

COMMUNICATING THE INCOMMUNICABLE

UNDERSTANDING PUBLIC SPACE THROUGH CREATIVE  
METHOD / VISUALISATION OF MEMORY, PERCEPTION  
AND IMAGINATION



NATHAN PAULETTO / MILICA MUMINOVIC

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*Communicating The Incommunicable* was produced as part of the research project conducted by Nathan Pauletto for his Honours Thesis (Bachelor of Arts in Architecture) under the supervision of Dr. Milica Muminović at the University of Canberra, who supported this project through a research grant.

This publication features the visualisations of data, and process involved in producing this thesis. It brings together both individual and collective responses to a public site, chosen on Northbourne Avenue. The honours student, Nathan Pauletto, wishes to give his sincere thanks to his supervisor Milica Muminović for all of her support, encouragement, guidance and mentorship over this last year.

The material presented was produced from fieldwork undertaken as part of the *You Are Here Festival* in Canberra, April 2016. My thanks to Patrick Stein and Adelin Chin for inviting me to participate in this festival as both an installation artist and researcher, and thank you to all those who participated. In the months following this festival, this data has been visualised and compiled.

Alongside this publication the body of work presented here has been shown at the Design Canberra Festival 2016, my thanks and gratitude to the Design Canberra Team (Julian Hobba) for allowing myself to participate in this wonderful event and exhibit my work. Thank you also to Ann Cleary for giving her time and thoughtful consideration in assessing this body of work.

Lastly I wish to express my gratitude to the University of Canberra for providing me the grounds and environment within which to undertake this research project.

CANBERRA / NOVEMBER 2016



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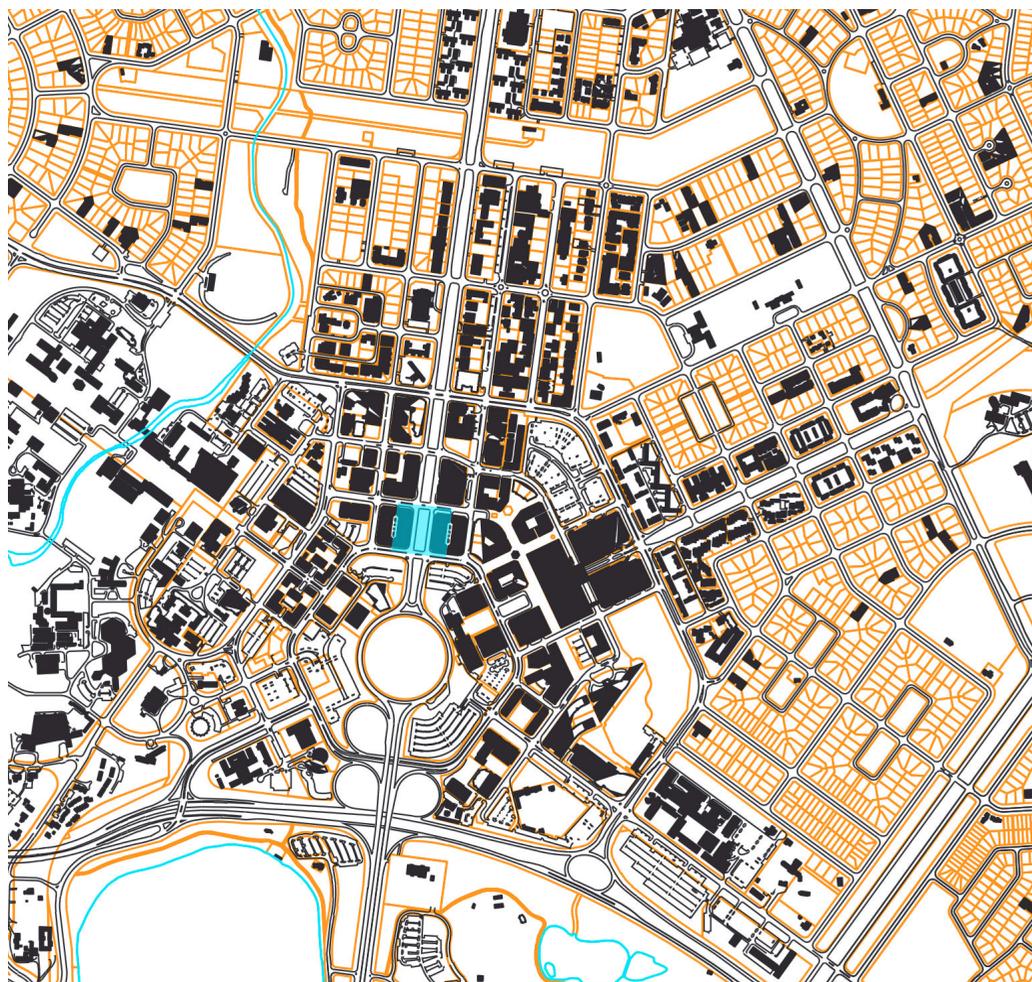
HONOURS THESIS: UNIVERSITY OF CANBERRA

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# INTRODUCTION

## CRAFTING A PROJECT



Northbourne Avenue + Canberra Surrounds  
(Created from multiple combined map files from The University of Canberra)

This booklet, *Communicating The Incommunicable*, presents the research project developed by Nathan Pauletto and Dr. Milica Muminovic following a study tour of Tokyo, Japan, in June 2015 (led by Dr. Milica Muminovic in partnership with Keio University and co+labo). The focus of that study was to follow the method of *Dérive*, a Situationist International practice focused upon observing space (public space) as inseparable from experience<sup>1</sup>. The aim of this work was to explore and map six distinct districts in Tokyo under the title 'Ordinary / Extraordinary', which culminated in an exhibition at the Design Festa Gallery in Harajuku, Tokyo<sup>2</sup>.

This has inspired the current research project by posing the question, 'How can this study be conducted in Canberra?' and if so, through what means? Some background to this reasoning was the researcher's own desire to craft a project based around a real environment and circumstances. One of the contended and contested development projects in Canberra, the current Light Rail Project proposal for Northbourne Avenue, raises the question of role, character and quality of public spaces in our everyday life. Northbourne Avenue presented itself as grounds for a laboratory: an urban container. Within this container was the focus of the study - public space and public life.

The following project has been whittled down to the topic of developing a method to inform such an inquiry. As will be unpacked in the following pages, many challenges and countless questions followed this initial framework as it was necessary to hone a question capable of being answered within the course of a one year honours project, completed on the 5th of November at the University of Canberra.

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1. Sadler, S. 1998 *The Situationist City*, MIT Press, Cambridge - Sadler's writing on psychogeography was the basis of the *Dérive* Project.
  2. To find out more and see the *Dérive* project go to [derivetokyo.tumblr.com](http://derivetokyo.tumblr.com).

# RESEARCH PROJECT

ABSTRACT / THESIS

The design of good public space contributes to liveable places, healthier lifestyles and sustainable cities (Carmona et al., 2010). Good quality public spaces usually possess qualities that are experienced as beautiful, comfortable, elegant, sublime; complex phenomena. However, these experiences are deeply subjective and thus difficult to define and measure (Radovic, 2014). To study the quality of public spaces is to study these perceptions and experiences of public space as determined by the people who use them. Although analysis and measurement of public spaces occur, many of the traditional methods that are currently used fail to capture this complexity. Increasingly it is understood that creative methods, which are inherently complex, may offer a solution to capture this complexity.

As a city, Canberra offers a variety of public spaces currently under development which provide the opportunity for such an analysis. In order to develop these spaces the analysis of the quality of space must first take place for improvement to occur. Transport is the main driver for development of public space, specifically the proposed Light Rail Development along Northbourne Avenue in the Civic precinct. Historically and up to present day, this Garden City has been designed around the scale of the car, and only in recent years has this perspective begun to shift to be centered around design for humans.

## *Understanding the City – A Broader Context*

From the 19th century there has been contention with the idea of using design analysis that relates to one fixed place (Law, 1985). Lefebvre identified that many traditional sciences are unable to provide this analysis as they inherently simplify a complex reality in order to comprehend it (Lefebvre 1996). To realise why these traditional sciences are unable to capture this complexity it must first be understood the complexity of what they are trying to capture; phenomena. Husserl argues that it is in the nature of phenomena to be first experienced while at once trying to explain it (Mumford, 2003). If an experience also occurs through fragments and humans are the ones to perceive an experience, it is therefore the overlapping of these multiple perceptions that provide one total perspective. Pallasmaa similarly recognizes the nature of these sciences to fragment and simplify an analysis, as an experience can only occur through fragments (Holl, et al., 2006).

Finding one whole view of the city and attempting to define this as reality is impossible due to its complexity and the subjective nature of experiencing reality, as stated by Alfred Schultz, 'the human world comprises various provinces of meaning' (Mumford, 2003). The question is if individual subjectivities (fragments of perception) can be overlaid to provide this gap of understanding. Ghel found that his research (a mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods) provided statistics rather than assumptions about public life and public space. This allows for public space to be seen and measured within a larger context (Radovic 2014). As Ghel states, this eliminates assumptions, however this data seen independently is just another fragmented view that tries to simplify a complex situation. This again brings us back to the concept of multiple fragments describing the complexity of a city.

Analysing the link between multiple subjective perceptions (fragments) and the environment these perceptions occur in is a way to understand the complexity of public space, and can therefore offer a method to measure the quality of this space. Norberg-Schulz explains that 'our everyday life-world consists [not only] of concrete 'phenomena' such as plants, animals and other tangible 'phenomena', but also of 'intangible phenomena' such as feelings' (Norberg-Schulz, 1984). When all of this is considered in an environment, it is called a place. A successful public space can be measured through quantitative and qualitative means (Larice, 2013), but this alone cannot measure the quality of the space. Svare explains this idea in practical terms, that people's use of the city has become overlooked; instead it is abstract concepts, large structures and traffic challenges that have come to dominate urban planning (Radovic et al., 2014). This is the debate between well established qualitative and quantitative methods and new emerging design thinking as part of analytical process used to capture the complexity of a city. Law states that a combination of methods used in this way has the ability to effectively capture this complexity (Law, 1985). This is what Geertz refers to as 'thick data', data that is imbued with not only facts but with commentary and interpretation, and subsequently the further interpretation of those comments and interpretations (Geertz, 1973). A creative process can find itself between methods of traditional research to achieve a 'thick description' of rich, meaningful data. As 'the city' is hugely complex, a simple description cannot hope to work if what is being described is incoherent, messy and complex (Law, 1985).

## *Phenomena, the Complexity of the City*

To study the quality of public space is to study the experiences and perceptions occurring in that space. These subjective experiences and perceptions are known, according to Kant, as phenomena (Kant, 1894). To the level of fine grain (the most detail), this comes to the very experience of the individual in a space, whether isolated or otherwise, giving the definition of place. Here Norberg-Schulz offers a way to study these real phenomena, both tangible and intangible. He describes it as a 'return to things' as opposed to abstractions and mental constructions (Larice, 2013).

Phenomenology comes to explore and highlight these everyday experiences of an individual's life (Seamon, 2000), which by nature are subjective and provide an intuitive description of the world. This is also explained by Alfred Schultz as, 'human situations, events, meanings and experiences as they spontaneously occur in the course of daily life' (Mumford, 2003). Phenomenology can be described as 'the interpretive study of human experience' (Seamon, 2000).

Based on this philosophical view, Heidegger develops one of the most important definitions of place (Casey, 1997). The very being is linked to the space and exists only in its relationship through 'being-in-the-world' (Heidegger, 1971). Therefore, not only is the data itself an interpretation, but also this is then interpreted doubly by the researcher. It is the hope that these observations and interpretations in time will come to inform more general qualities and characteristics of everyday-life (Seamon, 2000).

Architecture is both a way to locate oneself in a city and space, and to inhabit/live/reside within a

city (Johnson, 2002). It is our ability to order our environment using memory and imagination that allows people to have an awareness and perception of public space (MacKeith ed., 2006). As Pallasmaa states, 'Perception, memory and imagination are in constant interaction; the domain of the presence fuses images of memory and fantasy' (Pallasmaa, 2012). Thus, every experience is also a creative process.

Phenomena are not just the description or personal perceptions of space; they exist in between the physical environment and the perception. As Heidegger states it is the construction of place that gives 'being' to space (Larice, 2013), and as defined above it is people who through perception of phenomena make this construction. Observing and analyzing people's use of the city allows the identification of the meaningful qualities of space, which aids in the creation of good public spaces. Having the opportunity to observe people in a city or space by seeing and hearing them provides valuable data both in the general social environment and an insight into the specific people who use a space (Gehl, 1987). Through Heidegger's idea of dwelling we can develop the possibility to capture the complexity of public space

### ***How to Measure / Non Measurables and Intangibles***

To this date there is immense research on quantitative and qualitative analysis of public spaces, however there is lack of research on public spaces as complex phenomena. Knowledge honed through creative practice is still a relatively new field, but is seen as a way to bridge this gap. It is in the subtleties that this subjective form of knowledge comes to exist. 'Subtleties can come to form some of the most precious, beautiful and fragile elements of urban [space]' (Radovic, 2014) as stated by Radovic. He confirms the ability of creative practice to capture complexity without simplifying it. Art and Architectural work is not initially understood through a conceptual or intellectual discourse, it comes through an experience of encounter in an environment by one person (Pallasmaa, 2012). Part of the problem is how to capture this experience whilst at once experiencing it.

In asking the question 'how to measure', we are faced with the reality of finding ourselves in the gap between what is *decipherable* and what is *incommunicable* (Radovic, 2014). Traditional research in the past has sought to analyse this phenomena, but through isolating what is being studied, only a simple interpretation can be gained (Fishwick et al., 2006). In Fishwick's study of analyzing recreation places she notes that critics such as Heidegger argue that the use of quantitative measurements are also too divorced from everyday life and therefore become meaningless (Fishwick et al., 2006).

*It is the ability to feel, but lack of knowledge (whether through the medium of language or otherwise) on how to describe and communicate a felt experience (phenomena)* (Radovic, 2014).

Communicating individual perceptions and experiences can be achieved through creative process as it has the ability to elucidate the quality of public spaces (McNiff, 2008). Although phenomenology offers a critical and theoretical framework to undertake this research, it cannot in exact terms define a creative process. Even quantitative and qualitative research can only give a simplified answer even through a phenomenological approach. It must be built through the disciplined investigation of phenomena (Natanson, 1973), which can then come to inform a creative practise.

Arefi continued to find a creative process as a way of moving through a disciplined investigation. A common way of communicating these perceptions in a single way was needed in order to draw comparisons. Characterization of space through language became an appropriate means to communicate perception. Through the process of survey and discussion, it was found that 'these characterisations have a direct bearing on the respondent's perception of 'public' space in the study area' (Arefi et al., 2003). Yet language can be limiting in ways that a creative practice are able to overcome. Art and creative process allow knowledge to arise from experiencing the creative product through the lens of past experiences rather than being conceptualized or intellectualized (Pallasmaa, 2012).

### ***Research Question***

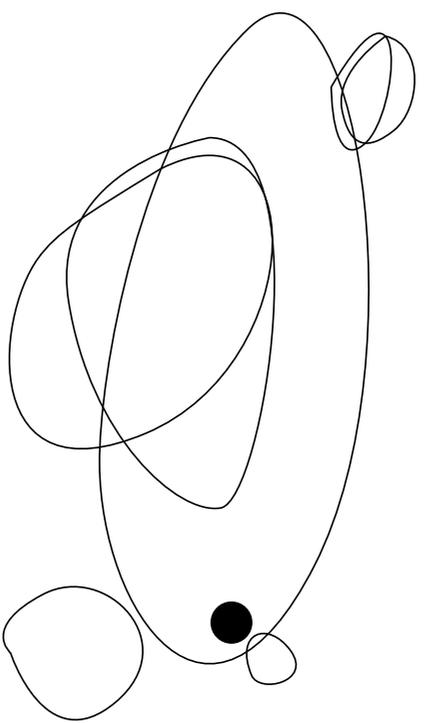
This short discussion raises the broad question: How can we measure and analyse public space in order to inform place making in the development of healthy urban centers without losing the complexity of the city?

From this we can derive a project based around exploring creative method to answer the above question, and in turn spark more; How can memory and individual perception of public space along the Northbourne Corridor be measured. How can a creative process come to communicate these findings?



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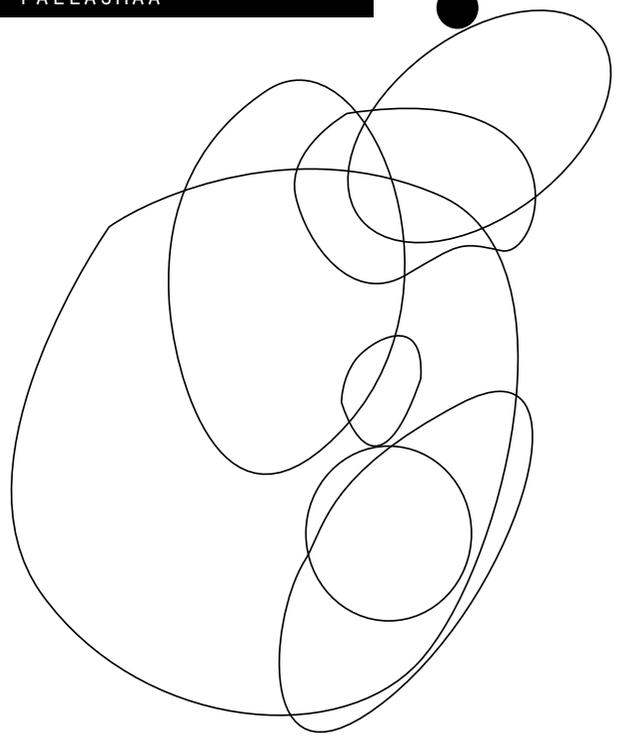
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'ARCHITECTURE SHOULD OFFER THE SPACE OF  
PARTICIPATION TO OTHERS'



JUHANI PALLASMAA



## FIELDWORK

Initially approached to create an installation in the Sydney Building for the *You Are Here Festival*, this became the major fieldwork event of the project occurring over two weeks from the 10th to the 24th of April (festival running 13th to 17th April). As the festival was situated in the site it was the way to engage participants.

To begin with, a type of creative method was designed to allow participants to record their thoughts about space in a creative way without needing a great deal of experience in that method. In other words it to be complex enough to capture a complex reality, but simple enough for anyone to use.

Alongside this, traditional qualitative and quantitative methods were also used to analyse the quality of this space.

### 01. OBSERVATION

Observing how people use the site, and drawing inferences about why they are using it in this way. This was achieved through watching people along select locations at chosen times over two weeks.

### 02. SURVEY

A survey was provided to participants in order to capture perceptions and memories of space through language.

### 03. INDIVIDUAL MAPPING / DRAWING

Participants were asked to record their thoughts on the site onto a piece of tracing paper placed over a map of the area with a simple criteria: shade blue over an uncomfortable area, shade orange over a comfortable area and draw a black circle around a space occupied for more than 5 minutes. These tracings were then laid a top one another.

### 04. COLLABORATIVE MAPPING / WEAVING

A large pin board was constructed to allow participants to record their own memory of spaces in Canberra in an abstract, conceptual way. This grew over the festival, each day with more people engaging and interacting with this 'live artwork'.

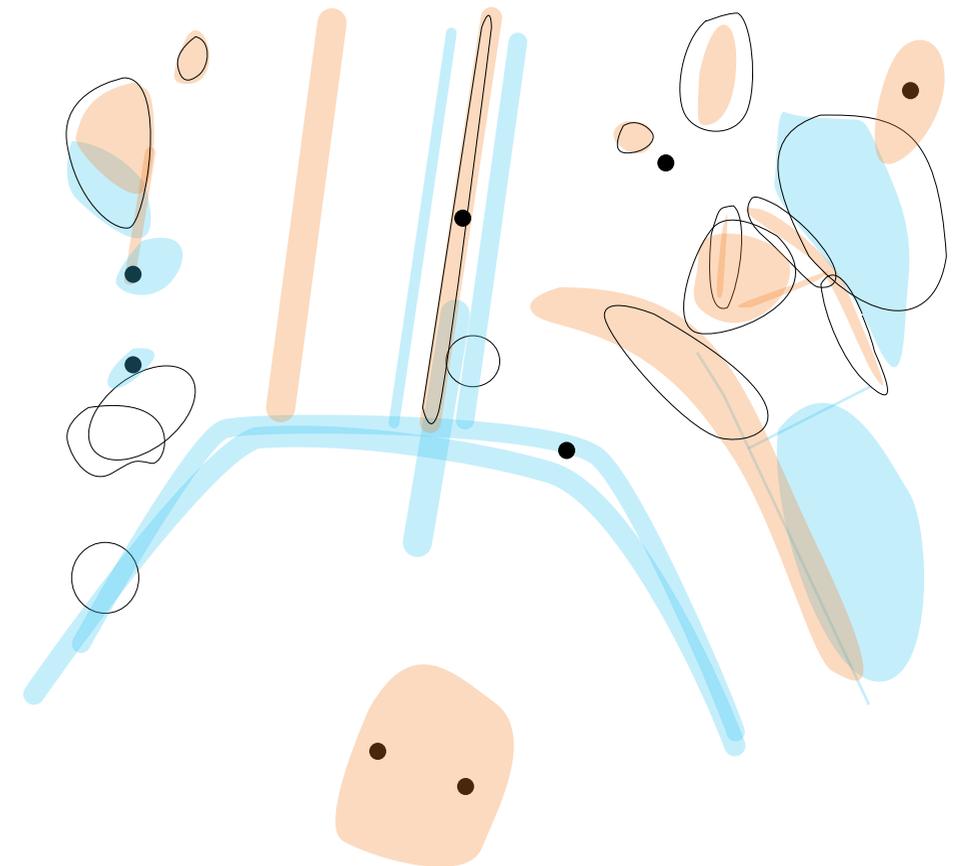


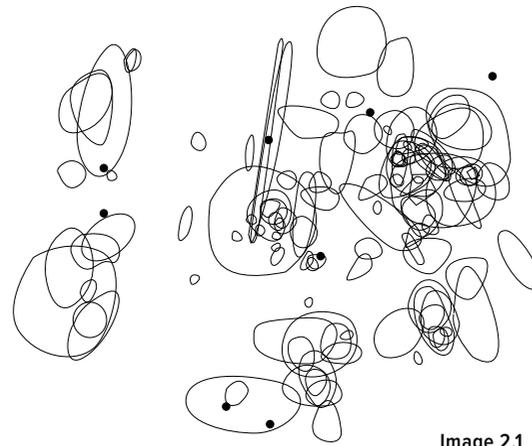
Image 1.1

### MAPPING MEMORY / INDIVIDUALS

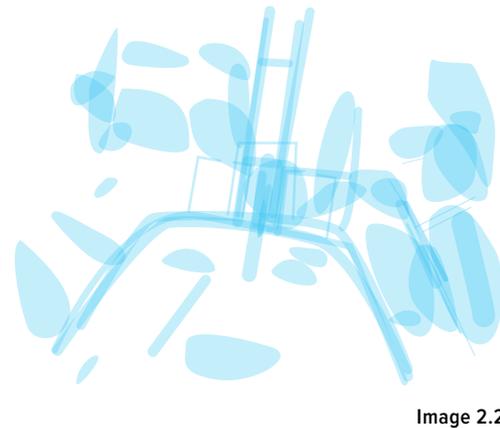
A simplistic view combining the results of two participants. When compared to the above image, the more participants involved generates a clearer and more recognisable physical map of the city.

**DRAWING EXERCISE**

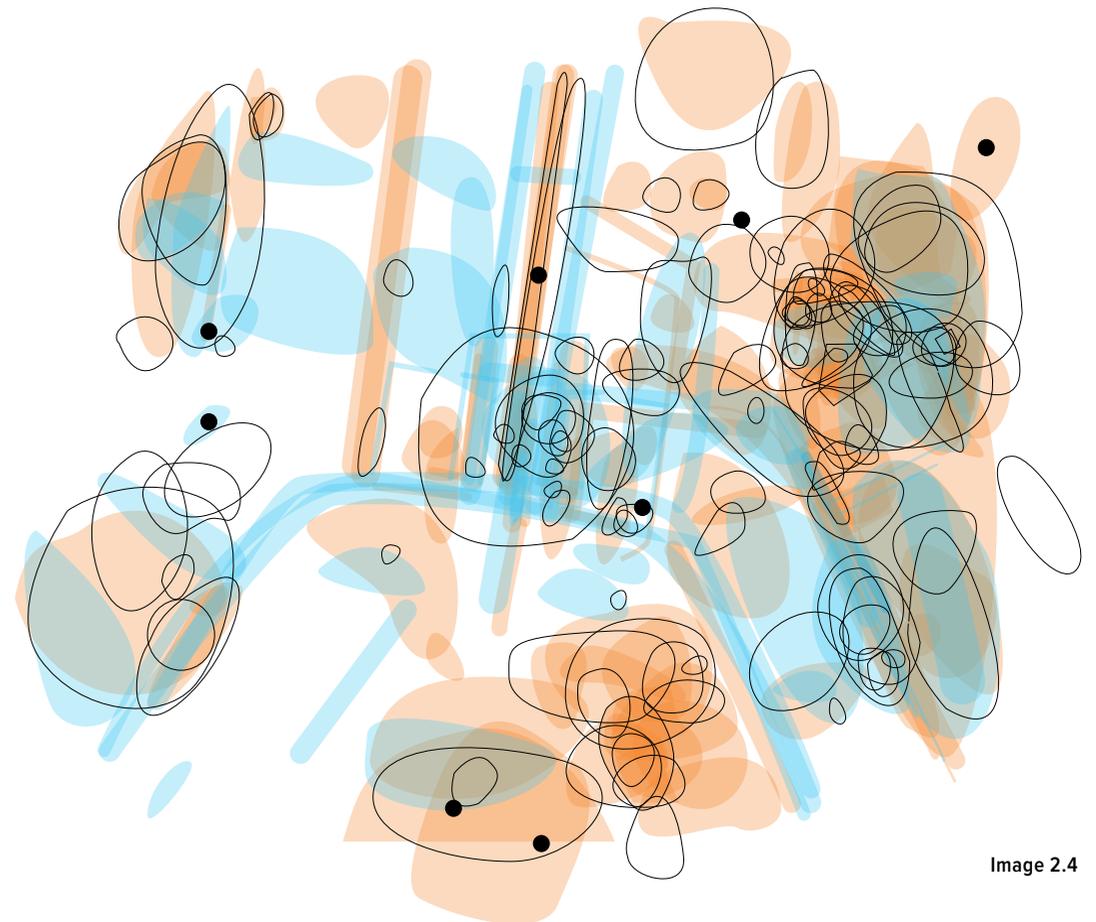
Black circles represent where a participant has stayed in a space for more than 5 minutes. Note that this is all spaces, roads, public spaces, commercial areas etc.



A blue area represents a space that is uncomfortable or unattractive to the participants. Where the colour is more solid, or dense, is where multiple participant responses have been overlaid.



An orange area represents a space that is comfortable or attractive to the participants. Where the colour is more solid, or dense, is where multiple participant responses have been overlaid.



**MAPPING MEMORY / COLLABORATIVE**

Combining all of the participant results overlaid onto a physical map of the site. This begins to create a collective understanding of quality of space as defined by memory and perception.

# VISUALISATION

## EXPLORING THE CREATIVE METHOD

The visualisation process was an exploration of how abstract the creative method could become before it failed to communicate the participant responses. You will see this process outlined here sequentially - each image presented as it was created.

Initially each drawing from participants was scanned from which a digital vector was created.<sup>3</sup> This allowed the overlapping of each response which is the images shown on the previous pages.<sup>4</sup> The next step was to then add more detail to these images, which was based upon the survey completed by participants along with the researcher's own observations.<sup>5</sup>

This set of images is the least abstract of the set in the sense that they retain a true sense of scale and accurately reflect the geometry of the site. To push the creative process forward the next step was to construct a grid abstract or 'pixelate' this work into a visualisation that appeared at once more abstract and more 'scientific'. The importance of this was attempting to craft a method that allowed any researcher to use it, while also maintaining a creative integrity (the work is still a work of art, not just the visualisation of data).

Here the researcher was able to create other visualisations based upon these initial participant contributions and add in their own inferences and observations.<sup>6</sup> Using these images derived from participant drawings allows the comparison between what the people say they do in public space, or at least what they like to do, and with what they are *actually* observed to be doing. This was one of the most interesting findings of the project: there is a discrepancy in Canberra (on the studied site) between what people say they do and what they are actually doing.



Image 3.1

3. p. 13, image 1.1 The overlaid response of two individuals shows how the initial visualisations looked before they were overlaid into a collective work.
4. p. 14, images 2.1 - 2.3 The results of the overlaid work gave a collective understanding to the perceived quality of the site and surrounding areas. As more layers are added, the image of the city begins to physically take shape and loses the abstract aesthetic.
5. p. 19, image 3.1 The photographs have been taken from Google maps and respond to how people said they used space in the participant survey. These key actions were: people watching, spending time in nature and eating or drinking something when in public space.
6. p. 20, images 4.1 - 4.4 Beginning to open the visualisation technique to the researcher's own observations and inferences, and experiment with abstraction.

## COMBINING INFORMATION

Comparing where participants have identified 'comfortable' public space, what the space actually looks like, and what the participants claim they like to do in these spaces.

INTERPRETATION

& ABSTRACTION

An attempt to re-interpret data in a more 'graphic way'. this is not to be read as a map, but rather as a graph of activity based on participant **drawing** response.



Image 4.1

This same approach to visualisation in a more graphic and abstract way, representing the (researcher's) **observation** of use of space.



Image 4.2

Here the last image is the visualisation of data collected from the participant survey. It shows where participants said they use space (through language). You can see the difference between the three responses, demonstrating the variance in single methods.

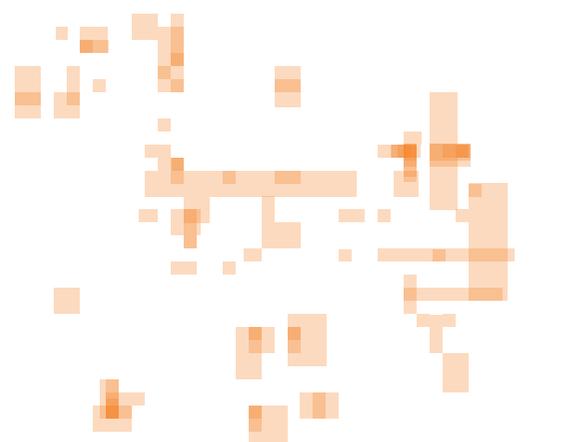


Image 4.3

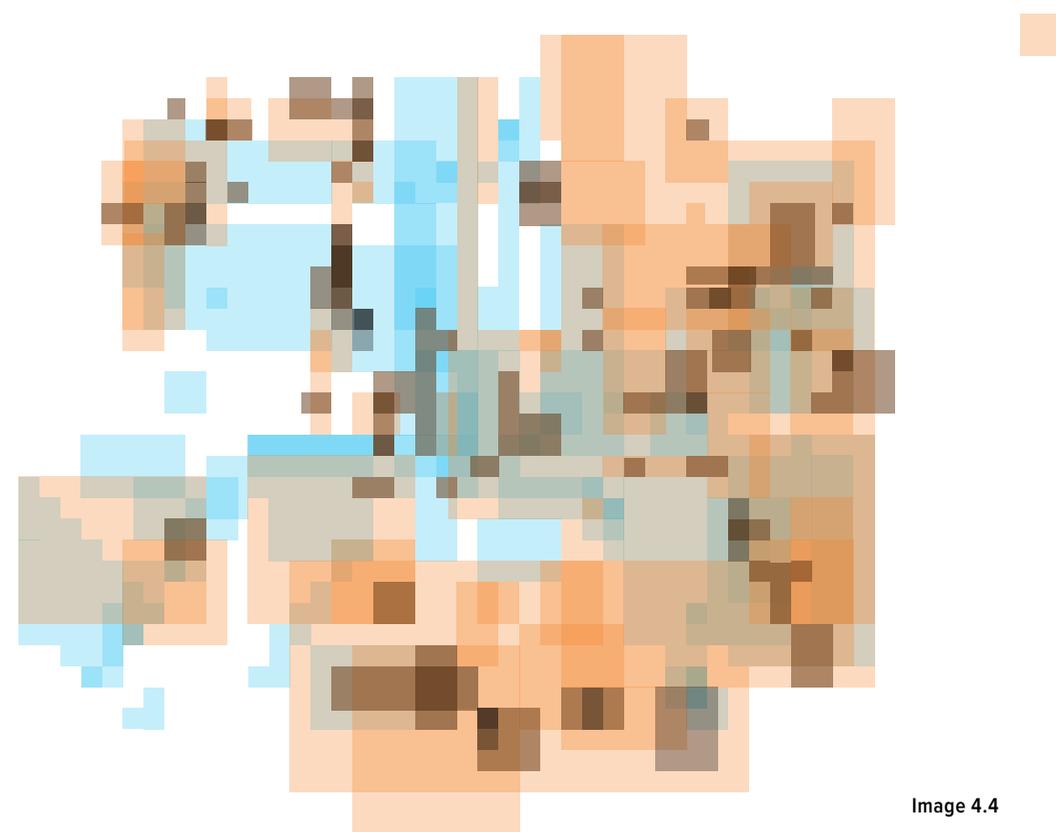


Image 4.4

ABSTRACTION OF DRAWING EXERCISE

Combination of participant responses to spaces they identify as comfortable / uncomfortable, and responses of where people are spending time. (Blue represents uncomfortable space, orange represents comfortable space, and black represents where someone has spent more than five minutes).

# CREATIVE PROCESS

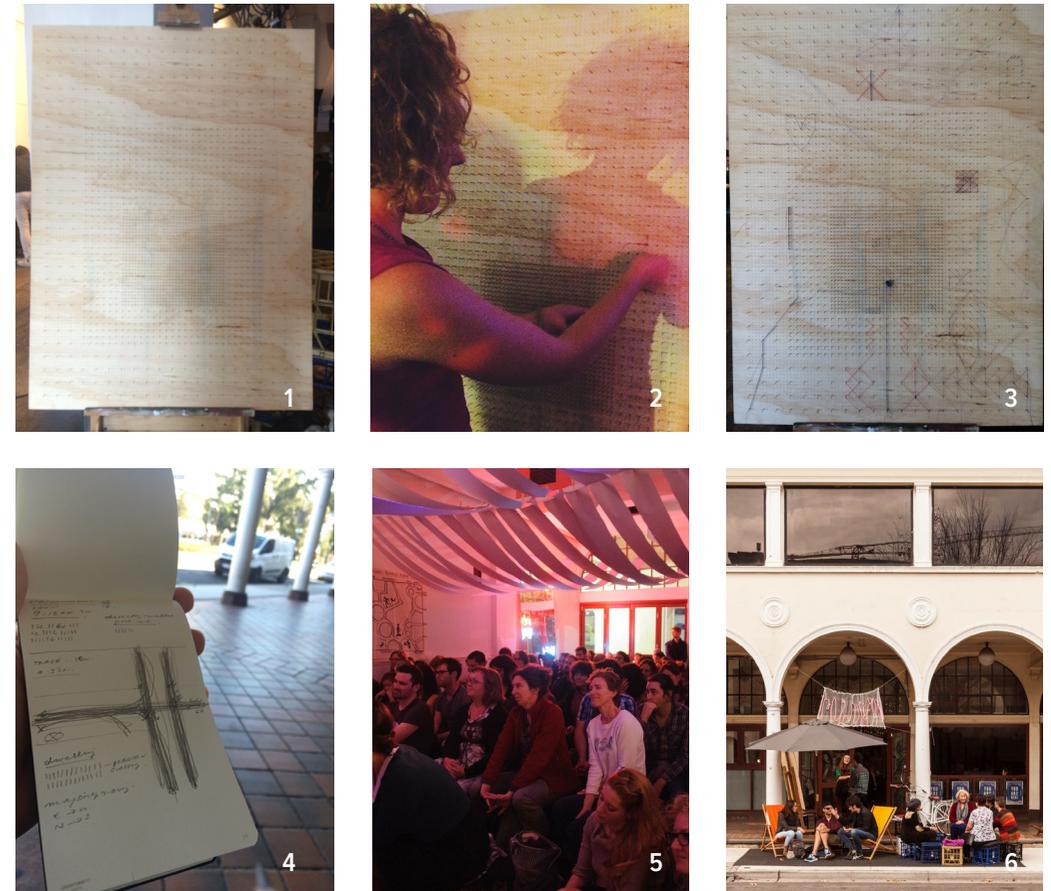
## EXPLORING ABSTRACTION

Designing a creative method for participants and the community meant considering the person using it from the start. Through previous experience, people commonly disqualify themselves from traditional art forms, like painting drawing, as it involves a level of technical skill. This barrier had to be overcome to achieve success.

The next set of images shows the physical work that was recorded and the subsequent series of abstractions<sup>7</sup>. This ended with two key works; an abstract watercolour representation<sup>8</sup>, and a physical 'literal' model of the site. Using the same abstraction technique as outlined in the Visualisation chapter provided the grounds for further experimentation with creative methods; watercolour and modeling.

The watercolour work was particularly enjoyable as it was the most intuitive of all of the creative methods explored, and perhaps the most poetic. It holds a distinction in its own right as a piece of art, but takes on further meaning in the context of the whole gallery of work. Describing the creative process of memory, perception and imagination, it compares the real geography of Canberra with the way participants have remembered it. This was born both from a satellite image of the site, and of the collaborative map produced during the fieldwork.

The second way this data eventuated was through physical modeling, as outlined above. A similar technique was used to the watercolour method - after the abstraction of the collaborative map took place, this was overlaid onto a satellite image of Canberra. Instead of the watercolour point representing this though a real image of Canberra was distorted to match the way participants had remembered and imagined it. This was then laser cut onto 30 sheets of boxboard to create both a geographically accurate map of Canberra, and a map as based on people's memory.



7. p. 34, images 6.1 - 6.7 The overlaid responses of three sections of the weaving shows how the initial visualisations looked before they were overlaid into a collective work.
8. p. 28 - 31. The process paintings and final watercolours. These were based on the real site map of Canberra, and the memory map. To compare them is to compare how participants remembered the city against the real geography of Canberra.

1. Weaving board, pre-fieldwork.
2. Participant from the You Are Here Festival recording her memories of Canberra.
3. The weaving board after the first day of fieldwork (day one of five).
4. Example of the tracings and observations.
5. Festival attendees watching performance art under a canopy the researcher assisted in producing for the site.
6. The fieldwork occurring directly within the site / observations, survey and creative method.

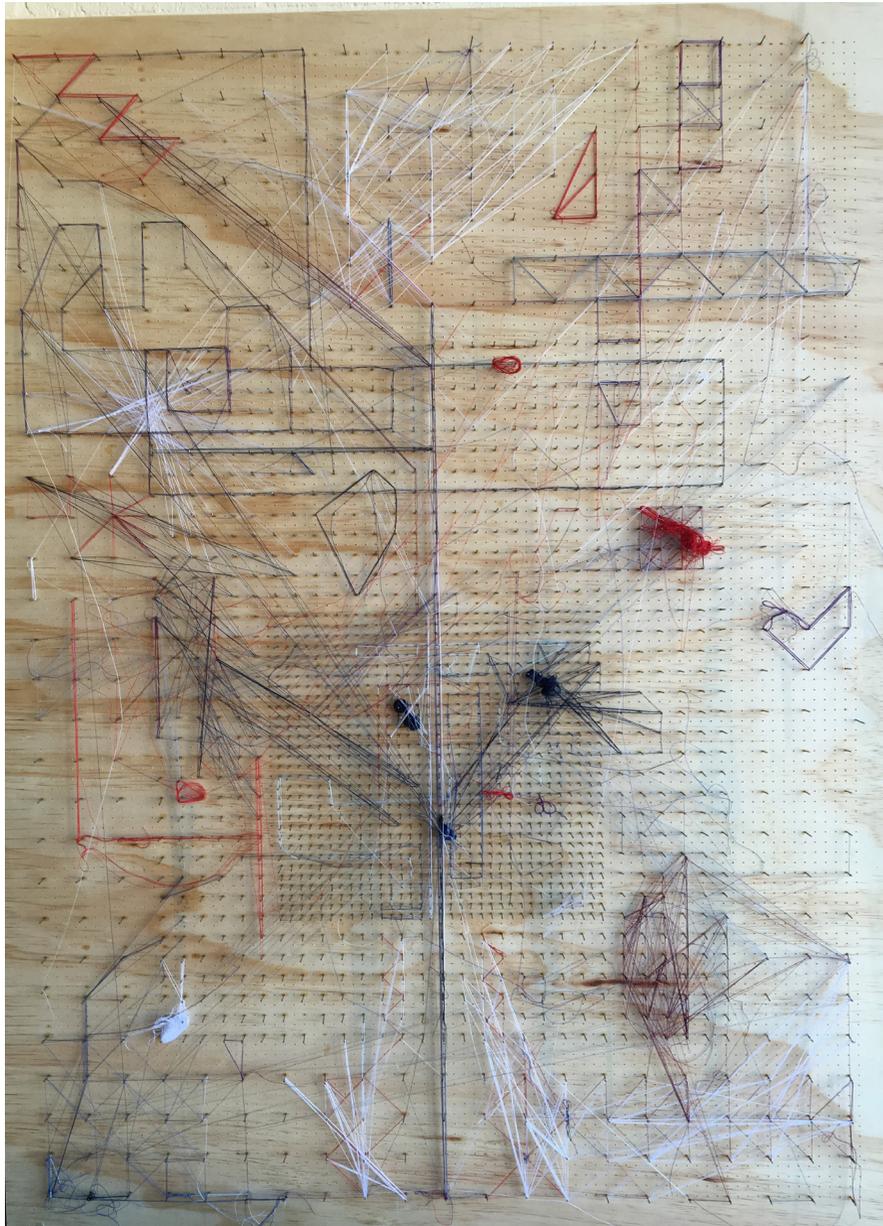


Image 5.1

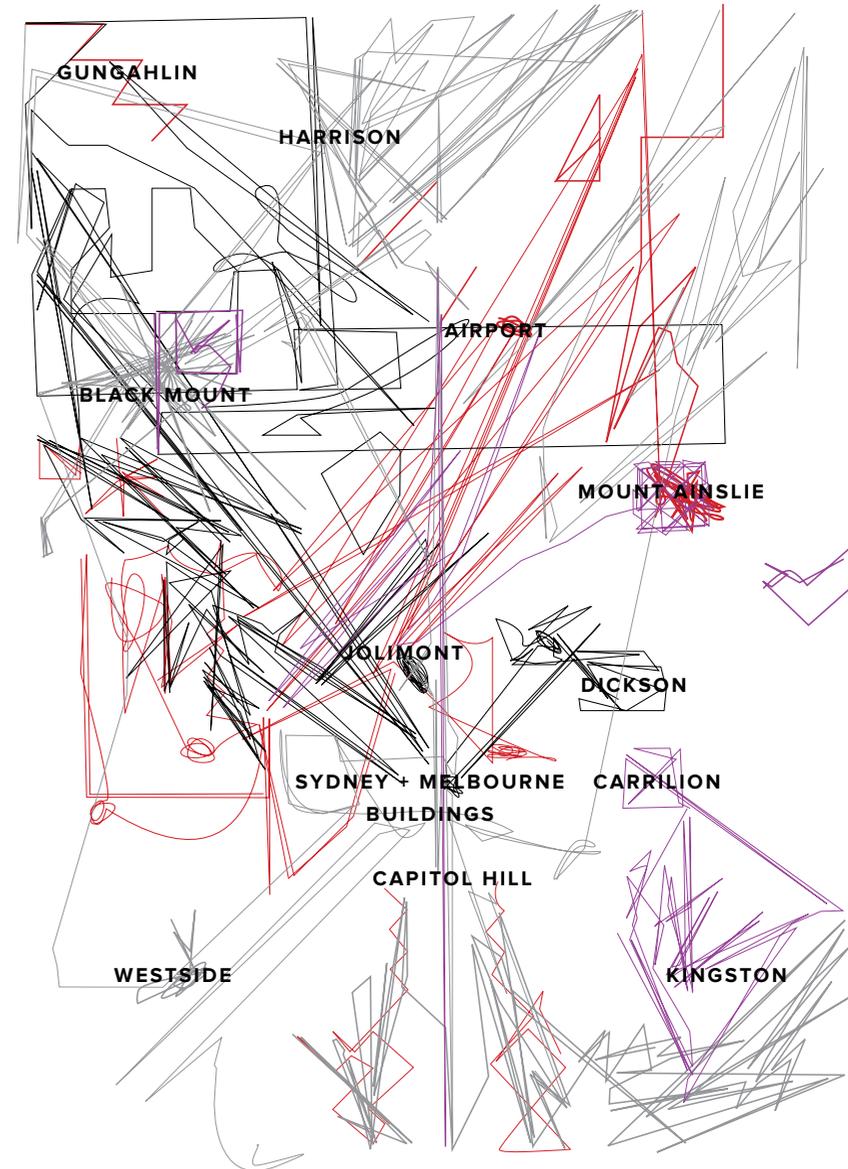


Image 5.2

## COLLABORATIVE WEAVING

A large scale view of Canberra, extending from the base of Northbourne Avenue at Lake Burley Griffin, up to the extents of Gungahlin / the Light Rail Proposal.

Participants recorded: regular routes they take in the city, spaces they like in the city, spaces they do not like. No scale was given to the participants, all of this has been generated through memory and imagination. Abstraction was inherently part of the work, in this way.

## WEAVING = MAPPING

Making sense of the abstract nature of the weaving by aligning real places with the recorded memories.

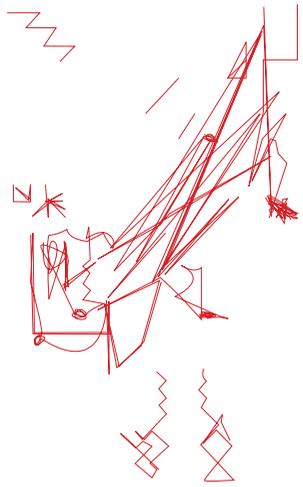


Image 6.1

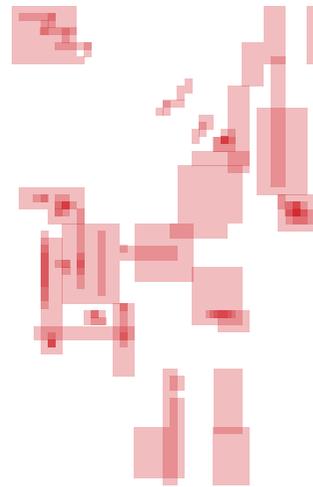


Image 6.4

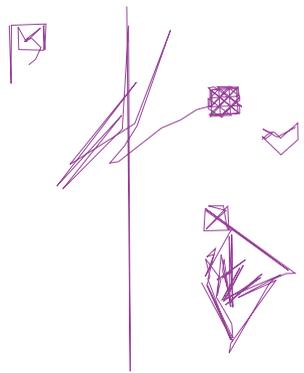


Image 6.2

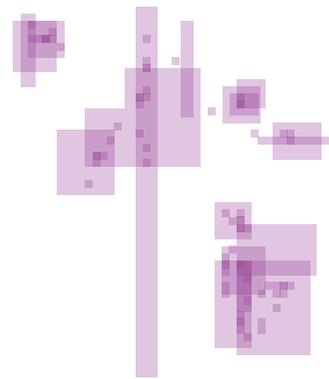


Image 6.5

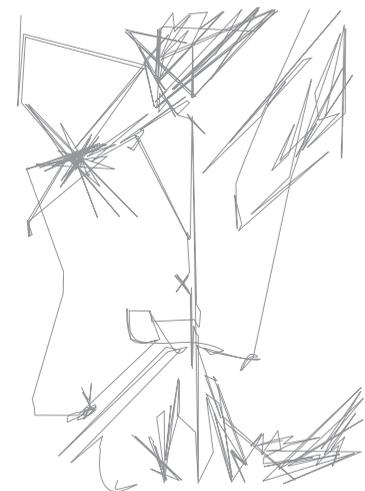


Image 6.3

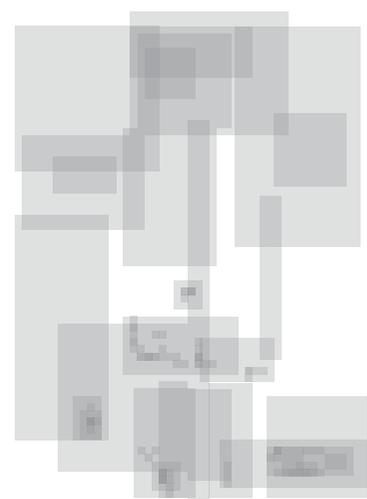


Image 6.6



Image 6.7

DATA INPUT (LEFT)

Beginning to translate participant weavings into digital data. The same abstraction technique was applied here, as with the drawing responses. (Images 6.1 - 6.6)

INTERPRETATION (ABOVE)

A simplified view of all of the participant results. A more complex interpretation of the work features on subsequent pages.



Image 7.1

WEAVING = MAPPING

Further detail has been (from image 6.7 on the previous page) to capture the subtleties of the string weaving map. Here the researcher's own observation and subjective perceptions are beginning to take shape.



Image 7.2

WEAVING = MAPPING

Making sense of the abstract nature of the weaving by aligning real places with the recorded memories. Each black square, or 'node', was taken from real locations in Canberra: public spaces, green spaces, cafe's and shopping centers.



Smaller versions were created to test different techniques with colours and styles of painting (bottom left and right).



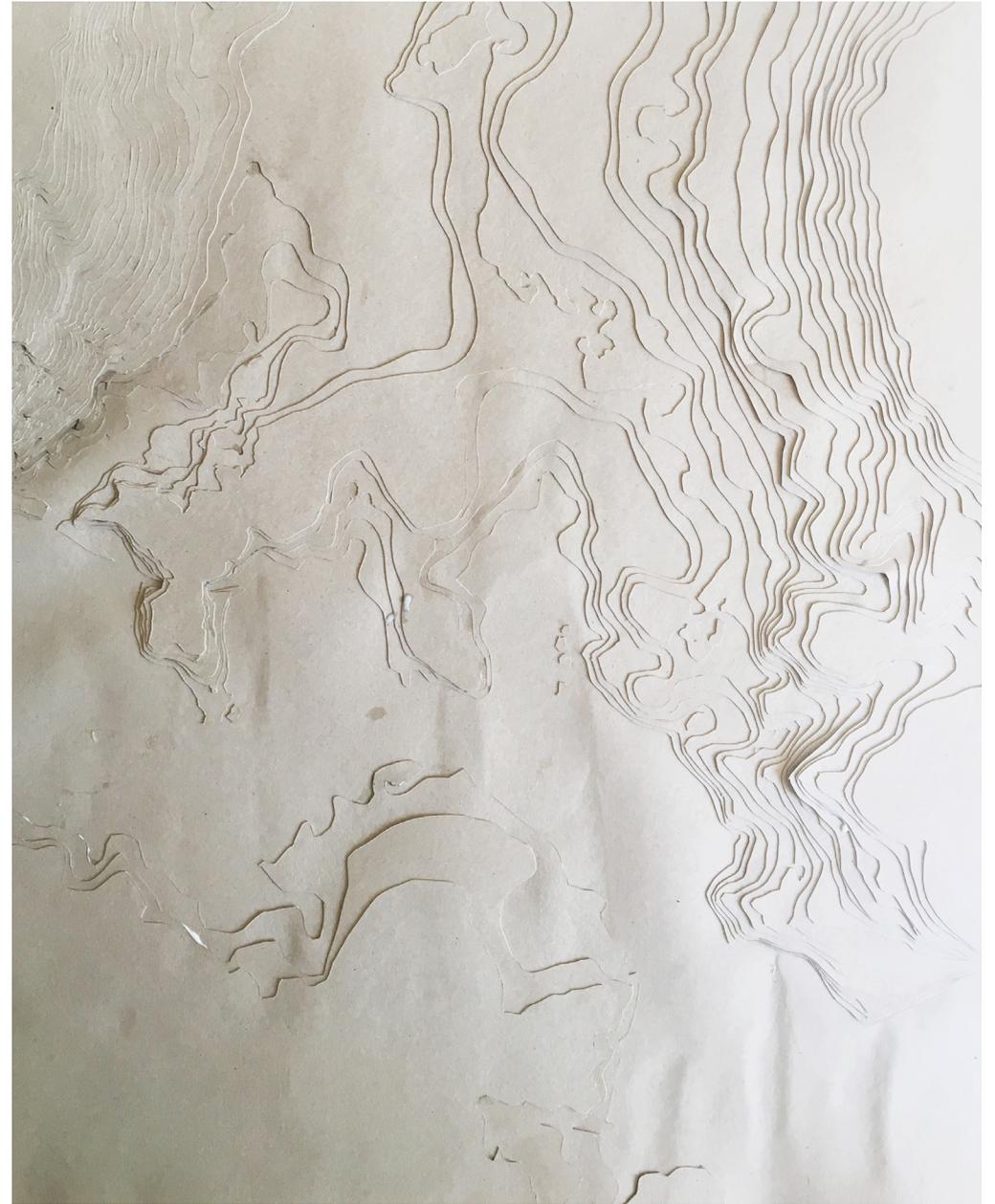
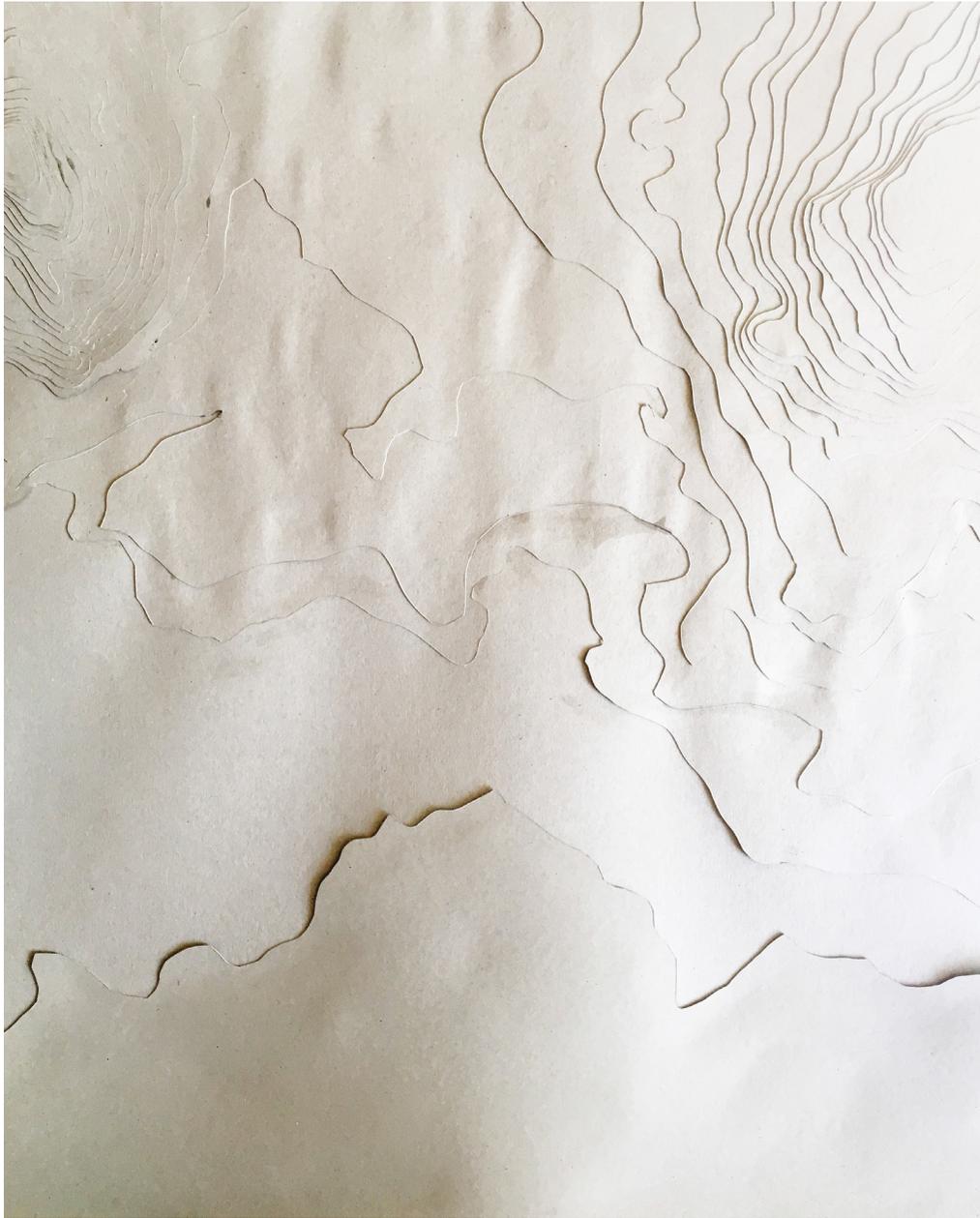
WATERCOLOUR / RE-INTERPRETING

From here watercolour was used to develop the project into the final stage. Watercolour was a medium the researcher found particularly intuitive. This allowed for their own subjectivity to be captured and become part of the work.



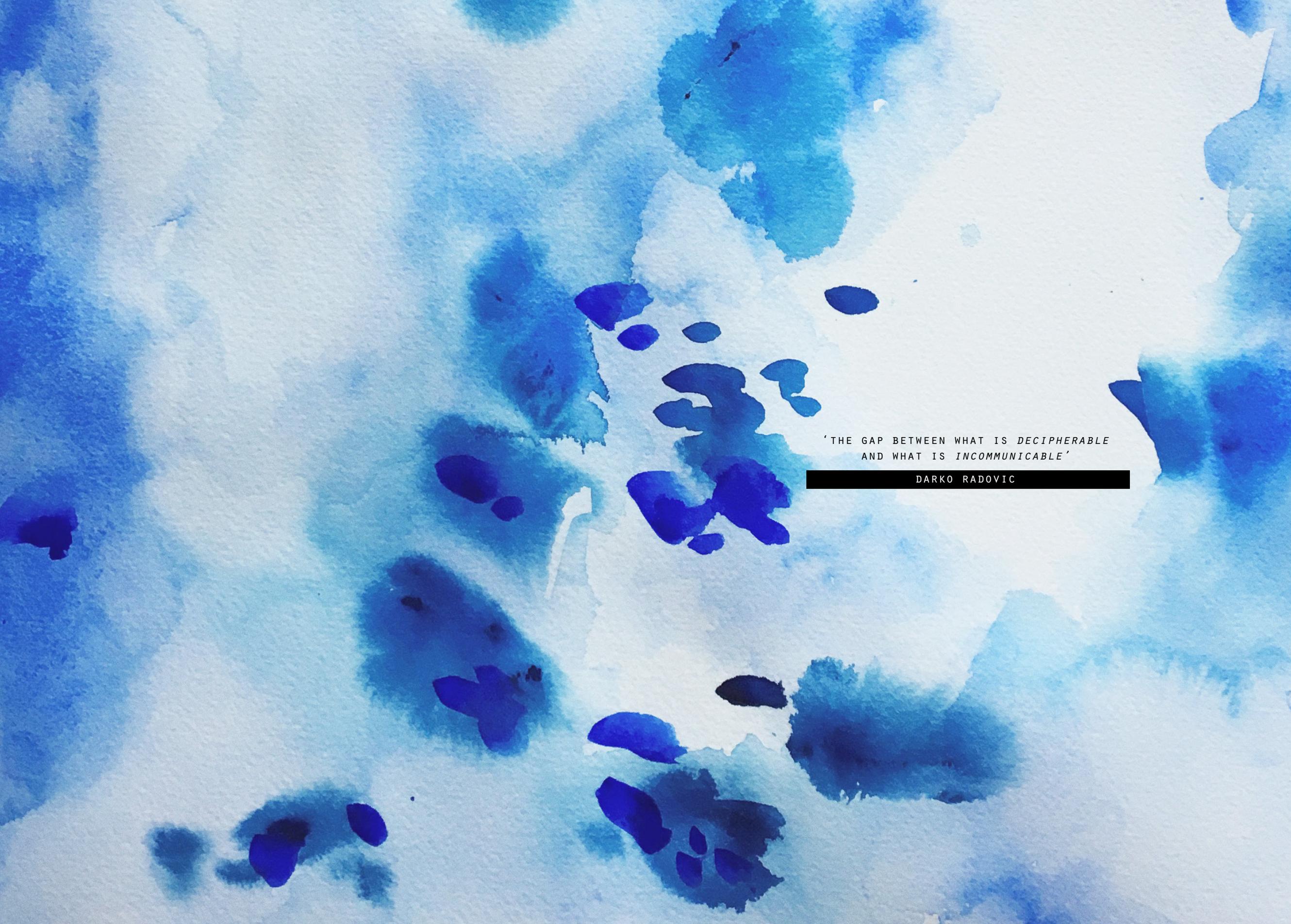
WATERCOLOUR / FINAL

The final works for the project: watercolour on A1 size 300gsm stretched paper.  
(Above: Real Map of Canberra, Left: Memory Map of Canberra).



MODELING / FINAL

The final watercolour work was then interpreted into two topographic maps of Canberra, the left image based upon the weaving map (memories of space) and the above image based upon the true geography of the site.



'THE GAP BETWEEN WHAT IS *DECIPHERABLE*  
AND WHAT IS *INCOMMUNICABLE*'

DARKO RADOVIC

# EPILOGUE

CONCLUSION / FUTURE

The value of this research project was twofold, as explained in the abstract. The focus of the research was to address the question, 'How can memory and individual perception of public space along the Northbourne Corridor be measured? How can a creative process come to communicate these findings?'

This research sought to test creative methods in analysing phenomena, but an unexpected result was in the site analysis of Northbourne Avenue: studying something *contained* (phenomena) led to an understanding of the *container* (the site analysis). In a short answer the researcher was able to find tangible outcomes to the research question. Creative methods were used to capture and communicate memories and perceptions of public space in order to define some sort of quality for that space. This development of alternative methods of analysis and design process in a research project was the priority for the researcher.

Success occurred throughout this project for a number of reasons. Firstly, it was able to engage with participants from the local community effectively, which was the main aim of the research. Participants were indeed able to use the creative method, or 'tools' developed by the researcher, and the researcher in turn was then able to re-interpret this using creative process. Aside from the method itself, it opened valuable and insightful community discussion not only into the use of creative methods in research, but also into the subject of the development of public spaces themselves. This was paramount to the fact Northbourne Avenue, with its impending Light Rail Development, is a contentious issue at the time of this research project.

The future of this method is promising as it opens many questions, and has led myself as the researcher to deduce several hypothesis around not only the benefits of creative method in a research project, but also into the context of Canberra as a city (using the city as a laboratory for fieldwork).

Lastly, I believe the greatest implication of this research is the potential for development. Of course once the creative method has been validated we find ourselves at the question of, 'what next?'. Let us assume for now this research project has been critically validated and accepted as factual and accurate. The out-workings and data this research provides is invaluable to many spheres of influence and demographics across Canberra. It has the potential to re-shape the way the city is perceived by key decision makers and developers while at once allowing the community to voice and capture their own opinions and perceptions of space in a meaningful and accurate way. All of this is done in the pursuit of developing healthy, livable cities centered around considerately designed public spaces by engaging people's perceptions.

RESEARCH TEAM

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COMMUNICATING THE INCOMMUNICABLE

UNDERSTANDING PUBLIC SPACE THROUGH CREATIVE METHOD /  
VISUALISATION OF MEMORY, PERCEPTION AND IMAGINATION

*Thank you to all of those who have contributed to and shaped this project, especially my parents, Tom and Rosa, for editing the work and helping me with the exhibitions and fieldwork, my four brothers for their support, friends who have helped in participating, editing and encouraging me. I couldn't have done this without the support and encouragement from my girlfriend Jess. Thank you to all of the participants - this project would not be possible without you!*

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