now in better view as it shifts curiously on the parquet; tightening as if it were suddenly being pulled from afar.

Outside the entrance to the hotel, just beyond the wrought iron railing, a doorman walks ahead of a giant red ball of wool that is on its way down the stone steps. He extends both his arms to stop the wool from tumbling into the street. He edges it gently onto the grey pathway. At first, the top of a woman's head is all that can be seen of her behind the ball. Though, soon she can be seen in full view once again, as she walks behind her red ball of wool. She is no longer wearing her uniform. Instead, she wears a casual outfit. Dressed in a pastel sleeveless summer dress with her hair down, she casually rolls the ball along the pathway; the giant red mass reaching almost to her shoulders in height.

The woman continues walking towards the tall columns that mark the entrance to the city's Old Post Office; giant stone trees that frame the dark iron gates. On the walkway, the various colours of the flowers displays stand out against the greyness of the concrete jungle and yet they, themselves, are nothing compared to the vibrant red of the wool ball that the woman pushes along—while a single strand leaves a growing trail behind her.

It provides a record of where she has been, much like the trail of white pebbles, and later breadcrumbs, which was left by Hansel and Gretel while the woodcutter's wife led them deeper and deeper into the forest. Florists tend to their stock, a business man walks past with a cup of coffee held in his hand, and pedestrians walk by in the opposite direction. People are going about their business as usual and paying little attention to her as she contin-

ues to push the big red ball slowly by. They are all carrying out their roles; performing various tasks, each one with its own aims, goals, destinations, and measures of productivity. They each possess a direction that sits within the expectations of the central business district. While all these things are happening around the woman, there is no suggestion that she knows where she is going. There is no hint of direction, of intention or of a suggested destination.

As I ponder the woman's apparent incongruence with those people around her, an apparent lack of economic motivations, I see her and turn to face the iron gates. Having decided to push the ball in this direction, I watch as the woman pushes the wool up the stone steps, through the open dark gates and into the building whose shadiness contrasts highly against the brightness of the clear day's sky. She looks up with interest as she enters the building, noticing its wrought iron ornamentation before going all the way inside. A close up of the ever growing line of wool shows that it now extends around the corner of one of the gate, turning sharply around the corner of the form to provide evidence of a sudden change in direction.

The woman can be seen walking alone, still, down a busy city lane way. A man, who brushes up against the ball as he hastily passes, offers a friendly apology, to which she responds with a calm acknowledging nod as if to say "No harm done. Good day to you, too." Having reached the end of the laneway, she turns left along a path. A birds-eye view from the top of the tall stone buildings makes her appear dwarfed below by the sheer scale of the built environment. Either end of the elbowed lane along which she walks, would take us to some unknown place—just another point in the labyrinth of the city she is wandering through. A close-up of the woman finds her looking up to the buildings. Still, she doesn't seem to know where she is going but, rather, it is as if she were being led by the buildings, by the city landscape, by the buildings themselves. Though the woman looks to a narrow stretch of sky shining its light down between the rooftops, she does so from a cultural space that seems to exist beyond the reach of the natural environment. A path of light stretches the length of their enormous silhouettes has the illusion of moving about as her body traverses the space, as her eyes move sporadically, without predetermination, varying their focus amid the capitalist architecture.

The woman looks around under a glass roofed mall, indulging her curiosity. This is what guides her. For a moment, she stands on a street path and turns her head to look in different directions, gauging her location. The low camera angled close-up of her body draws attention to this act of looking in a way that creates a sense of disconnection from her surroundings, despite her continuing navigation through the guts of the city. This absence of ambient details suggests her physical or even personal disorientation, like a little girl lost in the city. In the foreground of another laneway, enclosed and buffered by the height of the factories and warehouse that line it. The slowly shrinking

red ball of wool emphasises, by contrast, the dull and mostly empty surroundings. Two men in the background, wearing grey suits, seem to be in the process of moving an old couch.

The woman is now asking an elderly gentleman in a grey suit for directions. His old age and pleasant demeanour imply that his knowledge of the city has grown over time. He gestures for her to continue down this way and she listens with intent while the woollen ball rests behind them both, in a rare moment of inactivity. Once again, the buildings in the background seem to capture the daylight while blocking out all view of the sky in a way that shows the city to be very much an enclosed space.

It is as if the city is also being framed as one in which mystery dwells—in which you might not only lose your way but, to take it a logical extreme, in which you might never find your way again. You might even get lost and end up somewhere entirely unexpected, that is, if you had any expectations to begin with. Maybe this thought will be distressing. Perhaps this unpredictability is what feeds into the excitement. An awareness of the risks that come with exploring a strange place are often enough to sharpen the senses and widen the eyes; enough to see it start, enough to keep it going. Perhaps this is also an important part of exploring familiar places in unfamiliar ways by leaving oneself open to the possibility of something or nothing happening. By noticing what does. By not dwelling on what doesn't. Only time will tell how the woman's walk will unfold, or where it will end. For, now, the focus has been placed squarely on the journey; on the seemingly aimless and winding path to which she is committed; the path that she creates one step, one solitary moment, after another; marked and measured by a red ball of wool, by the blood line of her journey.

A view of the woman as she strolls between ornate glass chandeliers and past a model spiral staircase and Victorian furniture, gives the adventure an atmosphere that is, perhaps, akin to *Alice in Wonderland*. The woollen ball is now slightly smaller than before. Because of its gradual unravelling, the ball is much easier to manage, though the woman still needs the assistance of strangers to help her lift it up and onto an old wooden tram. Some passengers alight as she prepares to board. A moment of glare caused by the sunlight disrupts the image. The 'flicker' is just enough to dazzle the eyes and add to the surreal, half sleep ambience. The red wool is pulled rapidly as the tram moves off and gathers speed along the tracks. This causes the woollen ball to spin in situ on the carriage floor near to the open doors. This seems to amuse the woman, who smiles while looking down on the action.

Another bird's-eye view finds the woman rolling the red wool down one flight of a triangular staircase. Suddenly, she loses her grip on it and, extending her arms sideways in an attempt to secure her footing in the stairwell, the woollen ball takes off down the remainder of the flight. It bounces down another flight; rolling faster and faster towards the bottom. The chances that she will be able to catch up with it at this stage are remote, to say the least.

Nevertheless, she is visible in the background, running after her trail maker. Watching from the inside of a cafe, in which a man with a white paper bib sits eating his meal at the window, the woollen ball can be seen rolling past outside. The woman is running close behind. A red dress, visible in the shop window across the way, and the line of wine bottles placed neatly along the cafe window sill, signify two things that are abundant in this place of leisure and pleasure.

The ball rolls into the circular cathedral gardens. Water ripples on the curved roof around the perimeter. The central square echoes the shapes that are formed by the numerous pillars around the outside. The sites of decadence are only a short distance away from those places of sanctity. Here, finally, the red ball slows to a stop and she catches up. In retrieving her ball of wool, the woman notices a length of blue wool that is hooked around a wrought iron bench. She looks around as if to seek out the owner but no-one else is in the round garden. The blue wool is a trace of somehow else's meandering and who, going by the colour, is probably a man. Looking at the unfamiliar wool, she tilts her head in an expression of curiosity and, now picking up her ball, begins to follow the strange thread through the stone arches and along a graffitied laneway. The path of the blue wool ends abruptly where it reaches a decorated building wall; appearing as if to disappear straight into it. The mysterious Kings Cross wall at platform 9 and $\frac{3}{4}$ in the Harry Potter movies provides a suitable frame of reference. The blue wall has actually disappeared under the base of a doorway that is difficult to see, having been almost completely camouflaged by the wobbly-lined design that has been painted on the exterior. The woman continues to indulge her curiosity by reaching out her hand, taking hold of the door handle, and opening it. Then she steps inside.

The woman has entered a long and empty corridor, comprising entirely of stone arches. Along this hallway, and extending far into the distance, is the blue woollen thread. She continues to follow it in order to find out where its owner is going, where he has gone, who he is. Along the way, the blue wool can be seen resting along the top edge of a leather sofa. She runs her fingers beneath it as she passes, without stopping, before walking up a narrow spiral staircase at the end of the corridor. Once more, we are being led closer and closer to an indeterminable destination, if such a thing exists at all.

Having climbed to the top of the staircase the woman reaches another doorway. This one leads her outdoors and onto a clearing on what appears to be the roof of the building, if not and patio adjacent to one of the upper floors. A number of lush green plants line the patio's stone border. From here, a person is able to look out and over to the town clock that, although it once dominated the skyline, is now just another building amid an ever growing forest of sky scraping apartments and ant's nest office blocks; each one complete with its very own human colony, its idiosyncratic social organisation and associated hierarchy. Yet, here she is, apart from all of that; standing at the edge of the rooftop, right next to a large blue ball of wool.

Only two or three metres away, a man in a brown jacket is leaning against the wall. Having been peering down onto the city street, at first he has his back to the woman but soon stands up straight as he turns around to see who is there. He appears to be a little unsure of what to do next but is not visibly perturbed by her presence. She looks at him with a friendly expression, without a word, and still holding the ball of red wool in her left arm. Although it once almost equalled her in height, its constant unravelling that meant that the woollen ball is now the size of a round party balloon. The man continues to stand there as well, watching her watching him, returning the unthreatening gaze before gesturing a gentle and understanding nod with a gentle bite of his lip. It seems not so much that they know each other but, rather, that soon they will.

An orange length of wool extends from left to right, as does a pink length beneath it. The furry fibres catch the sunlight to illuminate the outside of the cord. Reaching between the foreground and the distance are four thick woollen threads—green, blue, orange, and yellow. Lying still along the cobble stones, their origin is as much of a mystery as their destination. One limit is indistinguishable from the other. An old white Roll Royce drives across the background.

Two tall plain walls create a narrow walkway. Almost a dozen threads of thick wool are strung along it. They are all of different colours and overlap each other in various places. In the same way that the red strand of wool has traced the path of the woman and in the same way that the blue strand of wool has traced the path of the man, these other strands of wool are meant to represent the paths of other people who have walked around the city space. Each strand is a record of human movement through an environment made from concrete, steel, and glass; the passage of the organic through the inorganic. They are the randomly crossing trails of strangers whose origins and destinations, to the viewer, are also invisible; indeterminable. The journey takes place in the midst of things; it takes us along the course of a nonlinear narrative.

A bug's eye view of a tree lined park also contains the various strands of coloured wool. Some litter the leafy lawn while others have been woven between and around the trees ahead. People's paths can cross each day without them ever knowing who has gone before them or who is yet to arrive. The city is alive with the experiences of its inhabitants. They make it what it is. As individual lives come and go, new threads add to the multitude of desires, interests, adventures, and interactions that are woven into an ever evolving cultural fabric. This fabric is represented as creative, relaxed and welcoming, suggesting that it's easy to weave yourself into the city. "It's easy to lose yourself in Melbourne."¹

¹ Tourism Victoria Video Room, "Lose Yourself in Melbourne," Accessed July 10, 2010, <http://www.visitvictoria.com/videostub/4F2E7E78-A361-4753-AE5E130F515F1201.cfm>

Lose Yourself in Melbourne

When I first saw the *Lose Yourself in Melbourne* advertisement, I was living in Western Australia, sitting in front of the television and being lazy in the afternoon. Not really paying attention to which program was being shown, instead, I was indulging in speculation as to what I was doing with my life, where I thought it was going, wishing that there was something exciting to do that might adequately distract me from the banalities of everyday that prompted me to lump myself on the couch in the first place. By all accounts, life was fine, but the sudden flicker of the television screen to an advertisement about Melbourne, a city that I had been to a couple of times on holiday, caught my eye. Little did I know then that something so seemingly simple and unassuming as a tourism promotion would lead me and my wife to take a turn at the fork in the road, packing up all our belongings, selling what we no longer needed in a monster of a garage sale, and moving to the other side of the country. Little did we know that the woman and her ball of wall would be like the seed of doubt that makes you wonder whether you're on the right path, getting the best opportunities, living life to the full. On each subsequent time that I noticed the advertisement, I gave an increasing amount of attention to the representations, assumptions, and meanings it contained.

Offering the viewer a nonlinear city-based narrative, the advertisement invites the viewer along on a seemingly aimless walk—a carefree and creative experience, which entails using the city not as a place of work or product consumption, but rather as a space of creativity. The advertisement invites the viewer into a space of potential, of adventure, and play.

This prospect might seem peculiar for those of us who are used to thinking about the city as a focal point of industrialised labour. Notions of the city have often conjured up imaginings of utilitarian hovels—the countless same-same apartments that compartmentalise the lives of the people who inhabit them (names including Walter Gropius and Le Corbusier might spring to mind). Maybe we will think of the CBD—the central business district and understand that the city is where money is made, lost, exchanged; that this built environment represents the height of productivity in the late modern age—the age in which industrialisation is no longer a brave new venture but an established part of everyday thinking and action.

The city is filled with cafes and shops. Even during a rare 2am city walk, on a Thursday morning, I have been surprised to see literally hundreds of people going about their business; chatting with friends, waiting for taxis, wandering in and out of all-night establishments. In this day and age, in which the notion of a city that never sleeps is not alien to us, the city still has the capacity to surprise us with its energy; its neon eyes blinking and watching the bodies littering the streets, like the industrialised cells of a creature writhing 24/7.

Certainly from day to day, the city is that place where you might go when you want to meet friends for lunch or enjoy a social drink. The city is where you might go to work during the day or night, or both. The city is where you might see a movie, or buy a new book, an exhibition or performance, a busker in the mall, where your path might cross that of a talkative stranger. Cities harbour the spectacle, the novel and enjoyable—the countless possible activities; at least, that is the promise of the city. What these activities are, from person to person, is anyone’s guess. Nevertheless, they all embody our motivations to pursue our interests, to meet deadlines, to pick up a last-minute bargain; they are the everyday tasks that find us acting in certain pre-established ways; they occupy the familiar paths that we take via public or private transport, or on foot. They comprise our habits and routines, our claims to a common cultural sensibility.

While the endless movement of the city shows it to be a place of many motivations and meanings, the *Lose Yourself in Melbourne* advertisement asks the viewer forget about all of these familiar patterns with which they might experience the city, such as where they involve our engagement in shopping or working. It invites the viewer, you and me, to let down our guard; to loosen up by letting go of preconceived, city-based goals. It wants us to sweep aside all of these conceivably routine or boring things. It invites us, instead, to simply ‘make it all up’ as we go along. When I first saw this advertisement, it was as if it was asking: “Why get so consumed in all of the routine? The city is your build environment, of course. But why not use it also for playing in? Why not embrace your opportunity to improvise everyday life? Quite literally, this is a chance to think on your feet. Take the shops, offices and street, and turn them into your playground.”

Because of the high value that I place on creativity, the reminder that city-life itself could be our most vital work of art led me to consider my own routines, my preconceptions, my experience of this built environment or, to put it in another way, all those things that help make up my cultural subjectivity. It led me to consider how I might challenge these things that I so easily, it would seem, take for granted as being normal, natural, or inevitable. I got the impression that the viewer was being invited to explore a built environment, one that I understood as epitomising the daily grind (a commuter-congested sinus, sneezing globs of office politics, gossiped around water fountains that offers some ludicrous reference to gardens throughout the ages, or the minutia of management meetings being masticated by the minutes). Yet, in the *Lose Yourself in Melbourne* advertisement, the world of such dull things seems far, far-away. In this particular case, Melbourne provides the viewer with a focal point—a metonym, that ‘part’ which stands in for the ‘whole.’ This city is represented as being much more than the sum of its parts. Not only the home of the central business district and the centre of consumerism, it is also being depicted as a site for singular adventures—the kinds of escapism that can be enjoyed during a lunch break. You can work in the city, but also, as

might a child who has been let out for recess, you are free to play a solitary game of mystery and intrigue—a game that takes place in the labyrinth of the built environment; in the body of a sophisticated modern machine.

Approaching it, now, not from the perspective of what is seen, but rather from the perspective of what is heard, the advertisement's soundtrack features Joanna Newsom. We can hear Joanna playing her harp while she, with her distinctly childlike voice, sings a song about the "sprout and the bean," about sleeping "all day," about "a golden ring," "a twisted string," about going "outside," about "the hollow chatter of the talking of the tadpoles."² Each lyrical fragment conjures a precarious avant-garde fantasy world that is conducive to the modernist backdrop; an ambience of playfulness and non-seriousness, of attention being made to the small observations that take place within the bigger picture of the game. These lyrics feed back into the overall message of the advertisement by giving voice to the ideas to which the advertisement's imagery also alludes.

Because the advertisement promotes a particular notion of the city space, we can also say that it privileges a particular ideology—a coherent system of ideas, values and beliefs that shapes our interpretations of the world. In general, ideology gives us a framework for how we interpret what takes place around us. Here, and to the extent that the *Lose Yourself in Melbourne* advertisement was commissioned by Tourism Victoria, the viewer bears witness to an ideology that has been given government approval.

It is commonplace to experience ideology being transmitted into our lounge rooms at the easy flick of a button. This is precisely what happens each time we turn on the television set, listen to the radio, a song or DVD. Current affairs programs, comedies, cartoons, animated films for children, nature documentaries; they all contain words and pictures that are packed full of meaning. Sometimes these meanings, value, and ideas reflect our own; sometimes they do not. I can't remember when the Christian Television Association stopped broadcasting "Hello my God" ads³; perhaps around the same time that the mass media became more invested in promoting its commitment to a multi-cultural Australia, or at least more invested in creating this impression. But seeing this ad after arriving home from primary school, following a weekly afternoon of religious instruction, was a prime example of my own exposure to ideological messages being disseminated by the mass media. It marked the first time that I became curious about the messages that I was, often unwittingly, inviting into my private space.

Advertising is well invested in the business of ideology. It relies wholeheartedly on the mass media's capacity for reaching the ears, eyes, and minds of diverse populations and geographical locations. Advertising is able to capi-

² J. Newsom, "Sprout and the Bean," [song] from *The Milk-Eyed Mender* (Chicago: Drag City Records, 2004).

³ The CTA advertisements can be viewed on Youtube.

talise on the sophisticated virtual and telecommunications networks that our modern world affords us with apparent ease, in order to circulate beliefs, values and assumptions with increasing efficiency and financial viability. One advertisement may try to convince us that its central focus, a cleaning product, will solve all of our problems when it comes to making those shower screens as clear as clear can be. It might claim to have the answer to our problem—one that we didn't know we even had prior to switching on the television. Another advertisement will try to tempt us with the steaming hot and spicy aroma of a barbecued chicken, complete with extra oily fries and a sugary drink.

Advertising tries to convince the viewer that it has what he or she needs—that its solutions are ideal as his or her solutions. It presumes that what it has to tell the viewer is what he or she needs or wants to know, to hear, and to think about while each of us go about our everyday life. We don't have to agree with what we are being told, but there is always scope to do so. It all depends on what we desire in the world, what we aspire to, as well as what we wish for ourselves to be. It depends upon how committed we are to these promoted assumptions 'made personal.' In the instance of watching an advertisement that depicts a lady wandering around the city with a massive ball of red wool, once again we are still being offered a package containing certain carefully chosen ideas, beliefs and observations. Once again, we are being guided around an 'imagining' of the world, just as we might, elsewhere, find ourselves being guided around a shopping catalogue or a dine-in menu at a fancy restaurant of our choice. Just like the catalogue or menu, we are still being offered a product except that, here, the product is an ideal the producer of ideals is not a restaurant, a clothing outlet, or a fast food joint; it is a government funded agency. Driving the *Lose Yourself in Melbourne* campaign, Tourism Victoria also shows itself to be in the business of establishing and disseminating ideological ideas—ways of thinking about, making sense of, the built environment. The advertisement is proof of Tourism Victoria's push to implant these ideas into the lounge rooms of an Australian viewing audience. In this sense, Tourism Australia is also a socialising agency because it encourages viewers to adopt, maintain, and even communicate to each other, certain notions and meanings pertaining to the city space.

A socialising agency can be a church or a school, it can comprise of mentors, friends and family. What these elements have in common is their capacity to learn cultural ideas and ideals, as well as to teach them. The notion of a socialising agency is relevant to, using Peter Brooker's words, any "assembly of individuals held together by an AESTHETIC and political IDEOLOGY, CLASS position and..., quite markedly, by personal friendship, marriage or partnership and a shared 'social conscience'."⁴ Such social formations are socialising agencies to the extent that they encourage certain be-

⁴ P. Brooker, *Glossary of Cultural Theory*, 2nd ed. (London: Hodder Arnold, 2003), 105.

haviours that are deemed acceptable in view of that shared conscience, and discouraging of those behaviours that are conceived to be in ‘opposition to’ or ‘at odds with’ it. No doubt holding its own kind of social conscience, one that upholds a tourist aesthetic of planetary exploration, the exotic ‘other,’ romantic travel narratives at the centre of which the potential tourist is encouraged to imagine his or her self, while rendering all incongruent aspects of the host environment invisible. The primary goal of Tourism Victoria, in its role as a socialising agency, is to play this game of allure and retreat in a way that encourages the public to think about the city—Melbourne—in a particular, pre-designed way. We can take it as a given that the ideals on in the offer, in *Lose Yourself in Melbourne* campaign, further justify this agency’s position in the broader cultural environment.

As Nietzsche so eloquently put it, “what convinces is not necessarily true—it is merely convincing.”⁵ Thus, we may take all that we see in the mass media with a pinch of salt. As the public becomes more and more media savvy, the viewer is much less likely to accept whatever messages they are exposed to at face value. If digging beneath the surface of an advertisement is the easiest way to interrogate it, the extent to which an advertisement’s ideology is accepted, digested, even pursued, is dependent upon the extent to which its content is seen as being logically coherent. In other words, for the advertisement to have any success at all it must place preferred features and characteristics of the city in the foreground, whilst omitting or obscuring our view of those which might otherwise prove to undermine its claims, those preferences. In short, the advertisement shows a woman wandering around by herself, in strange and uninhabited alleyways, minus whatever conceivably physical and/or moral dirt a viewer might expect them to harbour on a day to day basis.

This is the game of allure and retreat of which I have made mention. The advertisement shows the lone and self-losing woman very safely exploring the lesser seen corners of the city, turning this way and that without as much as a care for her direction or for her safety. Is she about to step into a makeshift brothel or X-rated peep show venue, stumble over a homeless person who’s simply trying to stay warm beside a cathedral stairwell? Is the woman with the red wool mere moments away from treading on a used intravenous needle? Will she soon get her purse stolen by a drug addict who’s trying desperately to raise enough money for another fix? Will the female wanderer be unfortunate enough to witness a desperate individual jump in front of a moving tram or train, or to smell the acrid stench of horse urine along a southern section of Swanston Street? Will she join other tourists, perhaps even some locals, in gaining pleasure from a ride in a city-based horse and cart, like some kind of pseudo-royalty on parade with their equine slaves? Will she bear witness to an old lady who, after an afternoon spent limping

⁵ F. Nietzsche, *The Will To Power*, Preface (Nov. 1887-March 1888).

along uneven pathways, now faces a fine of \$165 for travelling without a valid ticket?

We may rest assured that the answer to all of these hypothetical questions is “no.” It is highly unlikely that the woman in the advertisement is going to encounter images of homelessness, crime, pollution, looks of frustration that follow news of late or cancelled trams and trains, or car accidents. It is unlikely that the advertisement will make any mention of redundancies or any other symptoms of economic crisis. We can say this with confidence because such things would only expose the limits of the ideal, test it, challenge it, undermined its claims to logical coherence. Such anomalies are sequestered from the advertisement. They are the aspects of city life that remains beyond the limits of the expectations and experiences that are dominant in this society. They are displaced by the ideal; they are pushed into silence and obscurity, beyond the frame of the televised picture.

Tourism is big business; there is no funding allocation for the accidental and the unintentional; there is no scope for unmanaged risks, for disruptive ‘unknowns’, which is quite ironic given the style of stroll in which the woman with the red wool is engrossed. We can put money on the fact that what we are shown will have been re-approved and sanitised long before it was ever going to reach our eyeballs, our eardrums, and our meaning making minds. Because we can feel confident that the woman will not accidentally and unintentionally bump into adversity during the advertisement’s 90 second presence, we remain focussed in the frame of her mysterious adventure. What we experience, then, is the product of careful filtering—pure idealism.

In summary, the general trend for advertising tells us about the conditions behind the *Lose Yourself in Melbourne* campaign. Advertisements take up valuable broadcasting time. The success of its ideological message is dependent upon that message maintaining logical coherence at all times—its ability to privilege one point of view over other possibilities by leaving out or silencing those aspects considered contrary to the ideal. Thus, while an advertisement might hope to ‘wow’ us with what is present, with that which appears in front of the viewer, this is no reason to keep from thinking about what might lie beyond it, behind it. It is valuable to consider what is being silenced, omitted, of simply taken for granted so that a richer understanding of what is present may be appreciated—to make further sense for what is being communicated to an audience.

In order to put an advertisement to task we need to dig deeper than the depth provided. It is useful for the viewer to reach beyond the 2-dimensionality of the television screen and into the 3-dimensionality of the social circumstances from which it has emerged and which continue to provide it with a vital frame of reference. But this cannot be done from the comfort of the lounge room sofa. It cannot be done with the air of passivity with which tele-visual content can be so conveniently consumed. At its very core, putting the *Lose Yourself in Melbourne* advertisement to task requires the

movement of arms and legs; it requires the viewer to physically, intellectually, as well as emotionally reach beyond the frame of the televised picture—to pursue an active and critical engagement in that broader cultural context. Making sense of what is given means stepping outside and accessing relevant and tangible points of reference—those occupying not a virtual but a material reality—and trying to finding out where they have come from.

Self and Society

If a key to enriching our understanding of what is present is peering behind it, into it, then it stands to reason that each moment of cultural experience can be enriched through an understanding of its historical context, that past from which the present moment always extends. That is why we can read the *Lose Yourself in Melbourne* in two ways. First, we can say that it depicts a person's experience of the city, in the moment, perhaps in a lunchbreak or during a holiday period; here, we can say that the advertisement privileges the dynamic relationship between the self and a very modern society. Consequently, we may also say that, by concentrating on a person's walk around the streets and buildings that comprise the city, around this particular kind of build environment, it always depicts that person's relationship to history. Even though the advertisement prioritises a fixed focussed on the immediate present, it cannot escape the fact the past that has led to whatever is taking place 'now.' Making further sense of the *Lose Yourself in Melbourne* advertisement means looking into the setting of its non-linear narrative—taking the time to consider the historical circumstances and the cultural conditions of a modern society.

A modern society is a peculiar state of affairs, driven by myriad technological advancements in relation to which it organises and reorganises itself in increasingly sophisticated and efficient ways. This society is also a privileged minority world in which people talk quietly, passionately, and aggressively into small plastic boxes on the trams, the trains, or even when a cashier is trying to tell them their fee but can't get a word in edgeways because a more important conversation is taking place between the customer and his or her plastic box. These people tend to consume too much sugar, caffeine, and fizzy drinks. They sit in front of glowing, flashing rectangles, push their fingers against small plastic squares, and alternate between watching their fingers and watching the shapes that keep appearing on the rectangle. Sometimes, their fingers will stop and they'll just sit there and stare at the glowing rectangle, perhaps muttering to their self in the process. Perhaps they will sit inside their built environments all day and, at five o'clock in the afternoon, will walk down to the front door and say to another person, standing down there, "What has the weather been like today."

If we think that these people are quite peculiar, it might be surprising to consider that we are these people. Most of the global population doesn't live

like we do—in the modern West. And despite how unusual we are, we might still walk around each day without mindfulness of this observation—as if our activities were not simply second nature, but rather nature itself. But ours are not natural, normal, or inevitable sets of circumstances. Rather, they might seem to be so after a while, once we become accustomed to them, once they become our customs, our culture, our routines and habits—once they become our common-sense.

In this sense, the social world can be investigated in terms of its constructedness—in terms of the way that ideas, values, memories, desires, institutions, relationships, to mention just a few considerations, comprise our lives—then the process of delving into history is valuable. We can look search history in the hope of seeing this idea in practice, and as a strategy for enriching cultural experience today. Because, in order to get to the stage where things seem like second nature, we have to do them a lot; the more we do them, the less we need to think about them; making and coffee or getting to work, or conducting our manual labours, these practices and processes become our routines and habits. The more habitual our behaviour, the less critical we are of it.

But, you might ask, isn't this what makes modernity great, that we can evolve our efficiencies and economies, making what we have better and better? The answer is yes, if the aim is to improve the efficacy of our habits—when we conceive of sustainability as a form of growth. But this kind of growth sees scope for improvement only in the way things are, rather than in the interrogation and revision of those very behavioural foundations. The foundation of everyday life is taken for granted. Perhaps it is an accident of birth that has led us to invest ourselves intellectually and emotional, materially, in a modern society. Maybe there was something about it that attract us from elsewhere, like a mosquito lured into the realm of a luminous zapper, or a tiny fish that has become transfixed by the glowing lure that hangs in front of an angler fish's gaping, toothed void.

Just like the city environment, our customs are also constructed. By recognising this, and by taking stock of the constructedness of our cultural circumstances, of our modern life, it becomes possible for us to reach beyond what is given and into its motivations—achieving alternative levels of meaning. Perhaps by wandering around the city, by having a creative look around, the woman in the *Lose Yourself in Melbourne* advertisement is partaking in a seemingly aimless stroll that offers an analogy for how a person might also 'make strange' his or her own cultural circumstances. To stroll aimlessly around the city might well be the same thing as strolling aimlessly around the cultivated self.

Thus, when I make mention of a cultural strategy, I am always thinking that this is best when it is also a critical strategy, because accessing new kinds of cultural meaning means the opportunity to apply them to our lives, today. By reaching into the guts of our cultural assumptions about what is normal,

natural, or inevitable, we can proceed to make them seem strange again; the preciousness of our culture disintegrates and we begin to develop new ways of seeing and, essentially, this is what this book is about. The modern mindset is one in which society is accustomed to believing in the promise of the machine; since the enlightenment period there has been a tremendous redirection of faith in the power of the human mind to reason and rationalise—to improve life through humankind’s own efforts.

The process of actively shaking up the habits of everyday life, of challenging the spaces in which they take place, becomes a means to enriching cultural experience. When things become habitual, taken for granted, the shock of the new grows dull; seems increasingly ordinary, even passé. To make culture strange is to appreciate it in a new way, in a critical way, but also in a personal way, a culturally subjective way. Not only may we view the *Lose Yourself in Melbourne* advertisement and dig deep into its historical context, we may do so for the express purpose of applying the spoils of this task to our own lives. This appeal to a material reality becomes a challenge to the ideological content that the advertisement communicates, which further helps us to sort through its meanings (so as to better formulate our own), its implications, and its expectations (reasonable or otherwise).

This is why it is of the utmost importance to make clear that this project of engaging critically with culture is unique. It stems from a body in the world that can be no other body than me. This tells us two things about the narrative to come: 1. it is auto-ethnographic in nature, meaning that I shall be using personal experience as primary data, as a process as well as a product; 2. it includes historical and theoretical ‘anchors’ that ground my cultural subjectivity. This enables me to address the relationship between self and society in a very practical and communicable way. Recognising the self as a cultural being, recognising myself as my most immediately accessible cultural being, is very convenient. However, auto-ethnography always runs the risk of descending into narcissism when it overemphasises the self and starts to forget about society. My dedication to avoiding this risk is precisely why this book is divided into two halves, the first laying out the cultural and historical anchors, and the second documenting my response to these as I put them into practice.

By keeping historical and theoretical anchors clearly in sight, those which inform my own negotiation of this theoretical and practical cultural exploration, I aim to capitalise on the value of personal experience. This is especially so due to the notion of the ‘self’ that I have in mind; any self (or, to play on Rand’s terms, any *ego*⁶) that would like to engage more critically with his or her day to day experience. The fact that I possess a late modern sense of self is accidental; my more general understanding is that the self to be a

⁶ A. Rand, “The Soul of an Individualist,” *For the New Intellectual: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand* (New York: Signet; First Thus edition, 1963), 81.

thinking entity that negotiates intellectual, material, and emotional realities, often in complex ways. So, of course, this book can only be about a trajectory of making something out of this circumstances; this cultural dimension of everyday life. On that level, it is less my own cultural circumstances that it is my method of engagement—one that can be applied elsewhere, by other people.

It's needless to be put off by my mention of a 'cultural' self. It's fair to say that our lives are entirely cultural, that culture is not just about elite practices like theatre and gallery going, cheap recordings of Baroque classics, violin sonatas and partitas, cello suites. We take part in culture each time we get out of bed and get our breakfast out of the cereal box, or brush our teeth with coloured plastic devices that taste so much better when they're minty. Culture is there when we interact with one another, in the hopes and dreams and the memories held by each of us. We all have something to gain from learning about it. My conceptualisation of the self is directed towards inclusion and not exclusion. We are in culture together for, as Nicholas Mirzoeff confirms, "there is no outside to culture."⁷

If 'going on' in the world is always contextualised by a condition of 'interiority'—of always being 'inside' culture—it's no wonder that cultural mindfulness is also a kind of self-consciousness; developing an understanding of our build environments always takes place through personal eyes. This is fine, for in our reflection upon the ideals of modernism, we know that once such dream was the dream of objectivism and several decades have gone by since we realised that this was unreasonable. How can we claim that god is dead and then attempt to take a godlike stance, for surely this becomes a deathlike stance, peering into the crevasse of our own creative potential?

In addressing the dynamism between the self and one's society, it is necessary to take some clues from the pasts from which we extend, which through our pictures, literatures, and other forms of representation, have managed to draw out a few moments more. This means discussing a strategy that has been used to engage critically in everyday life in the built environment, namely the city. The city is an ideal setting for this discussion in that so far as it is a paradigm of modernity. To reflect upon the material and ideological consequences of modernity (this being a feature of the late modernist mindset) is to engage critically with the past and to do so in a way that can enrich day to day life today.

A major conceptual thread running through this book is the idea that the routines, the rituals, the traditions, and the habits that we *follow* often foster feelings of safety, security, well-being, contentment, even happiness in us. But my response to this idea is to state my belief that these 'knowns' come at a great cost by comprising a significance hindrance to self-growth. Having

⁷ N. Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 23.