

# “You Can’t Say that at SAHANZ”: Critical Nearness and the Role of Autoethnography in Architectural History

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*If distance (or objectivity) is the scholarly discipline of architectural history, then what is the role of nearness; does it suggest an undisciplined or less rigorous standpoint? Kim Roberts challenges this artificial division by focusing not just on the reception of architecture by audiences, but also on her own subjective responses as a researcher.<sup>1</sup> In this paper, we too consider the proclivities of accepted historiographic cultures. We reflect critically on the relationship between architectural history and its historians through the methodological frame of autoethnography which foregrounds personal experience as an explicit component of the sense-making process of research. Autoethnography navigates distance and nearness to critically connect the personal to the cultural, in the process unlocking conversations normally excluded from academic literature.<sup>2</sup>*

*Our reflection is informed by critical analysis and our own autoethnographies of articles on the periphery of the field by respected scholars including: Naomi Stead (2009 and 2010), Karen Burns (2010), Christine Phillips (2011), Arijit Sen (2013), Roy Brockington and Nela Cicmil (2016), and most recently by Kim Roberts (2019) and Maria Tumarkin (2019). Our paper respects the genres we traverse; it is structured by SAHANZ’s stylistic convention of distance; and intercepted by the first-person closeness of autoethnography, through the correspondence generated by writing this paper together. Our paper is also a dialogical response to the scholars we focus on. While autoethnography may appear to be less rigorous than analytical criticism, we argue it offers new and significant dimensions for architectural histories and historians, and their audiences.*

*Keywords: autoethnography; subjectivity; situated practice; disciplinary convention; research culture*

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*As a recent guest editor of Fabrications, I found myself negotiating the obstacles thrown-up by the submission of articles that embraced autoethnography. How could we possibly uphold blind peer review when an author openly discusses her neighbourhood, the place she conducted her doctoral research and her existing body of work? But to dismiss an article because it is difficult to review, when the work was both compelling and rigorous, did not seem like a choice available to us—at least not an ethical one. Yet messing with the integrity of the very practices that ground our discipline is no trifling concern. In employing alternative forms of writing architecture, Stead has observed that “transgression is not an end in itself” and that “when the only rule is to bend the rules, it’s a treacherous and boggy ground.”<sup>3</sup> For me, this paper seemed like a chance to pull together what has already been done, to analyse it critically and understand the unique affordances of autoethnography for architectural history. Cristina is interested in the idea of acculturation within our discipline and the practice of so carefully hiding this culture away; the mess disguised, the trailing thoughts ordered and made concrete by the framed authority of the archive. Rebecca.*

All autoethnography, according to Walter Goldschmidt, is focused around the self and reveals “personal investments, interpretations and analyses.”<sup>4</sup> What is our investment? We believe there is unrealised value in autoethnography for the practice, culture, and reception of architectural history. Autoethnography challenges the conventions of traditional research by critically analysing personal experiences in order to understand cultural experiences.<sup>5</sup> Our investment in autoethnography is both personal and disciplinary, arising from several personal experiences that have been integral to our academic endeavours. Yet to make these explicit, would be a scholarly *faux pas*. The goal of autoethnography is not an exercise in navel-gazing but aspires “to write meaningfully and evocatively about topics that matter and may make a difference, to include sensory and emotional experience, and to write from an ethic of care and concern.”<sup>6</sup>

*Rebecca, I find myself turning over our position, what is our argument? It’s as if experience is discounted within the discipline. But how else can we understand the practice within which we are situated? This makes me think about the distinct rules within writing on*

1 Kim Roberts, “The Hiroshima Peace Memorial Cenotaph and the Shadow Side of Spatial Research,” *Fabrications* 29, no. 1 (2019).

2 Tony E. Adams, Stacy Holman Jones, and Carolyn Ellis, *Autoethnography: Understanding Qualitative Research* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

3 Naomi Stead, “Writing the City, or, the Story of a Sydney Walk,” *NORA - Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research* 18, no. 4 (2010): 234.

4 Adam, Jones and Ellis are referencing Walter Goldschmidt and his seminal article “Anthropology and the Coming Crisis: An Autoethnographic Appraisal” *Anthropologist* 79, no. 2 (1977). Adams, Jones and Ellis, *Autoethnography*, 16.

5 Adam, Jones and Ellis, *Autoethnography*, 1.

6 Ellis and Bochner, “Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher as Subject,” 742.

*architecture. Who gets to claim “voice” and who doesn’t? The architect, (more so if they are renowned) is given the stage to proclaim the narratives on their work. The opponent to the architect is the critic, who also gets a speaking part. Then there is the architectural historian, whose conventions of the third voice position them off-stage, at a distance where anonymity produces authority and rigour for conventions of the universal voice and blind peer-review. Unlike the architect and the critic, the academic is not allowed to voice the intimate, the personal or the process of research and writing. And yet, if the angst and concern in writing this paper is anything to go by, writing is a difficult and fraught practice, one that asks us to put ourselves on paper, to make an original contribution and to endure necessary scrutiny by our peers. C.*

The increasing demand for “research impact” anticipates our research will engage with new audiences, not just those beyond the discipline but also beyond the institutions that sustain us. In a context where the value of architecture and the architect is being constantly marginalised,<sup>7</sup> architectural history is also, and arguably more so, at risk. This seems to be evidenced in the anecdotal reductions to the history and theory content of architectural qualifications in Australasia.<sup>8</sup> At this time and in this discipline, we wonder if examining architectural history through its engagement with autoethnography might prove useful. Fellow members of SAHANZ, do we have your attention now?

7 Flora Samuel, *Why Architects Matter: Evidencing and Communicating the Value of Architects* (London: Routledge, 2018).

8 Personal correspondence with academics at the University of Melbourne, University of Auckland and University of Newcastle.

## Methodology

Architectural history does not simply live in the publications produced by historians, but also in the performances and practices that engage with its production and reception. Our paper consciously glides between the detached and the intimate by weaving the argument through our own voices and those of others. Our paper is both process and product; “the medium is the message.”<sup>9</sup>

*Cris, our reviewer observed that autoethnography can seem “self-indulgent, unrigorous and of marginal interest to anyone but the author.” We are acutely aware. Yet they also acknowledged it can be useful “when other avenues of scholarly investigation seem exhausted, insurmountable or unsuited to the subject matter.” What are the qualifications relative to each*

9 Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Berkeley, CA: Ginko Press, [1967] 2013), 13-22.

condition? Three years post-PhD I wrote a paper to excise the emotional pull the hospital sites I'd studied continued to hold over me.<sup>10</sup> This presents an example of the exhaustion of traditional, archival architectural history methods—to solve this final, nagging problem, something else needed to be brought to it. Subject matters that are too personal, where participant groups may be considered too vulnerable, or an experience too particular—perhaps these provide examples of the insurmountable, where traditional methods could simply not be applied? Unsuitability we relate to the reception of architecture. As William Whyte so poetically phrased it, there is “a history of the gaze as well as of the brush stroke ... the production of space owes as much to those who consume it as it does to those who create it.”<sup>11</sup> Archival material seldom reveals the subjective responses of inhabitants to an architectural space and yet, so much architecture is designed with precisely this in mind: designers shape experience, they manipulate the material environment in order “to affect people’s moods and guide their behaviour.”<sup>12</sup> R.

In defining the characteristics of autoethnography, Adams, Jones and Ellis suggest it aspires to bring personal experience to fore; placing value on subjectivity and the reflective practice of the researcher, embracing storytelling and first-person narrative in the process. Personal experience enables a critique of existing cultural practice to be made by unlocking conversations that might not otherwise occur in academic literature (is this the “insurmountable”?). The critique is enabled because the genre seeks to form an explicit connection between the personal and the cultural, achieved by providing an honest account of the sense-making processes that underpin cultural practices. This includes those processes that relate to disciplinary research cultures—autoethnography requires an honest account of the road taken to reach a conclusion.<sup>13</sup>

We began by identifying eight papers from within the discipline of architectural history and theory that employed autoethnography or an aligned writing practice. Our criteria for inclusion was critical nearness—autoethnography was employed to draw on the experiences of the authors in a rigorous way. For this reason, two papers were quickly excluded: Arijit Sen’s “Staged Disappointment: Interpreting the Architectural Facade of the Vedanta Temple, San Francisco” (Winterthur Portfolio, 2013)<sup>14</sup> uses autoethnography as a metaphor, rather than a methodology; and Roy Brockington and Nela Cicmil’s “Brutalist

10 Rebecca McLaughlan, “Towards an Ethic of Reciprocity: The Messy Business of Co-creating Research with Voices from the Archive,” *Cultural Studies Review* 24, no. 2 (2018): 39-55.

11 William Whyte, “How do Buildings Mean? Some Issues of Interpretation in the History of Architecture,” *History and Theory* 45, no. 2 (2006): 153, 167.

12 Mikkel Bille, Peter Bjerregaard and Tim Flohr Sørensen, “Staging Atmospheres: Materiality, Culture, and the Texture of the in-between,” *Emotion, Space and Society* 15 (2015): 33.

13 Adams, Jones, and Ellis, *Autoethnography*, 26.

14 Arijit Sen, “Staged Disappointment Interpreting the Architectural Facade of the Vedanta Temple, San Francisco,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 47, no. 4 (2013).

Architecture: An Autoethnographic Examination of Structure and Corporeality” (*M/C Journal*, 2016) used autoethnography as a method but failed to critically analyse the author’s experiences in ways that unpacked their acculturation within the discipline or any other cultural context. Autoethnography is not just experience writ large; it is the systematic interrogation of this experience.

That left six papers that dealt with each authors’ experiences on the relationship of architectural history or theory to a particular site, series of sites, body of work or archives (in chronological order): Naomi Stead’s “If on a Winter’s Day a Tourist: Writing the Phenomenological Experience of Stockholm” (*Architectural Theory Review*, 2009); alongside her later work, “Writing the City, or, The Story of a Sydney Walk” (*NORA*, 2010); Karen Burns’ “Ex libris: Archaeologies of Feminism, Architecture and Deconstruction” (*Architectural Theory Review*, 2010); Christine Phillips’ “Experiencing Constructed Landscapes: The Use of Autoethnography in the Practice of Architectural History” (*Proceedings of SAHANZ*, 2011); Maria Tumarkin’s “Twenty Years of Thinking About Traumascaping” (*Fabrications*, 2019); and Kim Roberts’ “The Hiroshima Peace Memorial Cenotaph and the Shadow Side of Spatial Research” (*Fabrications*, 2019).

We first met in person to agree on lines of inquiry and decided to read the selected papers in isolation. Author one made reading notes as a series of letters to author two, while author two kept notes in the form of a diary to be shared. Amounting to seventeen pages, these notes documented our respective-sense-making processes as we grappled with the issues illuminated within and across these six papers. Autoethnography recognises this sense-making process as an explicit type of data.<sup>15</sup>

*Cris, the reviewer suggested our analysis was observational as opposed to analytical—the latter seeming to carry the underlying promise of objectivity. Yet so much architectural history is constructed via personal readings of an archive, within the broader context of that archive’s existence. If we apply an expanded definition of an “archive” (with thanks to Cvetkovich and Steedman<sup>16</sup>), then how is our reading of these six papers, within the broader context of our discipline, any different? The historian first observes then assembles the most likely explanation, as objectively as possible, from a so-often incomplete archive and the buildings that survive around it. Are we to pretend this is a definition of objectivity? As*

15 Adams, Jones, and Ellis, *Autoethnography*, 26.

16 Ann Cvetkovich, “In the Archives of Lesbian Feelings: Documentary and Popular Culture,” *Camera Obscura* 17, no. 1 (2002): 110-47; Carolyn Steedman, “The Space of Memory: In an Archive,” *History of the Human Sciences* 11, no. 4 (1998): 65-83.

*you've previously observed, the historian is always present in the histories they write—but this presence is covert. R.*

Sense-making is not simply observation and description but requires a critical approach to the combined data of artefact (the papers) and the experience (reading and writing this paper). It asks us to question why we think the way we do, not just drawing on our own individual cultural histories, but also on those of the artefacts being examined. Notes and drafts were traded, back and forth via email, and annotated by sms exchanges until this article reached a form sufficient for peer-review. As Burns has observed, writing is a practice which shapes thought.<sup>17</sup> By extension, the peer-review process is a disciplinary conversation framed by culture and politics as much as any discourse. We need to acknowledge that the process of writing together, and within the discipline, is a negotiation. What one academic puts forward can be accepted, rejected or reshaped by others. So, to be true to the genre, this paper cites from our initial notes throughout, without treating these as revered archival substitutes—they have been revised, rephrased, rewritten, rewoven and embroidered with our peer-reviewers' comments.

17 Karen Burns, "Ex Libris: Archaeologies of Feminism, Architecture and Deconstruction," *Architectural Theory Review* 15, no. 3 (2010): 244.

## Navigating Distance: Autoethnography and its Use in Architectural History

The six papers can be loosely grouped into two; where the autoethnography focuses on the experience of a physical site; or a collection of scholarly work. Stead's two papers fall into the first group. Her 2009 paper is framed by the concept of sensory urbanism and the 2010 paper by the phenomenological turn to experience in critical tourism. Both of Stead's articles employ experimental writing forms to challenge the conventions of architectural and urban history to interrogate the experience of two cities. Burns' paper falls into the second group. She interrogates her collection of architectural books as an archive, drawing on her autobiographical marks and scribbles (marginalia) to reframe canonical figures within her ongoing feminist intellectual inquiry. Both Stead and Burn's work the use of autoethnography as instrumental. It is aimed at challenging conventions and speaking for the gaps in the discipline, the things we all know and do, but are too afraid to put forward.

The final two papers, by Tumarkin and Roberts are longer autoethnographic engagements. Tumarkin, reflects on her own body of work over the past two decades and the way it

has emerged from, and is interwoven with her personal life. Tumarkin, like Burns, uses autoethnography to critically appraise how her scholarly trajectory has been shaped by the culture she belongs to. Roberts' paper is more like Stead's. She focuses on her relationship with the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Cenotaph to explore the memorial's affective pull as a site of 'unfinished business.'

*Hey Cris,*

*Christine Phillips asks how do we integrate personal experience with architectural history? She argues that a critics' own experience should be used to convey sensorial qualities of space; its use; and the relationships that occur between spaces and people. Phillips conception of autoethnography, however, is similar to that of Brockington and Cicmil, in that it assumes subjective experience—or attentiveness to the everyday experience—fused with the knowledge of the architectural historian is somehow enough. As architects, we value the phenomenological, but this is a trap; autoethnography is not simply about subjective experience, it's about taking that experience, reflecting critically on it and using that to say something more.*  
R.

*Rebecca, I agree. Phillips raises the right questions; the first half of her paper is excellent, but this critical approach is not applied to her datasets. Like psychoanalysis, autoethnography compels you to excavate below the surface to reveal how your experience is a reflection of your acculturation. The significance of Stead's and Burns' papers is situated as much within their argument, as how it is said—it is the instrumentality of autoethnography that embodies its transformative potential.* C.

Stead's papers use autoethnography to narrativize the urban experience of walking in two cities, the first in Stockholm (2009), and the second in Sydney (2010). But while she is the first to traverse into this territory in our analysis, she is not alone. She is responding to a seminal paper in critical tourism studies by Soile Veijola and Eva Jokinen, titled "The Body in Tourism."<sup>18</sup> This paper is provocatively written in the first person and addresses the reader, or co-author directly, collapsing the distance of the universal voice to introduce us to key tourism theorists—Dean McCannell, John Urry—as if on a tropical holiday.

18 Soile Veijola and Eeva Jokinen, "The Body in Tourism," *Theory, Culture & Society* 11 (1994): 125-51

*R. It is probably necessary to disclose to the reader aspects of lineage here, having been Naomi's PhD student and come upon Veijola and Jokinen's article, which I shared with her. Her response was gleeful. Off-course, I had no idea why it was so significant, I was naïve and unacculturated. Now, some ten years later, with trepidation, I read her caution in the 2010 paper on the risks of this approach. I wonder what the consequences of our own foray will be? Cheers Cris*

Stead's paper really belongs to the genre of ficto-criticism, where the "emphasis is always on the work done by the criticism—this is the privileged term, with less honour and credence given to the contributions of fiction."<sup>19</sup> While the walk is "imagined" rather than "real," the narrative is based on her lived experience. She was undertaking a Post-Doctoral Fellowship in Stockholm, while living in Sydney and knew these places intimately. What distinguishes this paper from those we've discarded is her inclusion of the academic process in the published paper. She writes:

*I wanted a paper that subverted the customary placeless and universal scholarly voice through a subjective embodied sensuality and recounting of a specific locale, specifying dates, times, exact street locations, recounted in the urgency of the first-person present tense. But I still wanted something which "worked" in the sense of having an argument and conclusions, adding something to the store of human knowledge, taking account of a broader scholarly literature and placing itself within that, being engaging on a scholarly level as well as a literary one.<sup>20</sup>*

Because of this, "Writing the City" makes the autoethnography instrumental. While the paper begins with a narrated walk in Sydney, it calls upon the process of writing, its iterations—drafts—and notes, plus peer reviews (both blind and collegiate), to help the reader understand the discipline's disregard, while acknowledging the cultural mores and conventions. Stead positions this as a form of resistance and quite deliberately gathers up, unpacks and makes sense of this resistance as she lived it. This led to Stead presenting at subsequent conferences, hosting two symposiums and guest editing an issue of *Architectural Theory Review*.

*R, Burns' 2010 paper was published in the issue of Architectural Theory Review edited by Stead. C.*

19 Stead, "Writing the City, or, the Story of a Sydney Walk," 234.

20 Stead, "Writing the City, or, the Story of a Sydney Walk," 231.

It is not surprising then, that Burns' paper also uses this disciplinary resistance to locate her argument. Like Stead she is walking through known territory, not just her own library/archive, but also the cultural territory of the field of architectural history. Her paper then specifically draws on the way particular texts become memorialised as "instruments of canon formation."<sup>21</sup> Burns is making reference to the work of Derrida, Eisenmann, Tschumi, Wigley, and Bloomer.

21 Burns, "Ex Libris," 248.

*R, suddenly the footnotes become critical, to not consider them would be to ignore the trajectory of the conversation, like not checking who is telling the tale at a swanky cocktail party. Burns sets the scene for deconstruction—first in a neutral way and reconstructs this through the convention of romance as a way of demonstrating how histories are stories: "Writing never arrives as a useful, neutral instrument but comes coded with prior histories."<sup>22</sup> Burns' reframing of Pete and Jack's relationship as a romance, (a "bromance?") is a way of slowly revealing the intimacy we seek in reading the work of others. By presenting their interlocution as if a Shakespearian play, staged by a well-regarded theatre company, she has directed our attention away from our own processes of reading and writing. Not for long though. She deftly captures our attention by revealing her own fan-girl relationship with Meaghan Morris, and causing me to think about my own intense academic encounter with this cultural studies authority, drawing me in closer to Burn's world—I am not so distant, perhaps I can relate, consider myself a participant not-quite-so-far from the centre? Or at least with company at the margins?*

22 Burns, "Ex Libris," 251.

Burns' subversion of canonical figures—as Pete and Jack—cleverly withdraws the reverence and distance we give architectural historians and theorists through their publications. In a sense the universal voice and the published work serve to create a separation, one which can feel impenetrable to an outsider even when they are present, like here at SAHANZ. The field is as much a society and culture as it is a body of knowledge. Stead and Burns' engagement with this personal knowledge is risky *precisely because* it opens up the discipline's culture and conventions to scrutiny.

Tumarkins' paper is a long reflection on her career and the way in which autoethnography was critical for giving meaning to her work on traumascapes. She convincingly argues that such a subject matter, which demands empathy, can only be

fully addressed by understanding *prima facie* of the affect such landscapes and places blanket us with. Similarly, Roberts' article does not simply reflect on a single subjective experience as a tourist but reflects across the duration of her doctoral research process, one where she has grappled with her responses to this site, turned them over in her mind, across years and subsequent visits; comparing the close range with the distant experience of the site she studies.

We note that Tumarkin and Roberts' papers lack the sense of risk and anxiety of Stead and Burns—one produced by an anticipated resistance in their work. While Tumarkin and Roberts both engage with physical places, with architecture, with memorialisation and haunting (sense of place), neither are proponents in the field of architectural history *proper*. Both identify themselves within the fields of culture and communication, and communication and creative arts, respectively.<sup>23</sup> Foregrounding this fact is by no means an attempt to discount their contribution, but it does explain the ease with which they are free to position themselves within their text without the need to instrumentalise their voices in the way that Stead and Burns' (and even Phillips to some extent) have had to. This bias, within the discipline of architectural history, is confirmed by the points raised within our peer reviewer reports. Our act of writing this paper was linked to the “selfie generation” and the “need to insert oneself [in] the frame.”<sup>24</sup> Yet personal and subjective experience in scholarship is not really a new phenomenon, instead, as Kitrina Douglas and David Carless argue, it has been devalued “and systematically removed from human and social science research over the course of the past century in response to calls for methods that more closely parallel research in the natural sciences.”<sup>25</sup> Yet, as Tumarkin has observed, “the autoethnographic framework both enables and supports [a] continuous interrogation of one's positionality, history, privileges, biases, blind spots, agendas, and motivations.”<sup>26</sup> In this paper here, we too, hope to have made a contribution.

## Risk, Resistance ... Opportunity?

Stead and Burns have both openly discussed the resistance they encountered in using autoethnography and how easily the value of this type of work is dismissed. Stead recalled that the audience to whom she presented an early conference paper, was not able (or perhaps unwilling) to engage with the work as “part of a systematic critical endeavour”:

23 Kim Roberts is currently employed as a heritage planner and architect for Context, a Melbourne based firms that has led the field in social value over the past three decades.

24 From the peer-review reports for this paper.

25 Kitrina Douglas and David Carless, “A History of Autoethnographic Inquiry,” in *Handbook of Autoethnography*, ed. Stacy Holman Jones, Tony E. Adams, and Carolyn Ellis (London: Routledge, 2013), 89.

26 Maria Tumarkin, “Twenty Years of Thinking About Traumascesapes,” *Fabrications* 29, no. 1 (2019): 6.

*the overwhelming sentiment was amusement: at my audacity in attempting such a thing, and at the thing itself as a novelty or curiosity or perhaps a gimmick .... Some discussion focused on the literary aspects of the text ... if I would just rewrite some of the dialogue less “stagily,” I could publish it in a literary magazine [as a short story].*<sup>27</sup>

27 Stead, “Writing the City, or, the Story of a Sydney Walk,” 234.

Burns too was aware that her autoethnographic act “[ran] the risk of having one’s work ruled out as irrelevant to the discipline.”<sup>28</sup> While this specific comment referred to her deliberate “unbalancing of the architecture/writing couple” through her focus on writing instead of buildings, it was nonetheless situated in a broader set of concerns that cropped up throughout the text:

28 Burns, “Ex Libris,” 244.

*For those of us working in the academy, we swim in the currents of an institutionalised writing practice ... we write in part according to what we know. We are written on by social and cultural conventions .... The question of how to speak remains sharp for me ... [how to] find a way of saying something different. How to run the risk of being ruled out of order.*<sup>29</sup>

29 Burns, “Ex Libris,” 245, 251, 260.

This resistance within architectural history is not just evident internally within the discipline. In their recent articles published in *Fabrications*, Roberts and Tumarkin both spoke openly of the value of autoethnography for their research. For them, autoethnography is productive. Roberts, although working on the margins of the discipline is nonetheless acculturated within it, and acutely aware of the opposition she would encounter. Her opening paragraph is a stake in the ground, challenging the accepted practice within architectural history of failing to admit, or discuss, the impact of our affective encounters with the sites we study. She accuses the discipline of “blindness” in the way that we:

*turn our heads from the experiential outcomes of architectural objects and landscapes .... When it comes to the subjective experience (that of others, but especially our own) we are eager to anchor, bury or bed it down firmly amidst solid and aggregated evidences: hard—irrefutably (and preferably officially) documented—fact.*<sup>30</sup>

30 Roberts, “The Hiroshima Peace Memorial Cenotaph and the Shadow Side of Spatial Research,” 87.

In contrast, Tumarkin had no reason to anticipate this resistance and provided a reactionary response following reviewer feedback. In defence of autoethnography she wrote:

*it is a way of not replicating the damaging dichotomy between the researcher's work and their being in the world—the dichotomy that strikes me as foreign and dangerous ... it is also a way of asserting ... unapologetically, that my research is always personal ... registered bodily and physically, often approached intuitively, its precise shape and areas of urgency determined by something I can only call my moral core.*<sup>31</sup>

31 Tumarkin, "Twenty Years of Thinking About Traumascespes," 6.

Roberts' research recognises there is always a disparity between design intent and the lived reality of spatial use—the authority of the architect at odds with a site's public meaning. She describes this as a kind of "discomfort" that "make[s] new demands" both on methodologies and the language we use to report our findings.<sup>32</sup> Her argument is that subjective experience provides the key to unlocking this knowledge. However, this is only part of the potential autoethnography can bring, it can also make explicit the conditions of research and therefore contextualise results, as well as the culture and conventions of a discipline as Burns and Stead have done.

32 Roberts, "The Hiroshima Peace Memorial Cenotaph and the Shadow Side of Spatial Research," 87.

*Rebecca, there is here, like in all scholarship, a question of lineage, one which we are also subscribing to here, in this paper. C.*

The articles by Stead and Burns were sophisticated, scholarly and appropriately self-critical, they were also self-conscious; aware of their own risk and experimentality. They employed autoethnography instrumentally to reveal constraints within the cultures of architectural history. The more recent papers, by Roberts and Tumarkin, are almost bombastic by comparison, self-possessed and entirely unapologetic. Tumarkin has the advantage of time depth. As an established scholar who has inhabited autoethnography for two decades, but saliently outside the boundary of architectural history. This leaves us with Roberts then, as the most recent scholar to speak autoethnographically from within the discipline. Roberts wrote with full knowledge of Stead and Burns' work—to be more precise, she wrote this piece initially for a colloquium of ficto-criticism led by Stead. The impact of these prior works is evident in the absence of Roberts' need to tread carefully.

## Autoethnography and Disciplinary Culture: Towards a Conclusion

*R, perhaps autoethnography does not contribute to the content, to the history itself, but reveals the culture from which the historiographic structures emerged? Cris*

If autoethnography reveals the culture of a discipline, then we learn more from the moments of resistance; of what is not permitted and the resulting silences than from what is readily accepted. Phillips' paper, alongside the one we submit here, are conference papers; a greater degree of tolerance and experimentation is allowed in this context. Only one of Stead's papers was published in an architectural journal. Burns' paper was published, and Roberts' written, because Stead set in place the conditions to allow them via various symposiums she hosted.<sup>33</sup> Tumarkin and Roberts' were published because we spent three days negotiating the obstacles that stood between the author's submission of these papers and the exacting rules of peer review. We have handed this year's conference editors the same problem. What sits behind this resistance? Is it fear—that of eroding the disciplinary boundaries that keep us in-check? Stead has observed this, in drawing parallels between the delivery of an academic conference paper and a performance:

*the academic conventions are exactly what allows us to think of a conference paper as not being a performance—of gender, class, culture, academic identity, all of it. Of course, it is, was, and always has been a performance of all these things.*<sup>34</sup>

Lineage is at work here again. Stead is borrowing the idea of performativity from Judith Butler (just as we are borrowing from Stead), a philosopher and gender theorist whose work has centred on the third wave of feminism and queer theory. Butler asserts that “performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate ‘act’, but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names.”<sup>35</sup> Butler takes into account the agency of performance and by extension practice, and its impact on culture. And here the paths between Tumarkin and Stead cross. Tumarkin is also borrowing from Butler, within her concept of “grievable lives” as “an attempt to reckon with people and experiences seemingly forgotten or unnoticed in the most influential trauma theorisations in Western humanities.”<sup>36</sup> Tumarkin uses Butler to speak about the unspoken lives of place. Stead uses Butler to disclose the performances that speak for place. Here we

33 “A Colloquium on Ficto-critical Approaches to a Writing Architecture,” convened by Naomi Stead, University of Queensland, August 4-5, 2016.

34 Stead, “Writing the City, or, the Story of a Sydney Walk,” 230.

35 Judith Butler, “Bodies That Matter,” in *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader*, ed. Janet Price and Margaret Shildrick (London: Routledge, 1999), 236.

36 Tumarkin, “Twenty Years of Thinking About Traumascapes,” 14.

use Stead and Tumarkin to talk about the unspoken lives and performances of our discipline.

*R. There is an elephant in the room. It's pink and it is gender. Stead, Burns, Phillips, Roberts, Tumarkin, and well you and I all share in this, and in working to use autoethnography instrumentally to have our voices and experiences heard. I can't get past it. But perhaps I'll grow out of this perspective. C.*

Autoethnography exposes the incidental nature of research and questions the rights we have to discuss the things we do as we practice it. Does revealing this struggle, exposing the dead ends and uncertainties, instead of tidying them carefully away for publication, somehow undermine our position? The illusion of the educated, capable researcher in control of a clean, linear process is shattered. So too is the illusion of objectivity; of critical distance.

*Hey Cris,*

*At our first meeting you observed that autoethnography might have a pedagogical affordance. That if we only see the finished product, we can't appreciate the journey, unpack the steps that led to the argument being formed. That autoethnography opens up the research process of architectural historians in a more explicit and examinable way; revealing biases and obsessions that remain otherwise obscured. R.*

So, what then, are the affordances of eroding the distance of objectivity in architectural history? We want to return here to our reviewers' concern with our desire to "insert ourselves in the frame."<sup>37</sup> Their hesitancy towards such a shift in practice draws on the widespread antagonism to public participation and popular culture. In an era of internet communication that has disrupted the traditional boundaries between authority and audience it is perhaps not surprising that there is a resistance to revealing the practice of architectural history. Rigour within our discipline is seldom expressed as an explicit set of rules, rather, it is known—and easily identified—by those who practise it. This embedded knowledge remains somehow secreted within the discipline itself. But here lies the opportunity. By opening up these processes to others, we may enable their participation. The embrace of citizen scientists can make science more relevant to us all. Similarly, citizen architectural history has the potential of opening up the discipline. Otherwise, we run the risk of remaining relevant to few. Autoethnography, used instrumentally can enable us to understand the culture of architectural history,

37 From the peer-review reports for this paper.

and in doing so open up the discipline and make it meaningful to new audiences. Autoethnography rather than diminishing the value of the historian as creator of knowledge, celebrates it and allows it to evolve.