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On the role of affect and practice in the production of place

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Abstract. Michel de Certeau's account of the modern city emphasises the 'doing' and 'making' residents undertake in an attempt to render a city more amenable to an 'art' of resistance. Yet, in attending to this doing and making, de Certeau has largely ignored the *felt* and *affective dimensions* of city life. Edward Casey provides a compelling means of interrogating these affective dimensions, distinguishing 'thick' and 'thin' places in everyday life. Thick places are contrived in the imbrications of affect, habit, and practice, presenting opportunities for personal enrichment and a deepening of affective experience. Casey's work restores the affective fecundity of place, even if it fails to provide a clear sense of how thick places might be identified. This paper takes up this challenge in an attempt to clarify the role of affect and practice in the production of place. The paper first reviews the practical and affective dimensions of this place-making before turning to an ethnographic account of young people, place, and urban life recently completed in Vancouver, Canada. This study explored the ways young people negotiate and transform place and the impact these practices have on the characteristic orientations of self and belonging. The experience of place was found to involve a series of affective relays between the cultivation of private places and the negotiation of designated spaces. The affective atmospheres created in these exchanges helped participants transform thin or designated spaces into dynamic thick places. The paper closes with a discussion of the role thick places might play in the design of innovative youth development efforts in urban settings.

> "The chorus of idle footsteps ... their swarming mass an innumerable collection of singularities. Their intertwined paths give their shape to spaces. They weave places together."
>
> Michel de Certeau *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984, page 97)

Michel de Certeau's account of the modern city emphasises the 'doing' and 'making' residents undertake in an attempt to render a city more amenable to an 'art' of resistance. This is a city constantly evolving, being made and remade in the undulating contours of its built environments and in the routines and improvisations of practice. Yet in attending to this 'doing' and 'making', de Certeau has largely ignored the affective dimensions of city life (Morris, 2004, page 684). De Certeau's agonistic city of strategies and tactics obscures the affective resonances of urban places. It misses what Ben Anderson (2009, pages 78 – 80) calls the "affective atmospheres" generated in place and the myriad social, material, and discursive resources such atmospheres support. To experience place is to be *affected by place*, just as it involves an active reckoning of the tactical opportunities and practical resources places invariably present. This is not to ignore the force of de Certeau's insights; it is rather to argue for an analytics of place that refines de Certeau's narrative of practice and tactics to include the affective measure of place, identity, and belonging.

The lived sensation, the feel, and emotional resonance of place, defines much of the routine and tumult of city life. These sensations inspire diverse affective atmospheres, shaping the experience of place while adding to the tenor of the city's myriad identities (Anderson, 2009, pages 78 – 81; Thrift, 2004). Affective atmospheres capture the emotional feel of place, as well as the store of action-potential, the dispositions and agencies,

potentially enactable in that place. This dual character addresses the emotional geography of place *in addition to a properly affective dimension* (Conradson, 2005, pages 104 – 105). Affect must, for this reason, be defined more broadly than emotion so as to avoid restricting the analysis of affect to particular emotional expressions (Massumi, 2002, pages 27 – 28). Instead, affect ought to be understood as a specific manifestation of a body's "power of acting", its lived force or action-potential (Deleuze, 1988, page 50)—for every affect is experienced both as a particular feeling state and as a *distinctive variation in one's willingness or capacity to act* in response to that state (Hardt, 2007, pages ix – x). It has been the unique contribution of scholars in geography and sociology to link this account of affect with the analysis of place and its role in the generation and transmission of affect (Casey, 2001; Clough and Halley, 2007; Soja, 1989; Thrift, 2007, pages 57 – 59). This work also points beyond de Certeau's analytics of place towards the affective dimensions of place-making.

Edward Casey has introduced the idea of 'thick' and 'thin' places in an attempt to trace the relationship between affect and place. Thick places are contrived in the imbrications of affect, habit, and meaning, inviting the self's 'concernful absorption' in place while presenting opportunities for 'personal enrichment' and a deepening of affective experience (Casey, 2001, pages 684 – 685). Thick places enhance one's sense of meaning and belonging, forging a series of affective and experiential connections in place. Thin places, in contrast, lack the "rigor and substance of thickly lived places" (Casey, 2001, page 684). They offer nothing to hold the self in place, and no memorable or resonant command of placial experience. Thick places, in this sense, are made as much as they are discovered; and they are made in and of affect and practice. Casey's notion of thick places restores the affective fecundity of place, even if it fails to provide a clear sense of how thick places might be identified. Indeed, Casey provides few insights into the character and organisation of thick places, how they might differ from one another, and the various means by which they are produced, accessed, and contested. This paper takes up these challenges, drawing from diverse sources in an attempt to clarify the role of affect and practice in the production of place.

The paper first reviews the practical and affective dimensions of this place-making, before turning to an ethnographic study of young people, place, and urban life recently completed in Vancouver, Canada. This study explored the ways young people negotiate and transform place and the impact these practices have on the characteristic orientations of self and belonging. Practices like walking, socialising, skateboarding, and breakdancing provided participants with various means of producing place. However, it was the *affective force* of these practices that contributed most directly to the production of thick places. Thick places were found to structure young people's experience of self and belonging through an intensification of the affective pull of place. This pull was felt most urgently in the varied techniques by which participants struggled to create *private places*. This social and affective labour involved an agonistic relay between the cultivation of private places and the negotiation of what might be termed 'designated spaces' (de Certeau, 1984, pages 93 – 95). What's more, this affective rendering was one of the most effective means by which participants managed to convert thin or designated spaces into dynamic thick places. These findings suggest other equally significant insights. More than a concatenation of disjunctive feeling states, the affective atmospheres created in thick places furnish an array of resources useful for the realisation of specific experiences, ambitions, and capacities (Anderson, 2006, page 733). These resources facilitate the kinds of personal enrichment Casey suggests are a hallmark of all thick places. The paper closes with a discussion of the role thick places—and the affective atmospheres they support—might play in the design of innovative youth development efforts in urban settings.

Practice and the production of place

De Certeau's account of the contemporary city is part of a broader effort to catalogue the manifold "procedures of everyday creativity" (1984, page xiv). While acknowledging the force of Michel Foucault's analysis of diverse relations of power and discipline, de Certeau (1984, page xiv) is concerned with identifying the specific practices or "ways of operating" by which individuals and groups "conform" to this power "only in order to evade" it. De Certeau here discerns two very different operations of power in the modern city. The panoptic power of the administrator and the planner seeks to manage the conduct of the city's inhabitants through a more orderly regulation of the city's spaces. This strategic power concerns the striations of the urban grid and the designation of 'proper uses' for the city's various districts and centres. Yet this power is always confronted with the petty tactics and ephemeral resistances of everyday life (pages 37 – 40). This resistance is primarily derived from the routines and displacements of practice. De Certeau (page xiv) understands practice to include the entire repertoire of "dispersed, tactical, and makeshift" procedures by which individuals and groups make sense of everyday life. It concerns the various dynamics of "making do", whereby ordinary citizens seek to manipulate the edicts of a disciplinary power 'to suit their own interests and their own rules' (page xiv). In each instance, strategies and tactics, power and resistance, contribute to the ongoing spatialisation of the city and the active production of place (Buchanan, 2000, pages 110 – 112).

In the modern city, walking constitutes a paradigmatic illustration of the force of practice and its role in the ongoing (re)production of place (de Certeau 1984, pages 97 – 99). The practice of walking necessarily conforms to the striations of the 'concept city', yet walkers also invent novel pathways and alternative uses for the city's designated places. Walking entails a series of "pedestrian speech acts" by which the walker "appropriates" various elements of the city's "topographical system", establishing a more idiosyncratic experience of place and a more distinctive set of relations between places (de Certeau 1984, pages 97 – 99). Such speech acts necessarily distinguish the practice of walking from the bare facts of the city's constructed order in that walking enacts a dynamic process of *movement, improvisation, and passage*. These qualities reflect the three principal features of pedestrian speech acts—"the present, the discrete, the phatic" (de Certeau 1984, pages 97 – 99). Each walk creates an *occasional sense of the present,* actualising specific possibilities inscribed within the city's spatial order while increasing "the number of possibilities ... shortcuts and detours" inherent in that order (page 98). This occasioning is also an *invention of discrete places*, in that walking serves to instantiate relations between points of transition, between a "near and a far ... a here and a there" (pages 97 – 99). Walking enacts movements and transitions between these points, establishing a discrete place of and for the self. This place-making renders certain city spaces familiar and navigable while "condemning (other) places to inertia or disappearance" (page 99). To think of the space of the city in geometric terms, with each entity assignable to a specific point in that space, even those entities in transition or motion, is to miss this lived, embodied spatialisation of the city. It misses, in particular, what de Certeau calls the phatic dimension of walking—the concatenated and relational invitation that each step extends to yet more walking. To walk is to perpetually "initiate, maintain, or interrupt contact" (page 99), just as it entails a solicitous provocation to more walking, more contact, and more interaction.

In each of these pedestrian speech acts de Certeau discovers a practice of reading and enunciation. Walking enables individuals to "compose a manifold story" out of the "cursives and strokes of an urban text" producing along the way a dynamic sense of place, a history, and a poetics of belonging (page 93). To walk a path in and through the city is to produce a series of "enunciations" each with their own "truth value" (page 99).

These enunciations form the basis of a rhetoric, a syntax and a personal style. This rhetoric has two principal features, "synecdoche" and "asyndeton" (page 101). Building on the commonplace understandings of these terms, de Certeau regards each as descriptive of a specific set of spatial practices by which the story of the city is crafted. Synecdoche concerns the invocation of the whole in the designation of the part (and vice versa) such that 'many hands' might describe a team of labourers. For de Certeau the habit of taking discrete features of an urban landscape to describe whole places is akin to the synecdochic "narration of a trajectory" by which a story of *place and passage* is woven out of the fragments of a spatial order (page 101). Similarly, asyndeton does away with the conjunctive relations of grammar (as in 'I came, I saw, I conquered') in order to deliver a more powerful rhetorical flourish to the spoken and written word. This, for de Certeau, conjures the 'leaps' and 'skips' whereby walkers pass over or through particular, indifferent spaces to access places of meaning and purpose (page 101). The creation of a unique spatial experience through the practice of this dyadic rhetoric extracts "enlarged singularities and separate islands" from the city's ordered grid (page 101). It creates place.

Yet this focus on the fecundity of practice—its constitutive role in the experience of place, meaning, and belonging—draws attention to an aspect of practice conspicuously absent from de Certeau's analysis, the felt or affective (Bendiner-Viani, 2005; Morris, 2004). This affective dimension might be something of an absent presence throughout de Certeau's work; however, the lack of explicit reference to the affective tonality of place suggests grounds for an ongoing refinement of the study of practice. It suggests further that de Certeau's account of walking in the city, and the role of walking in the generation of an urban poetics of place and belonging, might profit from a careful treatment of the felt and affective dimensions of this practice. To walk in the city is to be affected by the city, just as one's walking affects the city that this walking produces. The poetics of place generated in this walking is as much a function of practice, of a doing and a making, as it is a function of feeling and affective modulation. To attend to this affective quality is to go beyond de Certeau's urban text to explore the embodied and affective tonality of place. It is also to consider afresh the role of affect and practice in the production of place.

Affected by place

The notion that particular places conjure or evoke distinctive affective responses has, of course, a long history (Casey, 1993), yet it is only more recently that scholars have attended to the manner in which affects come to *actively constitute or produce place* (Anderson, 2009). Affects are, in this sense, not only indicative of the subjective mood of certain places; they also frame the array of activities and practices potentially enactable within that place. Affect ought here to be understood in two distinctive ways. Affect describes an array of feeling states characteristic of everyday life, with its constant shifts in mood and emotional resonance (Thrift, 2004, page 59). These states constitute the emotional palette of lived experience, which includes anger, shame, hope, fear, disgust, sorrow, joy, and so on. Each of these corresponds with a specific feeling state such that envy, for example, is experienced as a qualitatively and phenomenologically distinct condition, different from, say, anger or sorrow. Thrift adds that individuals typically remain uncertain, even unconscious, of the particular character of individual affects and their provenance (page 61). Yet one cannot help but feel moved by one's affects, in that one experiences affective responses even if one is not able to consciously describe or explain them.

At least since the time of Spinoza, however, it has been argued that affects convey more than a simple concatenation of feeling states, a ceaseless transition from one affective condition to another. Spinoza (1989, pages 129 – 131) contended that affects constitute the body's 'power of action'—its unique capacity to affect (and be affected by) the world of bodies and things that it encounters. Affects are more than mere feelings or emotions; they also constitute *action-potential*, or an individual's dispositional orientation to the world. Spinoza insists that every encounter subtly transforms an individual's affective capacities, either to enhance that individual's power of acting or to diminish it. It is for this reason that Spinoza (page 131) defines affect in terms of the various transitions and modifications by which the "power of action of the body is increased or diminished, aided or restrained". *This affective modification involves a transfer of power, capacities, or action-potential between bodies.* It is important at this juncture to note that Spinoza understands bodies to include an array of both human and nonhuman actors, objects, and processes. Regardless of the nature of this body, whether human or nonhuman, all bodies are potentially affected by a panoply of other bodies in any particular encounter. It follows that 'good' encounters involve the transfer of power from the affecting body to the affected body and so invest that body with joy and an increase in its power of acting, while 'bad' encounters involve a decrease in the power of the affected body and so invest that body with sadness (Deleuze, 1988, page 50).

It is in this sense that one might argue that the affects generated or experienced in place are dynamically involved in the production and reproduction of place (see also Lefebvre, 1991). It follows that the body's encounters in place involve affective resonances far beyond those experienced between discrete individuals. Just as bodies affect one another *in place*, bodies are inevitably affected *by place* such that place "seems to be a vital element in the constitution of affect" (Thrift, 2004, page 60). Affects are experienced in bodies but emanate or emerge from diverse encounters—encounters between bodies and between bodies and contexts, bodies and events (Massumi, 2002). Critically, each encounter generates unique affective capacities in that no two encounters ever produce the same affective modification in the body's power of acting. Bodies are affected by place in each instance anew, with each unique encounter with a place. The *experience of place* might in this way be said to differ affectively with each occasion; one's favourite cafe is one day a source of deep contentment or satisfaction, just as on other occasions it conjures all the frustrations and disaffections of the modern city (Laurier and Philo, 2006). Affect, therefore, describes both the distinctive set of feeling states realisable within a particular place as well as the store of action-potential, of expressions, capacities, and practices experienced in that space. The interplay between these two experiences of affect—the feeling states generated in place as well as the capacities and practices that each place makes possible—gives form to the diverse affective atmospheres discernible in place. Places are more than simple congeries of material objects, structured behaviours, and political technologies; places evolve and mutate according to the affective pitch and echo of the myriad practices and encounters experienced in place (Thrift, 2004).

Such recognition of the lived and affective experience of place is critical if the notion of place is to retain any sense at all (Soja, 1989; Thrift, 2007). Place ought never to be reduced to a determinate set of points on a map, a simple geographical expression. Rather, place always already conjures the lived, felt, and relational experience of a thinking, feeling body/subject. This relational understanding of place emphasises the 'constitutive coingredience' by which self and place are unavoidably enveloped such that there can be "no place without self and no self without place" (Casey, 2001, page 684). Edward Casey introduces the notion of 'thick' and 'thin' places in

an attempt to capture the varying *degrees of intensity* of this affective and relational compact. Casey's work also offers a powerful synthesis of a range of cognate themes common to much recent analysis of place-making, identity, and community (see Anderson and Harrison, 2010). Thick places invite the individual's "concernful absorption"—a deepening and broadening of the individual's lived experience of place—while supporting various practices of "personal enrichment" (Casey, 2001, page 684). This "concernful absorption" involves two related processes which Casey calls the "outgoing" and the "incoming" of place. "Outgoing" describes the active practices of engagement and reflection by which the "lived body" actually "encounters" or experiences place in all its manifold resonances (page 688). One is forever "going out to meet" the "place-world", with each meeting effecting a more refined corporeal orientation to place (page 688). This exploration inevitably involves the *ingression* of the place-world, a coming into the self of the world such that each body invariably "bears the traces of the places it has known" (page 688). Thick places support more intensive, or affectively resonant, experiences of this outgoing and incoming.

Casey contrasts thick places with the 'thin' places that increasingly characterise the modern West. Thin places are, for Casey, places that have been erased of any local specificity, any unique quality or feature that might enable individuals and groups to actively engage with place, to secure some kind of purchase. These "levelled down" (page 684) places trade the specificity, the uniquely differential character of thick places for the fungible uniformity of the same, the familiar, and the navigable. While Casey declines to provide examples of thin places, one might note the strange consistency of international airport terminals, shopping malls, and fast-food restaurants, which increasingly resemble one another no matter which corner of the globe one encounters them in. Despite their divergent ontologies, thick and thin places illustrate the role of affect in the production of place, emphasising the affective resonances of thick places, while exposing the banalisation of thin places. Any city is invariably made up of thick and thin places, places which support diverse enriching experiences, and places which leave no trace at all. Yet Casey's allegorical rendering of place provides little basis for identifying thick places and the diverse means of their production and organisation. It is not clear, in other words, how thick places emerge, how one might begin to interrogate their dimensions and contours, or how one might explain their transitions and continuities. Are thick places fleeting, evanescent effects of affective engagement in place, or are they more durable features of the social, material, and discursive production of place? The reading of affect introduced at the outset of this paper arguably provides some basis for addressing these challenges, emphasising the diverse feeling states associated with place as well as the dispositional orientations experienced in that place.

This account suggests that affective engagement with place—and the affective atmospheres this engagement supports—provides the principal means by which thin places are converted into thick places. This engagement does not bear the character of an exchange in which substantive qualities or essences are transferred between places and bodies (see Thrift, 2004, pages 59 – 62). Rather, affective engagement captures an emergent force or intensity that is a function of the assembling of bodies, both human and nonhuman, without ever being reducible to these bodies (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, pages 276 – 280). Affective engagement creates a zone of indeterminacy, an *intensity*, that transforms space in the very instance of creating place (McCormack, 2007, pages 369 – 372). Affects are autonomous in this sense, in that they reside neither in individual places nor in individual bodies but rather in the dynamic and relational interaction of places and bodies (Massumi, 2002). Despite the sometimes florid complexion of this argument, it points, once more, to the limitations of de Certeau's

account of the role of practice in the production of place. Walking, for example, surely betrays any number of affective, felt, and lived facets in contributing to the embodied practice of place-making. What's more, this affective dimension extends beyond the mere cataloguing of the diverse feeling states associated with any particular walk to include the various transitions and modifications in the body's power of acting that the very practice of walking produces. *To walk is to be affected by place and to simultaneously contribute to the ongoing co-constitution of self and place.* While walking contributes to the practical spatialisation of the city, it is the affective dimensions of this practice that contribute most directly to the production of thick places. The only problem that remains is how to identify thick places. In part, this concerns the issue of clarifying the role of affect and practice in the production of place, yet it also concerns the more difficult problem of discerning how thick places support personal enrichment. Exploring these links between affect, practice, the production of place, and the experience of personal enrichment was the principal focus of ethnographic research recently completed in Vancouver, Canada.

Walking in Vancouver

This study was primarily concerned with the various ways young people identify, negotiate, and transform place and the impact these practices have on the characteristic orientations of self, identity, and belonging. A complementary aim was to explore the affective dimensions of place-making and the ways affects shape the experience of place while mediating relations between places. A range of research methods were employed in the course of this work, including ethnographic methods such as participant observation and in-depth interviews, as well as elements of Wang and Burris's (1997) photovoice methodology and Carpiano's (2009) "go-along" walking interview method. The use of these methods facilitated the analysis of a range of practices and their role in the negotiation and transformation of place, while remaining sensitive to the affective dimensions of this place-making.

Research was conducted among youth aged fifteen to eighteen years in four Vancouver neighbourhoods (West End, Kitsilano, Mt Pleasant, and Killarney) between November 2007 and June 2008. Three groups of three friends (referred to as 'triads' hereafter) were recruited in each neighbourhood to facilitate analysis of both the private and social aspects of place and place-making. Thirty-six youth participated in total, nine in each site, with a near equal mix of males and females. All thirty-six youth were attending school at the time of the study and living at home with family. The study sites were selected on the basis of 2006 Canadian census data in an effort to capture the broad ethnocultural and socioeconomic diversity of Greater Vancouver. The research received ethical approval from the University of British Columbia, the Vancouver School Board (VSB), and Vancouver Coastal Health Authority (VCHA). The VSB and VCHA also assisted with recruitment, with most participants selected through high schools and community centres in each catchment area. A small number of participants were recruited following referrals from primary contacts.

The research commenced with a "go-along" walking tour of local places nominated by participants in each triad as important, meaningful, or otherwise significant. Carpiano (2009, page 264) describes this method as an ideal empirical technique for exploring the 'interplay between structural conditions and individual agency for shaping action'. The distinctive methodological features of this approach include the use of a semistructured interview guide alongside more conversational ad hoc questions, as well as the collection of detailed field notes based on observations of the research context (Carpiano, 2009). The walking tours adopted these methods in order to generate more refined accounts of young people's place-making, with particular emphasis

on the individual and collective aspects of this process. This interest in the personal and social dimensions of place-making reflects much contemporary research on young people, place, identity, and belonging (Miles, 2000). Three discrete triad tours were completed in each of the four research sites, with all three members participating in ten of the twelve tours, with one member absent from each of the remaining walks for various reasons. Tours took place mainly on foot, though in a number of instances tours continued via public transit to access additional sites around the neighbourhood. Each tour interview was digitally recorded and transcribed, with research assistants also taking their own field notes. Research assistants later conducted three sessions of participant observation in each neighbourhood, concentrating on individual places identified in earlier tours.

Perhaps the most distinctive finding to emerge in this work was the considerable effort all participants undertook to identify, maintain, and transform local places in an attempt to cultivate a unique sense of belonging in the city. This involved a series of discrete practices, sometimes conducted on one's own, though more often as part of a larger group, as well as a series of affective processes of navigation and memorialisation by which a city of belonging and emotional resonance was crafted. The walking tours highlighted the social aspects of these experiences and the links between the collective negotiation of place and the formation of intimate private spaces. Each aspect of this place-making will be described below.

On the negotiation of designated spaces and the cultivation of private places

Place-making inevitably draws on diverse social and affective resources, just as it requires active engagement with the structural or material dimensions of place (Thrift, 2007). The walking tours involved an attempt to trace the relational and material aspects of this place-making, with a focus on places of meaning and belonging, however participants understood this. The tours highlighted the social dimensions of place-making, in that participants were eager to tour sites of interaction and shared practice despite the author's expressed interest in both the individual and social experience of place. In rare instances, walking tours involved one or another triad member introducing sites that were unfamiliar to other members. More commonly, participants directed researchers to shared or collective spaces of sociality and engagement. Tensions between the individual and group negotiation of place emerged infrequently, and so the analysis below will concentrate on the social and affective dimensions of place-making in Vancouver. While many of the places canvassed in this research were familiar (cafes, parks, and malls), a number of unusual, almost counter-intuitive locations, such as parkades, were also identified. What emerged very forcefully was the sense that young people struggle to identify places of belonging and meaning. In almost every instance, participants described carving such places out of the order and routine of more formally designated places. The challenge, as one participant noted, is to "grab a table or a corner or a bench someplace and then claim it as ours". Without many places of their own, participants were forced to cultivate thick places whenever and wherever feasible. This process often turned on familiar tensions between private and public spaces and the difficulties participants experienced in cultivating a place for privacy and/or intimacy.

The example of school was raised by a number of triads, highlighting the struggles many youth experience securing a place of belonging or identity at school (Allen, 2006). For many participants, this struggle concerned the effort to identify places for privacy in the midst of a busy and very public setting. While participants noted that their schools typically provided designated spaces for each student—such as a locker or a specified desk for a particular class—these sites rarely afforded any privacy or the

space for more intimate social interactions. In an attempt to cultivate such a space, one triad spoke of their efforts to 'claim' a corner under a stairwell in one of the main buildings on campus. Describing this effort, one member noted,

"The three of us want to hang out, but we don't belong to any of the school clubs, so we can't really get to hang out there. Then one day I saw that this little corner looked like no one was around or could see you properly from the stairs, so we sat there with our lunch. And like it's a really great place to hang out and talk 'cos it's close to the lockers and that but no one bothers us. We can just do whatever, like no one is around us."

Other members spoke of the sense of ownership they felt in this corner and their ongoing efforts to ensure that it was free for their exclusive use at lunchtime. One member stated bluntly, "well it's our place now, people know that, or they should know it". This 'ownership' was established in a distinctive set of practices, starting with the sheer fact of these boys' presence and their regular return to this place, yet also involving acts of privacy and the expression of more intimate social relations.

This art of cultivating private spaces from the interstices of more public or designated sites was common to almost all triad members. Participants identified many such places during the walking tours, including niches and corners in malls and arcades; quiet spots in parks, beaches, and other open spaces; as well as particular cafes and bubble tea shops. In explaining the significance of these places, a number of participants spoke of the absence of formally recognised spaces for youth in the city of Vancouver. As one youth described it,

"Well we are too young to go to clubs and not everyone is into drinking anyway. And then only kids go to the neighbourhood houses, well maybe some go to play basketball and stuff, but like if you are not into sport, then there is really nowhere to go, particularly if you don't have any money."

While home provided many participants with a degree of privacy and a related sense of authenticity and meaning, home was not always appropriate for shared activities, or for socialising. As such, the creation of places for socialising in groups both large and small often required considerable effort and much improvisatory nous. Despite the vagaries of Vancouver's climate, much of this place-making took place in parks, beaches, and open spaces. Participants favoured these spaces because of the privacy they afforded and the absence of adult supervision. Parks and beaches were regarded as especially amenable places, ideal for the ongoing cultivation of a 'youth space' in among the runners, dog walkers, families, and tourists. In walking through one such park, a triad member noted that;

"There's a lot of open space here and nobody's [ie adults] going to listen to you. Nobody's going to judge you. There are places to sit, and we can all hang out and text and share food and just wait for the bus whatever, you know? 'Open space' pretty much says it. People can go anywhere around the park, and you seem to have a bit more privacy. I talk to my friends here a lot."

The identification of places for privacy and social interaction also involved the search for spaces to support specific activities or pastimes such as skateboarding, 'free running', or breakdancing. One walk involved a tour of local sites where triad members rode their skateboards. This included a courtyard outside a local accident insurance firm that was flood-lit overnight, including on weekends; various parkades attached to local malls; a small park beneath the off-ramp to a city bridge; and a row of benches outside a municipal swimming pool. Interestingly, these youth rarely rode their boards at the various skate-parks operated by local authorities, preferring the freedom and the privacy afforded in open spaces. A similar attitude was conveyed by another triad who liked to breakdance in diverse public (and quasi-public) places,

particularly at night. Walking with this triad involved numerous stops at niches and alcoves in amid strip malls and shopping precincts, which by night became sites for "breaking, for smoking, and for writing [graffiti]". These niches were preferred for the privacy they afforded from the street and for the specific material properties they exhibited. Commenting on one such space, a triad member stated that,

> "It's perfect here right. You see the tiled floor is great so we don't have to carry around mats or cardboard if we don't feel like it and you can't really be seen from the street, especially at night if it's raining so the police and security guards don't notice us when they drive by. We can get six or seven people dancing in here and it's our own private club [laughs]."

This simple covered alcove between two shop-fronts afforded an array of opportunities for privacy, interaction, and spontaneity, while the practices enacted within this space served to further entrench it as a place of meaning and belonging. This triad identified three similar places on their walking tour, and subsequent fieldwork confirmed the range of divergent practices common to them. Many youth frequented these sites to dance, watch and mingle, listen to music, and perhaps smoke cannabis, yet for each, these places evoked a strong sense of communal life and personal belonging—sense that "this is our place".

This creation of intimate places amid the structures and order of a more formal city is entirely consistent with de Certeau's characterisations of a walking rhetoric of pedestrian speech acts and the associated practices of synecdoche and asyndeton. In each of these fragmented spaces—the niches beneath a stair well at school; the quiet corners in local parks; and the benches, courtyards, and alcoves favoured by skateboarders and breakdancers—triad members have discovered the "enlarged singularities and separate islands" from which a city of place and belonging might be cultivated (de Certeau, 1984, page 101). Moreover, these mundane places come to evoke the very meaning of neighbourhood and community, giving form and substance to the lived experience of place. It might be argued further that the practices enacted in each site work to transform these thin featureless spaces into the kinds of thick places potentially supportive of young people's personal enrichment. For it is clear that participants experience privacy, social engagement, skateboarding, and breakdancing as meaningful, significant, and life affirming. Each involves the kinds of 'concernful absorption' in place Casey notes, even in instances where the activity itself works to push the environment from view. If these thick places are made in and of practice, they come to evoke a sense of belonging and meaning in affect.

Affect as an art of navigation

The art of place-making, and the diverse practices that support and extend this art, serve to enmesh bodies in relational networks of meaning and belonging, of time and space. *These relational networks are primarily felt and affective in their lived immediacy* (Massumi, 2002; Thrift, 2007). Yet it is not merely the case that the various techniques that give form to place evoke diverse feeling states; these techniques are themselves material expressions of the modifications in the power of acting of the diverse bodies that inhabit place (Deleuze, 1988). Reports derived from the walking tours and the subsequent observational work reflect this complexity. The places identified in each of the walking tours resonated for participants in all manner of polyvalent ways. These places are far more than simple material settings for specific practices and activities. Of course, these activities are important; however, participants clearly acknowledged that such activities are directly framed or enabled by the character of the setting itself. The privacy so valued by participants is, for example, a function not only of the exclusivity of a set of temporal relations; it is also a manifestation of the particular

properties of place. This intimacy is a *relational achievement* drawing on diverse social, affective, and material resources.

What this suggests is that individuals and groups are deeply affected by place, just as they are deeply affected by the varied practices, activities, and bodies they encounter in place. The group of breakdancers, for example, spoke enthusiastically of the "rush", the "buzz", and the "energy" they felt dancing in various public (made private) places late in the evening. In part, this buzz was transmitted between bodies in the excitement of the moment, the movement and energy of the dancing, the volume and modulation of the music, and the exclusivity of the group. Yet the myriad material, spatial, relational, and discursive elements that converge in this space also manifest diverse *affective atmospheres* (Anderson, 2009, pages 78 – 81). These atmospheres capture an emergent 'something more' that is produced in the interaction of material, social, and affective, forms. It conveys the energy or 'power of acting' characteristic of what Deleuze (1988, page 101) describes as a body's "force of existing". This force, produced in and through encounters and events, potentially extends the array of things a body can do (Anderson, 2009, page 80). Moreover, affective atmospheres and their emergent properties are unique to each occasioning of place, such that the atmosphere in the various niches and alcoves in which triad members dance is refashioned anew with each instance. Participants acknowledged this distinction in describing those nights when these atmospheric elements converge in the production of a memorable, inspiring night. One youth described it as follows;

> "Yeah, definitely some nights are so good, like I don't know you just feel different, like you can really move and you can get right into the tricks, people are cheering and the music is loud. Nothing can touch you."

This illustrates well the twin dimensions of affect—the specificity of the feeling states produced in and of affect and the modifications in the body's dispositional orientations that are its principal expressions (see also Deleuze, 1988).

The extent and force of the affective atmospheres discernible in these varied sites are again reminiscent of de Certeau's treatment of the 'separate islands' produced in and through a rhetorics of urban place. Like de Certeau's disjunctive city of isolated fragments and interstitial zones, triad members characterised their own neighbourhoods in the same fragmented and allusive rhetoric. Each triad's walking tour featured these riven, isolated sites, which convey the meaning and experience of neighbourhood. Yet these tours also stress what de Certeau leaves absent—the profound role of affect in the cultivation of these 'enlarged singularities'. Breakdancing, skateboarding, and social interaction help define the function or distinctiveness of these spatial fragments, but their real power is arguably derived from the affective atmospheres these places support. Such atmospheres are a complicated assemblage of social, material, and affective components, linked together in the sinews of practice, in the materiality of place and finally in the emergent 'co-presencing' of bodies, place, and self (Anderson, 2009). Affect is the emergent and energetic expression of the force of practice in place. What's more, I would argue contra de Certeau that affect—and not the asyndetic wanderings of practice—*is the principal mechanism threading urban places together*. Although practice may well be the means by which places take on meaning, the motivating impulse that inspires young people to identify and maintain these sites in the first place is born in and of the affects and capacities they express. One is affected by the atmosphere, the *potential in place*, before one investigates its value as a space of and for practice. Skateboarders encountering a courtyard outside an insurance firm, for example, are first affected by the quality of the light, the expanse of flat concrete leading to a flight of stairs, and the privacy afforded by high walls on two sides, before actually launching into place, board under foot and practice in motion.

Affect, in this way, serves as a kind of map or tool of navigation whereby individuals negotiate the city in search of those sites which later become *places* in and of the practices they support. Affect is the strange attractor lingering in place awaiting its realisation in practice, habit, and sensation (Massumi, 1992, pages 64 – 65). One is affected *by place* before one might be affected *in place* through one's practices and habits. This idea was conveyed again and again by triad members on the various walking tours. When quizzed on how various places had first been identified along with their various merits and attractions, participants turned almost without fail to a language of feelings and sensations—that a place at first 'felt right' or that it inspired the right kind of feelings and moods. In describing a bubble tea shop that had become a favourite hangout place, triad members noted that:

"Well, we walked past a bunch of times after school, and I just liked the look of the place, the people in there, and the colour of it all, it just looked like a really cool place, so I wanted to try it."

Another triad spoke in similar ways about a stretch of parkland overlooking the city that was a common place to meet and talk. One member suggested that "the place was so peaceful right from the start, like you just felt so calm the moment you got there". Affects are, in this sense, *a means of navigating space*, in that places present certain affective possibilities, which in themselves suggest practices and activities that might be realisable in that space. Negotiating the city is an art of discerning or reading these affective cues in search of places to support particular activities. These readings, in turn, produce an affective map of the city, indicating the shifting affects and moods of urban life and the practices and capacities these affects support. These practices reinforce the significance and value of place, but they are cultivated primarily in a series of affective encounters. Affect is, in this way, just as synecdochic and asyndetic in its cultivation of place and belonging in the city as is practice. Affects link places together, providing a lived sense of belonging in place, while giving form to the meaning and purpose of one's neighbourhood or community.

This affective rendering of place also involves a memorialisation in and of place—an implacement of memory, feeling, and capacities. Affect is the means by which fragments of subjectivity, memory, and purpose are deposited in place, as it were. Every lunchtime, triad members return to the same corner in the same stairwell to resume a distinctive practice of privacy and intimacy, yet the affective atmosphere crafted in this place itself triggers a range of subjective experiences and dispositions. Moreover, this atmosphere serves as a kind of subjective orientation to place, signalling the various affects, moods, and capacities that might be enactable in that place, in contrast to the thin places that surround it. Thick places like this leave behind affective traces of lived intensity, awaiting reactivation in practice and interaction. As one breakdancer observed,

"I walk by that arcade on my way to school most days and like I'll be listening to my ipod and I'll come by and think about the last time we were there and it's so exciting. Like I'll just give myself a few beats to skip to, dancing off and thinking about the next time."

The memorialisation of affect in place, *the embedding of affect in place*, is the primary means by which thin places are transformed into thick places replete with all manner of enriching moments. The extent to which these embedded affects are available to inspire future events or activities and the duration of such immanent effects and their accessibility to wider social networks are critical questions that await further study. All pertain to the *character* of affective atmospheres in place.

Conclusions: the cultivation of thick places

Place-making has long been regarded as an important determinant of young people's experience of belonging and purpose (Allen, 2006; Clark and Uzzell, 2002). To feel connected to place *is to experience a sense of belonging in place* that itself generates resources of immense value in the promotion of health and well-being (Benson and Saito, 2001). As such, belonging and purpose have been shown to buffer various developmental problems associated with alcohol and other drug use (Roth and Brooks-Gunn, 2003), mood and anxiety disorders (Catalano et al, 2004), and poor academic achievement (Hymel et al, 2006). Place matters in this sense precisely because places are intimately involved in young people's personal development and their health and well-being (Lerner, 2002). This suggests a powerful rationale for the study of place and place-making, yet it also suggests the need for some means of discerning which places potentially support young people's health and development and how such places are identified, cultivated, and maintained. This paper has argued that the study of affect and practice—and their constitutive role in the production and reproduction of thick places—provides grounds for the development of such an analytics of place.

More specifically, I have argued for an analytics of place that goes beyond de Certeau's urban rhetorics of practice and tactics to include the *affective experience of place-making*. This affective dimension is far more than a mere aesthetic or experiential concern. For affects exceed the indicative mood or sense of place to include the action-potential, the dispositional orientations, conveyed within place. To fail to attend to this affective dimension is to miss the push and pull of place. It also renders one less sensitive to the fine distinctions marking thick and thin places so critical to the everyday experience of the city. I have argued further that thick places ought to be regarded as an expression of the diverse affective atmospheres generated in the collocations of practice and place. This complicated nexus animates the manifold expressions of personal enrichment observable in all thick places. The task of identifying thick places requires one to remain alert to this nexus and the ways affects and practices converge in the experience of enrichment and belonging. It suggests, moreover, a direct link between the study of affect and the analysis of place and its role in the maintenance of health and development.

The analysis of place-making in the city of Vancouver illustrated the significance of thick places and their production in diverse circuits of affect and practice, movement and sensation. Thick places punctuated participants' everyday experience of the city, threading local places together in a constitutive and resonant expression of community belonging. This belonging is an affective and practical effect of the intimacy and privacy, fun and spontaneity, creativity and drive observable in the diverse thick places canvassed in this study. What's more, these thick places were identified in all manner of marginal spaces, alongside more conventional developmental contexts like school, the home, workplaces, cultural institutions and, so on (see Catalano et al, 2004). This is not to disregard the developmental significance of schools, libraries, and sporting facilities; it is rather to stress that youth development proceeds in a variety of makeshift, spontaneous places. The point is that the diverse experiences documented in these thick places—from the creation of privacy in stairwells and public parks to the exuberances of skateboarding and breakdancing—forge a series of finely drawn connections to place, establishing a sense of community, belonging, and meaning. Finding ways to facilitate young people's cultivation of thick places, and the affective atmospheres and enriching experiences they support, should figure among the most pressing priorities informing the design of more effective youth development strategies in urban settings.

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