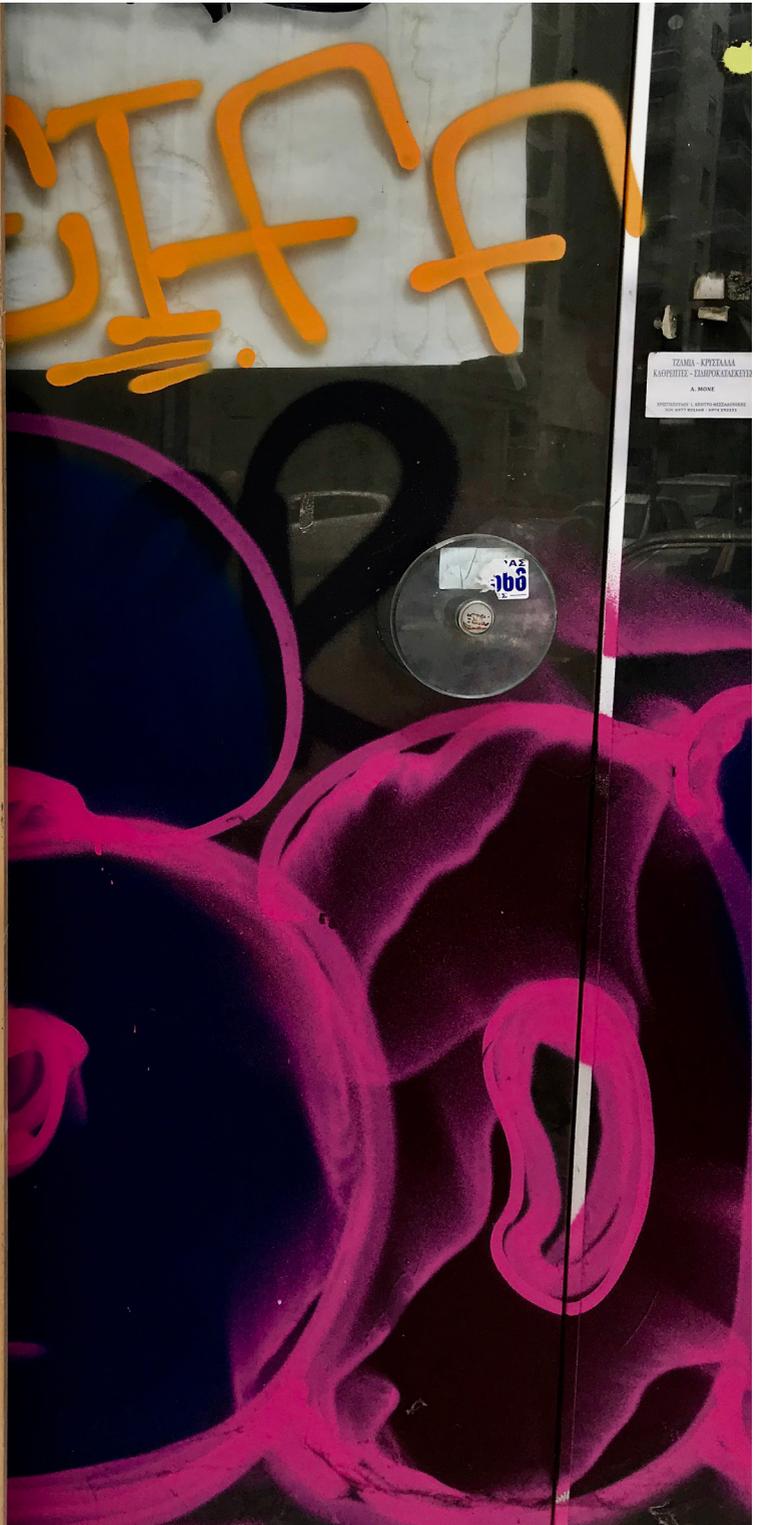




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Surfaces & Materials

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ГЛАВНО УПРАВЛЕНИЕ
КАПИТАЛ-МАРКЕТИНГОВИ
А. МОДЕ
СПИСОКЪТ НА СЪСТАВЯВАЩИТЕ
СЪСТАВНИ ЧАСТИ НА СЪСТАВНИТЕ

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EDITORIAL

The issue of *lo Squaderno* you are about to read collects a number of reflections on the perception of city surfaces and materials. We have gathered a variety of experiences and explorations of surfaces, and the peculiar atmospheres associated with them.

We have started from the hypothesis that the city is a puzzle of surfaces – bricks, bars and tiles of the visible – and have asked contributors to address questions such as the following ones: How do we recognise a city from its surfaces? What is the experience of urban surfaces in everyday life and in exceptional moments? Can the study of urban surfaces reveal forgotten facts about urban existence itself? How to apprehend the power of juxtaposed surface textures as they affect the experience of dwellers and users? How to capture the city as a compositional effect of such taxidermy arrangements?

The issue opens with two general reflections on the intersection between surfaces, politics and language: Sabina Andron elaborates on the visual struggles surrounding the “right to the surface”, which she proposes to interpret as “right to the surface”, while Cameron McEwan traces from Aldo Rossi’s architectural theory as well as Paolo Virno’s reflections on the power of language to highlight how the skin of the city represents the “locus of the multitude”. For McEwan, in particular, the linguistic surface of the city is inherently political, while at the same time collective memory and imagination regularly condense into the form of the city.

The subsequent contributions tackle a number of quite diverse cities such as Jakarta, Rome, Athens, Hobart (Tasmania), Chicago, Tehran, Madrid, Dawson City (Canada), and London. To begin with, AbdouMalik Simone employs the image of the spiral to capture the experience of the youth from the Black Belt of Jakarta’s urban core, whose life practices and attitude he depicts in terms of “urban surfacing”.

In the following contribution, Harshavardhan Bhat analyses the ecological condition of the state of Jharkhand, in the Indian subcontinent, where India’s largest coal reserve is located. He suggests that the whole geography of the ashes generated from extractive activities is necessary to understand not only the toxic habitats thereby created, but also the larger continental urban milieu and ecosystems as sooted fly ash surfaces.

The aerial material also features in Maria Theodorou’s piece, where however it takes the shape of dream-thinking. By pondering a number of architectural dreams and urban day-dreaming, Theodorou reconstructs the significance these images may have for architecture and architects themselves. She suggests that often architects day-dream about materials, and develops an original approach that consists thinking not simply about materials, but together with them.

This attitude resonates in Jan Hogan’s essay on the practice of lithography in the context of contemporary Tasmania. While lithography stones actually come from Bavaria, they can be put to good use to somehow cope with or even redress the colonial legacy of Australia. Hogan in particular develops an animistic sensibility towards the agency and intentionality of matter itself, connecting to Karen Barad’s idea of spacetime mattering. Lithography stones, Hogan suggests, absorb and release stories and they can talk about territories and cover latitudes: “Living as a settler Australian in Hobart with all the benefits of privilege and with little of the responsibility to a specific place – Hoban discloses – I struggle to find a language, a text, to put forward in this world that does not continue the same pathways of colonial power and disruption.”

A different colonial situation is described by Olivier Gaudin in his essay on the history of Chicago. Gaudin is interested in the technical

operations and artificial remaking of the ground surfaces that gave rise to the Midwestern metropolis. Thanks to meticulous historical reconstruction, he stresses that different visions and interests actually shape the city through its “surfaces of projection”.

The use of public surfaces in the most materials sense is at the centre of Narciss M. Sohrabi’s piece. The article documents the 2015 urban art project “A City-wide Art Gallery” in Tehran, where advertisement billboards were used to feature reproductions of a number of classic and contemporary artworks. What makes the article interesting is the peculiar situation of public space usage that contradistinguishes the Persian capital, as well as how the dominant visual logic has been changing in recent times.

The following two essays are more openly political in intent. Antonio Giráldez López reports from three detention centres for immigrants in Spain, exploring both their inner surfaces and how such surfaces, usually invisible, were merged with the visible surfaces of the city on the occasion of riots and revolts. Melody Woodnutt then elaborates a philosophical reflection on the technological hubris entailed by the attempted construction of an ice bridge in the sub-Artic Canadian town of Dawson City. She engages especially in the elaboration of the notion of “performance of place” to account for .

The political becomes more immediately personal in the two following essays, both located in London. In the first one, Victoria Brooks tells of sexual encounters in hotel rooms, paying attention to the production of indoor surfaces and the undecidability of bodily surfaces engaged in sexual acts. In the second and final essay, the artist B.A. Zanditon, reflects on one of her projects involving the production of rubbings from modernist architecture at the Festival Wing of Southbank Centre. The project, which spanned more than five years, reached the point where the artists tried to enmesh herself into the texture of the buildings. Her rubbings thus document her experience of the site, one that is both immediate and prolonged.

In sum, in this issue we have collected stories of thin layers, stories of flesh and stone – the endless ephemeral of cities’ history.

The issue is accompanied throughout by a visual project by picpoet, documenting the crisis of inner-city Thessaloniki in Greece.

APM & AMB



To Occupy, to Inscribe, to Thicken Spatial Politics and the Right to the Surface

Sabina Andron

This essay sits in the warm, multiple and frictional space of the urban surface.

The surface is a space: not a boundary but an extension, a thickness, an object.

The surface object is cumulative and layered: it results from the gradual addition of individual inscriptions, materials, coatings, paint, markings and erasures.

Urban spatial production makes surface. It doesn't just occupy the surface, it produces it: it generates a new space, a new location, a new object.

The surface is therefore qualitatively different from private and public spaces. It blurs these urban ownership regimes and embodies collective spatial production and use: a surface commons.

Urban ownership regimes and the politics of spatial production are closely related to the question of the right to the city. In thinking about what, and where, the right to the city is, I will suggest in this essay that the right to the city might be (in) the surface.

The right to the city

Henri Lefebvre introduced the right to the city as the possibility of actively participating in shaping and producing cities, their image and function, and argued that this right was fundamental to urban inhabitation (Lefebvre 1996). Since then, the right to the city has been variously interpreted as a right to the democratic management of capitalist surplus (Harvey 2013), an urban politics of inhabitation (Purcell 2002), a right to difference and centrality (Butler 2012, Dikeç 2001), a right of production and not only of choice (Marcuse 2012) and a moral claim to property (Layard 2012). The city, like the surface, should not only be a space for consumption, but an everchanging reality that results directly from individual acts of production, participation and appropriation created by its inhabitants.

How might the right to the city apply to surface spatial production, and what can the surfaces of the city tell us about access, exclusion and urban entitlement? While the notion of the right to the city includes and connects such rights as housing, rights against police abuse, rights to public participation in urban design, and rights against established property laws (Attoh 2011), I dedicate these pages to explore the right to the surface as a form of right to the city. (see also Andron *forthcoming*) My own understanding of the right to the city is that of a right to self-determination in the production and occupation of space, and a prerogative to use the city in defiance of exclusionary and suppressive properties and regulations.

Two strategies of spatial production, appropriation and participation, are particularly relevant to understanding the right to the city as a right to the surface. Appropriation is the right to creatively define and produce urban space as property, while participation was understood by Lefebvre as the right to

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the *oeuvre* – the right of inhabitants to physically access, occupy and use urban space. Radical sites of publicness can be produced at surface level, immediately next to private property, opening up the use value of cities and fighting against their valuation and management as a series of private assets. This type of publicness is a form of spatial production rather than a type of property certificate, so what is communally used effectively becomes public, despite it being privately owned. Use, rather than ownership, determines publicness, and produces an urban commons, the not-public-nor-private, the *oeuvre*, the right to the city.

Urban surfaces are social spaces and repositories of political activity. They are the stage on which urban stories unfold, or become hidden, and they mediate between the cultural forces and the physical objects that make up the city

This is a project of writing from below, of becoming minor and complicating the interstitial space of the surface as a form of commons. The spatial typology of the surface commons challenges normative conceptions of property in the

neoliberal city, through a form of democracy as civic empowerment and co-production. The action of surface inscription is such a process, through which urban spatial politics are re-written in practice (re-practiced). Inscribing surfaces re-politicises property, participation, public and private spaces, and brings to the fore the importance of self-determination in the production and occupation of urban space. The right to appropriate the city is not something that is requested or even demanded of the existing order. Rather, this right is something that is declared and verified in practice (Iveson 2013: 945).

The cultural force of the property ownership model is its clarity, certainty and order: “the visible geographies of property (the maps, fences, signs and so on) give a reassuring legibility of property” (Blomley 2004: 14). What happens on surfaces, however, is a complexification of this certainty, whereby property and its marks become ambiguous, uncertain and challengeable. In fact, this lack of stability is the clearest strength that surfaces possess, as they *can* and *will* keep transforming. This makes them more resilient and ultimately impossible to control by any single discourse, be that of private property or urban order. Surfaces enable a heterogeneous experience of property, which becomes malleable, subversive and politically productive in its support of alternatives (Keenan 2015).

Surfaces become locations for a specific way of claiming a right to the city, and counter urban governance regimes based on crime prevention through environmental design, hostile architecture, broken windows, urban decay, defensible space, disorder prevention, privatisation, securitisation, cleanliness, exclusion, sanitisation and propriety.

The boundaries of private property stop right at the edge of built space, before the first inscription hits the surface. The politics of these subsequent surface strata are imbedded in their materials, and the best way to understand these is to conceptually thicken surfaces, to expand their liminality and explore their layered depth. Material depth, of course, matters very little. Surfaces begin their conceptual thickening with the first inscriptive layer that sticks to their private body. This layer sits parasitically close to private property yet negates its postulates and proposes a communal use instead. I therefore propose to reassess surface space as a radically political locus where a collectively inscribed, communally debated urban model can be pursued.

The right to the surface

Urban surfaces are social spaces and repositories of political activity. They are the stage on which urban stories unfold, or become hidden, and they mediate between the cultural forces and the physical objects that make up the city. They are fascinating because they are specific physical loci, yet they afford readings and interpretations that expand far beyond their material existence.

Surfaces are archives of the city, which are produced, curated and recruited to serve specific political agendas. Cities can reveal themselves in depth through their surfaces, and the study of surfaces could become a uniquely political and richly detailed field of urban spatial exploration. Such surface studies could investigate visual, material, legal and semiotic dimensions of surface productions and use them as insights into issues of urban entitlement and claims to the right to the city. An interest in urban surfaces has already been explored by scholars from a wide variety of disciplines, including sociology (Brighenti 2009, 2010), anthropology (Noland 2005), architecture (Unwin 2000, Lavin 2011), linguistics (Pennycook 2009, Harris 1995, Henkin 1998), geography (Mould 2015), literary theory (Nandrea 1999), urbanism (Tripodi 2008, 2009), visual culture (Bruno 2014), photography (O'Neil 2008) and communication (Irvine 2012); and collections such as *Urban Walls* (Brighenti and Kärholm forthcoming) and this special issue are instrumental in establishing this field of urban studies and setting its agenda.

Every surface is a locus of minor victories enabled by transition and becoming, a recurrent celebration of trivial metamorphoses and opinions. Each inscription is an assertion, an involvement, a temporary victory of visibility over silence, of activity over idleness and of memory over oblivion. Fame here is rarely individual and it almost never lasts, but it produces a collective recognition instead, a force that comes from being simultaneously together, rather than distinctively apart.

I understand the right to the surface as a right of ownership, production and positionality, which can be claimed in different ways. It is a right to alter the surface through erasure and inscription, a right to touch, read, lean against, write about and photograph the surface. This right is of all urban inhabitants to engage in discursive and material production around surfaces, and to develop surfaces as politicised spaces.

The right to the city is the right to the surface: a manifesto

The right to the surface is unique but manifold, its energy is singular yet its traction comes from multiplication. The right to the surface is a right to visibility, inclusion and participation: the right to be clear and to be here. The right to the surface is a right to appropriation and use, irrespective of ownership entitlements and property certificates: its authority lies in shared urban experience and sociability. A right to spatial production and enactment of dissent, and an enfranchisement for the urban inhabitant in front of corporate and institutional interests.

The right to the surface is a contestation of private property and a production of spaces for collective use. It is a moral and political claim to access and participation, hijacking and appropriation. It is a right to break the law. The right to the surface is additive and productive, not selective and exclusive: it is the right of more, of all, to write, show and be seen – instead of none or a selected few.

The right to the surface should not be institutionalised: it is claimed, not granted. It is direct and not representative. The right to the surface does not depend on aesthetics or harmony. It is processual and formative, it seeks change and movement, not stability and permanence. It is a right to risk, not to safety. The right to refuse and confuse ideas about beauty and value; and to produce an active surface politics. The right to surface territories as political achievements.

The right to the surface is a right to write, to create, to produce *oeuvre*. It is a right to non-reconciliation and disagreement. It is a right of power and not of immunity: it grants the authority to inscribe and it does not offer protection against inscription. It is a liberty right and it entitles confrontation between subjectivities: the sticker, the crack, the writer, the scrawl, the message and the hybrid alongside the title to govern, the owner, the fence, the law and the capital. It is a right against spatial enclosure and privatisation, a right of action and not of suppression.

The right to the surface is a right to discourse and sociability, it is a right to stay name-less and

uncategorisable. The right to the surface is a right to sign and a right to the sign. It is an expression of possibility, potential, alternative, heterogeneity and future. A right to struggle and belonging, to simultaneity and encounter. A right to incoherence.

The right to the surface is the right to produce urban art, to decide the image of the city and to contest its regimes of regulation. It is the right to become and to remain minor, mundane, category-less and an-aesthetic. The right to the surface stacks, delights, annoys, undermines and empowers. The right to the surface is a right to unpoliced displays and to value surfaces as archives of urban cultures. The right to the surface is the right to the city.

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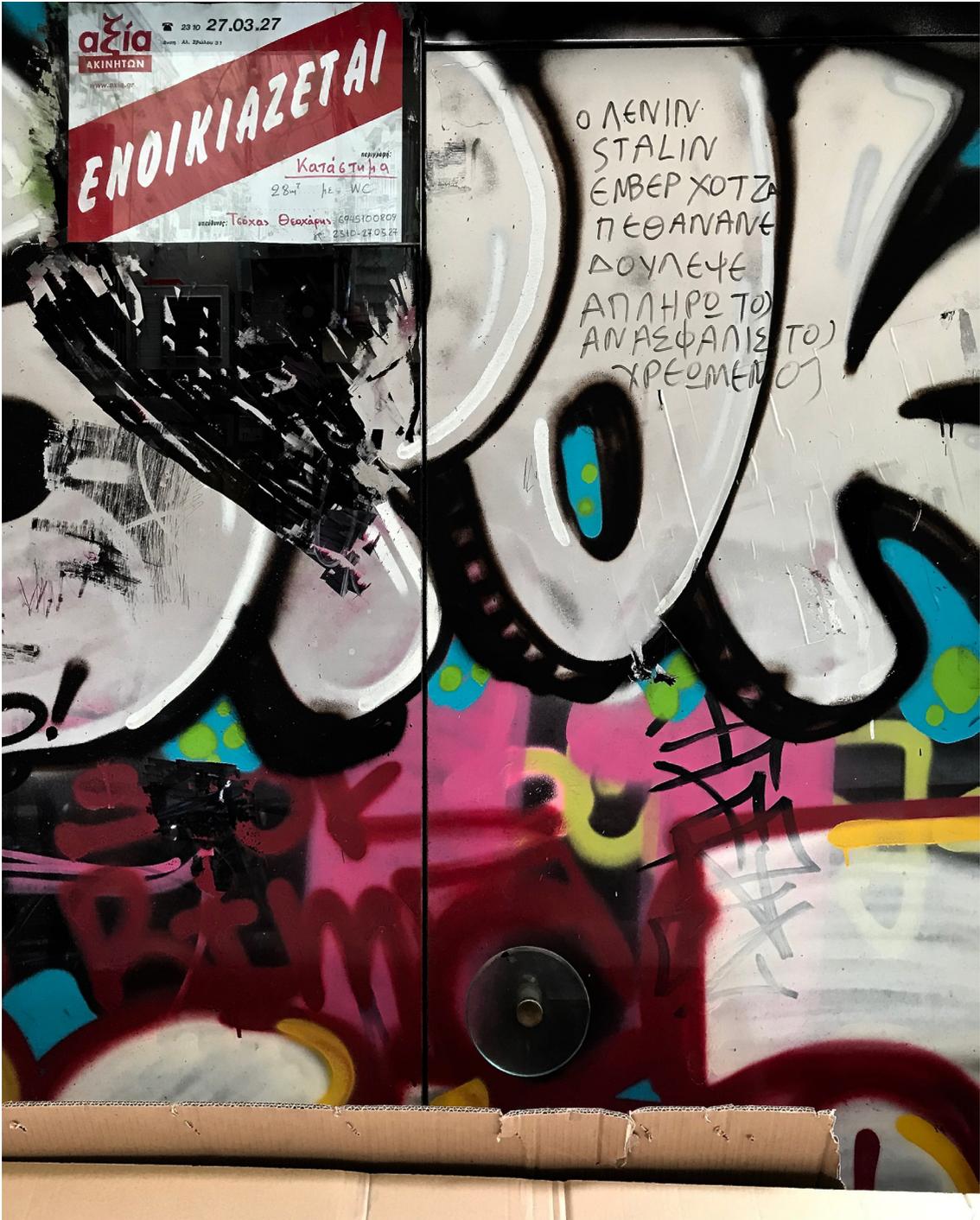
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Linguistic Surface

The City is the Locus of the Multitude

Cameron McEwan

Introduction

During the 1970s “age of discourse,” architecture’s boundaries, forms and operations were framed as a language, with rules and logics of combination and recombination, syntax and structure, as an historically conditioned project toward critical and operative ends. Since the 1990s, understanding architecture as a language has been rejected by architects and theorists who have since tended to interpret architecture as affective, technically instrumental or often as merely surface appearance. Critical and historical content has been eschewed. In recent years, political theorists have developed readings of the linguistic character of contemporary productive relations and subjectivity, understanding the centrality of language as not only individual and communicative but also a “creative force.”¹ It is possible to speculate that the categories and tools developed by political theorists can help address and resituate the relationship between architecture and language today, and the agency of architecture toward a new, collective, political and productive possibility.

The aim of this essay is to develop the notion of “linguistic surface” as a way to interpret the city as locus of the multitude: a place where the city produces and reproduces itself as a shared and collective surface of conflict turned into coexistence, of the real and the imaginary condensed and inhabited by thinking, creating linguistic subjects. Three surfaces are discussed: the city surface, the surface of thought, the linguistic surface that joins city and thought, interpenetrating, constructing and constituting the other. I will draw on what the architect Aldo Rossi called the city as an “historical text” and link Rossi’s notion of collective memory (memory ordered by language, syntax and association) with the description of the contemporary city as “modelled on language” put forward by the political theorist Paolo Virno.

The Linguistic Surface of the City: Aldo Rossi and Collective Memory

In a fundamental passage of his canonical book *The Architecture of the City* (1966), Aldo Rossi reflects on two points of view from which he analysed the history of the city. He writes:

In the first, the city was seen as a material artifact, a man-made object built over time and retaining the traces of time, even if in a discontinuous way. Studied from this point of view – archaeology, the history of architecture, and the histories of individual cities – the city yields very important information and docu-

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¹ See for instance Maurizio Lazzarato, *Signs and Machines: Capitalism and the Production of Subjectivity*, trans. by Joshua David Jordan (Cambridge, Mass.: Semiotext(e); MIT Press, 2014); and Christian Marazzi, *Capital and Language: From the New Economy to the War Economy*, trans. by Gregory Conti (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2008). In the following notes I refer primarily to Paolo Virno.

mentation. Cities become historical texts . . . The second point of view sees history as the study of the actual formation and structure of urban artifacts. It is complementary to the first and directly concerns not only the real structure of the city, but also the idea that the city is a synthesis of a series of values. Thus it concerns the collective imagination.²

In Rossi's first point, the city is understood as a textual surface — an "historical text" and locus of the "real structure of the city." As Rossi says, the city becomes a text that yields material, formal and situated knowledge, which crystallise a particular moment in the history of the city, synthesising "a series of values," which is the "collective imagination," or as Rossi writes elsewhere, the "collective memory." On the one hand the city accumulates buildings, monuments, streets, typical institutions, the common and the exceptional places occupied by those who live and work in the city, and which are the representation of a collective will to coexist in the city. On the other hand the city constitutes the repository of human labour, thought, and the collective memory and imagination of its people made real in the material architectural form.

Within these two points of view there is a dialogue between the real and the imaginary, actuality and its formation, which condense the city as a representation of collective will. Rossi's words invoke de Saussure's model of *langue* and *parole* as well as Marx's framework for a materialist base and ideological superstructure, or Freud's latent and manifest content of the unconscious. The city as an historical text, a linguistic surface, characterises the urban situation and stretches from historical base, introjecting into the collective subject while projecting into the city: "the unconscious is outside" as Jacques Lacan has said, following Freud.³ The linguistic surface of the city is the locus where real and imaginary, individual and collective, language and speech, condense to the point at which surface crystallises into linguistic form.

It is worthwhile remembering that Marx, Freud and de Saussure were some of Rossi's key references and that structuralist thought in particular was at the core of Rossi's thinking on the city. Rossi wrote: "The points specified by Ferdinand de Saussure for the development of linguistics can be translated into a program for the development of an urban science. . . ."⁴ Rossi translated this into an understanding of the syntactic and associative structure of the city. It is interesting that the thought of Ferdinand de Saussure is a key reference point for the political theorist Paolo Virno who has linked de Saussure's structural linguistics with Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and argues for the "intrinsically political nature of language."⁵

The Linguistic Surface of Thought: Paolo Virno and the Multitude

In recent years Paolo Virno has developed a reading of the linguistic and political character of contemporary subjectivity, which he calls "the multitude" — a collective subject of many different individuals who share the faculty of language and construct a linguistic mode of being.⁶ The notion of

2 Aldo Rossi, *The Architecture of the City* [1966], trans. by Diane Ghirardo and Joan Ockman (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1982), p. 128.

3 Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1994), p. 123. Also refer Andrea Mubi Brighenti, *Visibility in Social Theory and Social Research* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), where Brighenti discusses the writing, inscribing and projection of thought into the "flesh . . . of the social" (p. 41) and the "deep surface" of the city.

4 Rossi, *The Architecture of the City*, p. 23. Also refer Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* [1913], trans. by Roy Harris (London: Duckworth, 2000).

5 Refer in particular to Paolo Virno, *When the Word Becomes Flesh: Language and Human Nature* [2003], trans. by Giuseppina Mecchia (South Pasadena, CA: Semiotext(e), 2015), p. 41.

6 Refer the following: Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*, trans. by Isabella Bertolotti, James Cascaito, and Andrea Casson (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2004); Paolo Virno, "Three Remarks

multitude appeared in the 1970s during the European transition from a Fordist to post-Fordist model of production, and from the cultural shift taking place around 1968. It was recognised that the physical raw materials of real estate, capital assets and machinery, crucial during the Fordist era, are in fact transformed by the human intellect and the faculties of language. Raw materials are “real abstractions”, such as thought, memory, imagination, creativity, communication. Thought is figured forth into the socio-economic process and made real by speech acts, flows of information, knowledge, images, the production of social relations, and spatialised by a precarious global multitude inhabiting the linguistic world of urbanisation.

Virno situates the multitude within the city and puts it thus:

... it is the contemporary metropolis that is built on the model of language. The metropolis appears as a labyrinth of expressions, metaphors, proper names, and propositions, of tenses and moods of the verb; and saying this is no simple analogy. The metropolis actually is a linguistic formation, an environment that is above all constituted by objectivised discourse, by preconstructed code, and by materialised grammar.⁷

The city produces and reproduces itself as a shared and collective surface of conflict turned into coexistence, of the real and the imaginary condensed and inhabited by thinking, creating linguistic subjects

For Virno, language is outside (as in Lacan’s “unconscious is outside,” the unconscious structured like language): it is in the city. The city is a “linguistic formation,” as Virno writes. The city is the field of the collective other, which is language. The city materialises the thought of the multitude in its architecture, its institutions and infrastructures. Virno’s metropolis is the locus of the multitude, who share the linguistic faculties of thought, Marx’s “general intellect”. The latter stands for the intellect in general because the intellect is a general faculty of language that belongs to all people. “General Intellect should not necessarily mean the aggregate of the knowledge acquired by the species, but the *faculty* of thinking; potential as such, not its countless particular realizations.”⁸ The value of the subject is not materialised in a singular product (a tool, image, machine, the city), but rather as a more general “potential,” as a basic precondition of thought, imagination, knowledge, and collective memory. Potential is distinct from realisation, insofar as it is non-present, non-current, and non-real. For Virno, potential is pure thought, and that thought is linguistically constructed (the linguistic surface of thought), materialised by the multitude in the city as a text, as the textual surface of the city.

The City is the Locus of the Multitude

Multitude is thus an echo of what Rossi called collective memory. “One can say that the city itself is the collective memory of its people,” Rossi said, “and like memory it is associated with objects and places. The city is the *locus* of the collective memory.”⁹ In other words, the city is the locus of the multitude. This is where Rossi and Virno coincide: architectural thought condenses into political thought, multitude and city, individual and collective. On the one hand the linguistic surface of the city has a political claim that figures forth the ethos of knowledge accumulated in the bodies of the multitude as imagination, as pure thought. On the other hand there is a formal claim with thought condensed into the form of the city. Thought, memory and imagination are collective, relational and linguistic. Language acts are realised in the collective sphere of the city giving a form to life. Collective memory is thus outside, exterior and shared. It is architecture and the city. It is subjectivity. It is the

Regarding the Multitude’s Subjectivity and Its Aesthetic Component’, in *Under Pressure: Pictures, Subjects, and the New Spirit of Capitalism*, ed. by Daniel Birnbaum and Isabelle Graw (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2008), pp. 31–45.

7 Virno, ‘Three Remarks Regarding the Multitude’s Subjectivity and Its Aesthetic Component’, p. 33.

8 Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude*, p. 66.

9 Rossi, *The Architecture of the City*, p. 130.

many bodies who share the linguistic experience. The linguistic surface connects the city, collective memory and the multitude. It is the surface upon which city and subject interpenetrate, produce and reproduce one another, construct and constitute one another. The linguistic surface emphasises the productive, political and collective dimension of language.

Today, thought is instrumentalised by market capitalism. Critical discourse and the intellectual culture of architecture is allowed ever less space. What is needed in this context is the thought of the multitude toward a reinvention of the world. We are reminded of the potential inherent to all human beings for thinking and feeling, remembering and imagining, and the possibility to project an alternative future presence. A presence that is counter to the prevalent tendency, alternative to what is current, and a view that something else must always be possible.

The Spiral: Surfacing the city

AbdouMaliq Simone

How do residents largely unanchored from their long-honed stabilities observe the situations that require from them new ways of seeing, new dispositions of circumnavigation? How do they attempt to reconcile their “blindspots”, their structural inabilities to read themselves into a surrounds that views them in ways inaccessible to them? How do they compose points of views, angles onto things capable of observing prospective trajectories across time and space – a process of composition that requires gathering up potential collaborators differentially distributed across their networks and territories of operation? To use Lury and Day’s (2017) term, how do they *render*, gather up and turn over or turn out particular visualizations of their urban contexts and urban problems, particularly in ways that publicise knowing when they do not, and not knowing when they do, so that they are not fully apprehended and thus assignable to particular expectations of domains? With so many factors at different scales at work in rendering places knowable and subject to multiple interventions; with so many alternating interplays of shadow and light, how do residents of volatile, ever-shifting urban terrains garner a sense about how to move, what to do?

If composing a plane of observation and a surface of movement is a matter of sociality, does sociality’s very matter, the very coherence of any observation, indeed any observer, depend upon a gathering up of bits and pieces of events and experiences scattered across intensely punctured and punctuated landscapes? If, as Martijn Konings (2017) points out, contemporary capitalism is the complexifying of uncertainty, a topological formatting of an oscillating interplay of asset classes, derivatives, securitisation and equities that harness risk as impulsion and state apparatuses as guarantors of last resort, can uncertainty be used to generate differing prospectuses, ones based on the gathering up of disparate ways of living? Returning to Colin McFarlane’s (2011) notions of gathering processes, such mobilisations require circulation, in turn requiring footwork; and if the “One belt, one road” is a salvo in a critical geopolitical shift in the composition of empowered footwork, then how might we think of more vernacular, quotidian demonstrations of such footwork in urban contexts where residents are seldom at home, seldom accountable, visualisable in terms of a conventional categories of inhabitation? As steady employment, fixed addresses and discernible social ties may appear increasingly peripheral amidst an onslaught of cheap political and religious affect, residents, increasingly consigned to peripheries of all kinds, nevertheless have to figure something out, a next move.

Here I want to explore the form of the “spiral” as a particular practice of the “next move”, a mode of surfacing – of rendering a surface of movement and observation. The spiral is architecture of movement that has no limit, no definitive centre or periphery. Even if a starting point is identified, once things spiral, movement does not proceed in just one direction. It bears down as it extends outward,

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it vectors toward an infinity that is simultaneously macro- and microscopic. That single point from which things extend or towards which things zero in on is never sufficiently or stably individuated or coherent for it to hold as either origin or destination. Even when it is, for example, an individual that affects and is affected by spiralling forces, those forces bear down on that individual in ways that disrupt and dissipate the integrity of her personhood, and then it becomes a matter of biomass, genetics, flesh, viruses or bacteria that are spread out across the landscape, that spin outwards in vectors not often easily identified or controlled.

Unlike gang conflicts that fight over the consolidation and defense of territory, these conflicts are ones of itineraries, of securing temporary circuits of passage, of youth literally caught in a crossfire of competing aspirations attempting to secure momentary platforms to keep on going

The spiral is not a straight line from A to B. Whatever happens with A may indeed eventually reach and effect the situation of B, but it has traversed in a way that seeks to cover as much ground as possible, tries to fold in as many occurrences, places, and things along the way. As all of these

things are gathered up it is never clear to what extend they intensify the meaning or ramifications of whatever was going at point A or, alternately, provide a way for these ramifications to be diffused, watered down. It is never clear whether the implications of the supposedly original event gather up steam or force, or whether they fade away, become other things. When things spiral, it is not clear whether this gathering up is an amassing of volume, energy and meaning, or whether it is simply the process of events being translated into other ones, taking on different forms and values. So, when the trajectory of impact reaches point B, it is never clear to what extent whatever took place at point A really is at work in the situation that point B now confronts. The same phenomenon works in both directions, out to in, in to out.

In the so-called Black Belt of Jakarta's urban core – Senen, Sentiong, Tanah Tinggi, Kampung Rawa, Galur, and Johar Bahru – *spiral* has long referred to an IUD, a predominant form of contraception. But the notion has been "worked on" in various ways, referring to the act of "sleeping around" without commitment to a more recent use that refers to a particular way of navigating the city, work, and opportunity. These areas acquired their "black" designation in part from the large number of darker skinned inhabitants coming from Ambon, Flores and other Western parts of Indonesia, but even more so because of their densities and prevailing practices of inhabitation. These are red-lined areas whose youth find it difficult to get regular jobs. They are vilified for their supposedly wayward ways, proclivity to theft, drugs and violence, even as these districts are some of the most dynamic and heterogeneous in the city. While these areas are replete with household factories, artisanal workshops, improvised markets, and thousands of services and repairs, sectors are overcrowded, and youth have to find ways to venture out into the larger urban region. But where do they head and how? First, they come to know what is immediately around them, who the players are, what kinds of opportunities are available, and assess quickly where these opportunities might go and what it will cost them to take advantage of them. They assess their household obligations and local neighborhood demands and resources.

If they feel they need to venture out, they will initially do so close to home unless they know for sure of something somewhere else. Often they will start out and sometimes continue with a few friends, for this is a practice seldom initiated alone. Most of the times it is young men that venture out, but increasingly young women are also part of this game. Often they will pick a near-by commercial center, shopping mall, market, or small industrial zone where casual jobs can be found, as well as a bed in a rooming house. Again, they will assess where whatever job they have picked is going, and in particular, pay attention to what others around them have to say. Usually they will move along the

circumference of an initial circle, venturing a little further out but at the same time doubling back in, often temporarily settling in a district right next to where their home is located.

They move along different immediate outskirts of where they come from, gathering evidence and impressions from those spaces that are familiar, covering the different angles, moving back and forth, as they eventually elongate the trajectory into more unfamiliar terrains. By circling the vicinity they initially stay close to home without necessarily being easily located by family or associates. In the process, they cross paths with others who have their own itineraries. Sometimes it is at these crossings where conflicts might occur, where the efforts for temporary emplacement become intensely competitive. Unlike gang conflicts that fight over the consolidation and defense of territory, these conflicts are ones of itineraries, of securing temporary circuits of passage, of youth literally caught in a crossfire of competing aspirations attempting to secure momentary platforms to keep on going.

Extending the notion of the spiral as sex without commitment, spiral here is a way of accumulating jobs, money, experience, and information without commitment. It is a way to get out into the wider world where the real opportunities are. But it is never clear exactly where these real opportunities are to be located. More importantly, such opportunities, whatever they are, are not to be approached head-on, but rather in a more round-about way. It is about trying to have a broad perspective on things, and this is based on looking at the familiar terrain from different angles, and then making the immediately unfamiliar more familiar as one heads outward. It doesn't mean that the youth from these districts only navigate the city in this manner, or that they will live their lives only through this kind of circumnavigation. To spiral is one of many ways of doing things, but in Jakarta an entire infrastructure has grown around it, a practice of mobility supported by cheap boarding house rooms and food-stalls, cheap places to hear the conversations of strangers, to be folded into various schemes and projects that mostly never materialize but never cease to be offered and experimented with. So Indrawan:

At first I was delivering pampers [drug packets] for the cops because they had me boxed in with some fake charges and it was part of them trying to break up this Kota Paris [district in Tangi Tinggi] operation, and one of the sub-bosses decided to try and make an example out of me so I had to leave, but meanwhile I had learned a little bit of the cop's operations around the area and managed to rip off a pretty big supply of stuff that I could sell to raise some money, and then there were these guys in the market of Johar Bahru who were selling in their clothes stall, so I helped them set up a delivery service and got rewarded with managing another cellphone store they rented. I didn't know much about phones or anything but I started to practice and found all of the ways you can put things on the internet to sell and stuff, so after a while I finally made it to the Ambassador [large electronic market] where they make all kinds of prototypes on cheap software, and then I was going around helping small shops install the stuff.

Spiralling also refers to a mode of schooling. The kids from the black belt mostly come from poor formal educational backgrounds. But they are street-smart, and very much aware of the diversity of knowledge they come to possess, particularly after working their way across districts. They seldom stand still, even after working long hours in some dull employment, sleep little and spend hours with cigarettes and snacks in one *warung* after another.

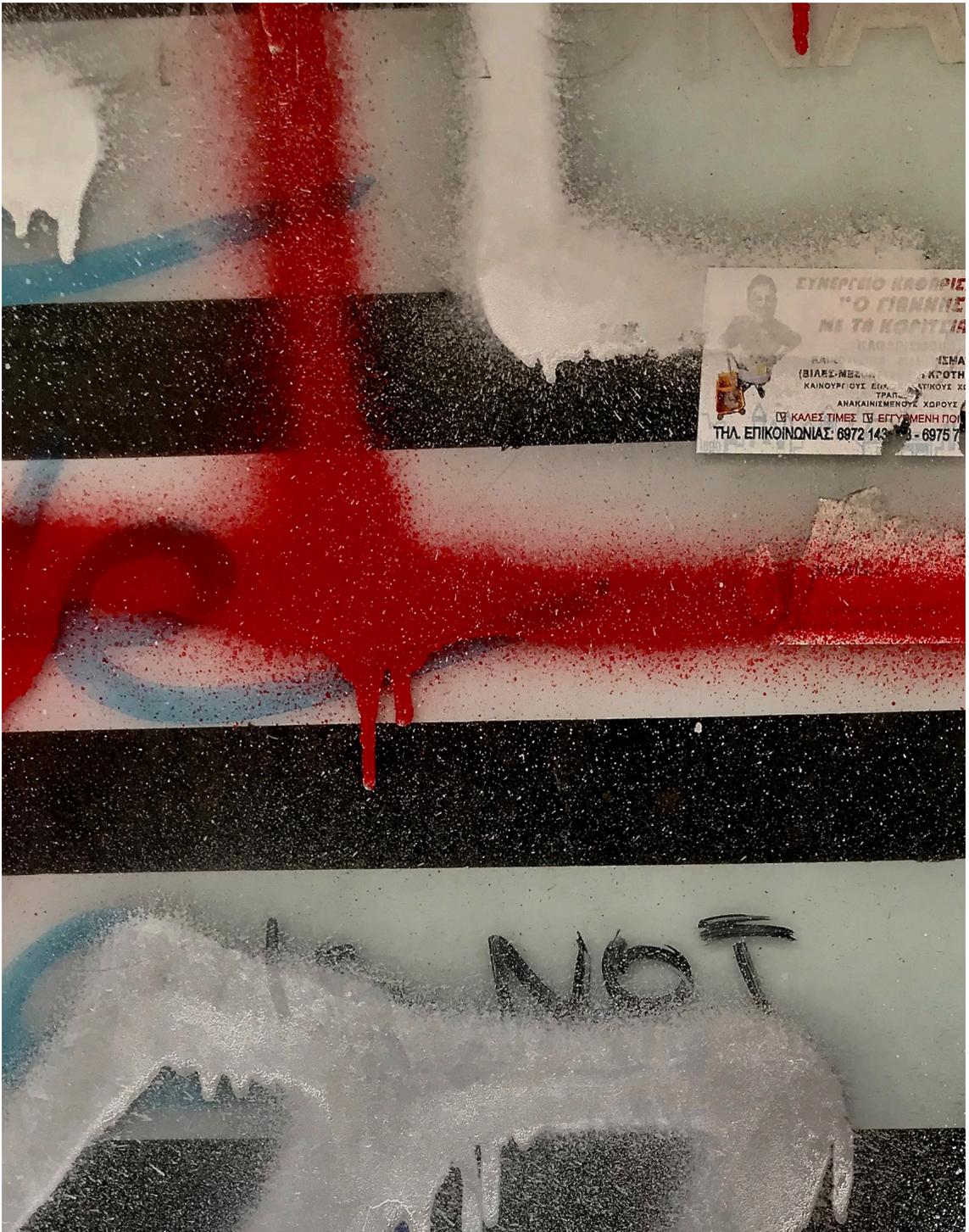
It is well known that Indonesians are the world's most prolific users of social media, and for these kids the constant use of WhatsApp, Instagram and PET provide a medium that constantly repositions wherever they are presently located in oscillating networks of contacts, gossip, advice, and images. As their bodies circulate across Jakarta, their texts and photos circulate forward and back, opening up beckoned calls for returns back home where situations have changes, invitations to join quickly assembled parties, or warnings to take detours around hot spots best avoided for now. More importantly, these media fuel conversations, which can cover topics such as politics, ghosts, genetics, spaceships, microchips, Muslim minutia, porn sex, automated vehicles, medical cures, and housing finance. Youth from the black belt are rarely content with what they know; they acknowledge no

limits to what they are eligible to talk about. Spiralling is a way to nurture a curiosity that need not be drowned in the precarity of trying to make ends meet, for these kids don't rush out haphazardly into the bright lights of purported economic opportunity.

They hesitate; they stall, but not for long, just long enough to build up enough confidence to make the next move without overwhelming themselves with anxiety, without rushing home. It doesn't mean that they don't know how to play their part when they need to, play being the youth from the black belt who knows where the drugs are, know the police that can be bought off, know where to get discount prices for almost anything, or know where to get things fixed for cheap. This performance comes in handy when they find themselves hanging out in some of Jakarta's key gravitational nodes – such as the strategically located and super heterogeneously mixed housing project, Kalibata City, with its scores of coffee shops and small eating places. This is where journalists, artists, NGO staff, designers, freelance workers, musicians, and young aspiring entrepreneurs often converge, where they tirelessly gather to propose different projects, moneymaking schemes, and DIY urban interventions, and where the particular capacities of the black belt often can be readily employed in order to keep costs down or acquire something to lure investors, grease wheels, facilitate favorable outcomes.

But again, black belt youth do not want to get stuck in this role; they don't want to be simply adjuncts to the competencies of others. But through these professionals and hipsters, they learn more about where the venues of value are located. Afterwards, some may pour over YouTube videos learning the vernaculars of particular ascendant trades, such as baristas, apartment brokers, or app designers. Most will never secure something in these areas but the attempt is added to an expanding repertoire of knowledge exhibited in some of the most menial jobs to their advantage, as everyone in Jakarta appears increasingly restless to do something more with what they have. For example, there are youth who end up as sales clerks or porters in the massive retail markets, Tanah Abang, Ambassador, Cempaka ITC, or Manga Dua ITC, who quickly demonstrate how stall owners, distributors, fabricators, and contractors can maximise their yield. While themselves may never become the big players in the marketing game, they demonstrate a particular acuity in manipulating small differences, and get to know how to rescale their poor wages in such a way as to increase their free time and access to other opportunities.

While this incessant self-refashioning may reiterate the familiar neoliberal game of constantly having to improve oneself, what is different here is that the spiralling is also a matter of collective positions, of knowing how to be part of an assembly of contacts and friends that one has gathered along the itineraries of movement and of which oneself has also been gathered. The spiral then comes to represent a distribution of care, information exchange, locational advantages, points of access, refuge and destination. None of these are ever fixed over time, but still make-up of a matrix of resourcefulness that may not restructure the conditions of precarious work and life, but constitute a hedge against it, a way of enduring with it. Importantly, it means that the black belt does not remain simply a swathe of defined territory, not simply a simmering mass of uncertain density awaiting implosion and subsequent urban regeneration that the majority of inhabitants will never be a part of.



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Over skies of extraction

**Harshavardhan
Bhat**

In the 2017 TM Krishna classical recital for the Ennore Creek Campaign, titled *Chennai Poromboke Paadal*, translating from Tamil as the Chennai *Poromboke* song, T.M. Krishna recited in Carnatic classical style, a song for the common lands¹. The song explores the transformation in the meaning of the word *Poromboke* from common lands to waste lands – from how the commons transformed perceptually and materially to a surface of toxic space, expelled and demonized as waste. Critiquing the coal power plant that stands by Ennore creek emitting ash into the sky and the fluid earth, TM Krishna recites “*the sea and the river, he has kept apart . . . the white sky, he blackened*”. In moving images shot over brown infrastructural pipelines, backgrounded by the atmospheric might of the toxic plains of the Ennore creek and its wetlands, TM Krishna asks “*for one who sold the waterbodies, the lake is mere poromboke . . . - you and I, then; what are we to him?*”. Ecologically, Krishna claims, “we are poromboke”, too. In this ecological assemblage of life between ground and air, the body is in aerosols, submerged in the toxic present, questioning its ontology and the surfaces it ponders.

The aerosol is material as materials are aerosols. They are both in-fact surfaces, disregarding distinctions and the in-between – of the urban, the infrastructural, the pit, the burners, the forest, the mud amongst *milieu* others. Michelle Murphy calls life in this recomposed air as alterlife describing life as something that is “already altered, which is also life open to alteration” (2017, p.497). Fly ash for example is a speculative material act of plural alternations, holding the capacity for a future of multiple altered frames. Fly ash is a cartography of immanent space, because of its capacity to occupy space at the pores of material and a material ability to accommodate weight. It bleaches with mushy sand. It fogs the sky. It manipulates being as its spills and mixes. What makes fly ash (also categorically called coal ash) really interesting as a material is its speculative makeup, which is almost completely dependent on the makeup of the coal bed from which the coal was originally extracted. The chemical composition, gravity, surface value, mineralogical composition of fly ashes vary (Ramezaniapour, 2014) and therefore compose a wide complex diversity of possible outcomes and mobilities. As Murphy (2017) indicates, it’s hard to identify where the condition of alterlife begins or diverges, that the human as a category itself is formed by chemical relations – and that capitalism ensures the future of toxic relations, even after the human.

The title of this brief essay is an anecdotal play on Marques’s (2017, p.416) remark that “what we cannot possibly yet see is how the sky has a forest on its back”. With this essay, I essentially want to argue that the sky over spaces of extraction are *of* extraction, that the dredging of the earth is in effect almost always a dredging of the sky. There is a modernism in operation here, in reference to

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¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=82jFyeV5AHM>.

energy systems, critical infrastructures and contemporary capitalism as we know it. There is also the hubris of modernity within which these explosions are enacted by the combustion of material, in the pretence that these are surfaces of control. The Jharia coalfield based in Jharkhand estimated to be India's largest coal reserve, proves so otherwise – in negotiating control and rupture. The operating coalfield, part of India's ambition to increase coal production, has been actively also burning for about 100 years (Pearce, 2016; Gupta, 2016). As highly combustible material, oxygen, moisture and wind flow choreograph fire through the shafts and crevices of space where coal exposes to air its capacity to dance with the air – as fire. Blasts crack material, allowing surface to be created, allowing the fluidity of fire to enhance and spread. The lands deemed largely unstable have consumed some of the human settlements that existed in the territory (Singh and Rotheroe 2018). Some humans in their thousands continue habitation in these toxic habitats, as cracks and fumes sustain and maintain, in the production of sooted fly ash surfaces, one version of an economy. Coal as a source of temperature and transmission enacts then a dual performance, at the mine and the power plant, i.e. the source and the destination where fly ash is present in both protocols of extraction. The skies above these zones of extraction then are also extractive worlds. Their life capacities are transformed by the surfaces coal and its ash creates. As a cumulative liquid act, the performance transforms life in the air, the soil, surfaces beneath and surfaces above. The performance in/of the Anthropocene disrupts the control function of modernity by deepening precarity and exposing the vulnerability of life by the distribution of chemicals.

As Belanger proposes “The physical, material, fluid, and energetic extents of urbanisation lie far beyond the footprint of cities” (2016, p.44). The coalfields, the structures of energy and the city burn co-producing fly-ash spaces across territory. Fly ash is upon us as aerosol, temperature, energy and dusts – different versions of surfaces, tangible and affective. Fly ash can also constitute silicon dioxide, aluminium oxide, iron oxide, titanium dioxide, calcium oxide, magnesium oxide, sulphur trioxide, potassium oxide, manganese oxide, barium oxide, strontium oxide (Cheng-Yong et al., 2017, Table 1) among several others including dioxins, arsenic and the offerings of the earth at a particular place and a particular time. Fly ash surfaces are unequal and diverse. A little over a thousand kilometres from Jharia via National Highway 19 is New Delhi, the capital. The city houses two coal-fired power stations, yet again producing other stories of fly-ash mobilities and surfaces. Mehra et al.'s (1998) environmental monitoring research interestingly shows that the metallic contamination of water bodies caused by fly ash caused the reduction of the common water hyacinth (*Eichhornia crassipes*) in parts, meanwhile enriching and enabling the growth of mustard greens (*Brassica juncea*), down the river plains, during the monsoons. *Eichhornia crassipes* interestingly has been known to recover platinum (Farago and Parsons, 1985) and lead (Akcin et al., 1994) amongst others, in other experiments in other water bodies. Chemical species operate with microbial and vegetal species subjectively. Some proliferate in the compounding of one flourishing as another diminishes, in toxicity. The dryness of the summer lifts fly ash into flows, transporting dust and in the monsoons, the wetness assists in the descending of fly ash onto other surfaces (Pandey and Singh, 2012).

I wonder therefore whether the emergence of aerosol surfaces into the archive of substantiation, as samples, in what Shannon Mattern (2017) calls the “geo-informatic construct” assists in framing a politics of the Anthropocene. Do aerosol surfaces convey meaning beyond their aesthetical and toxic function? Are these surfaces seen? Are they realised? How are non-human capacities rendered in knowing these surfaces? Amy Balkin's 2002-2012 speculative Public Smog art project set out to claim the atmosphere as a UNESCO world heritage site². Balkin proposed that this was a park that fluctuated in time, place and scale. As something that was imagined, envisioned and proposed – Balkin's translucent box visualisation extrapolated the potential of spatial visibility into a speculative

² <http://www.publicsmog.org/>.

index of political relations. If modernity, capitalism and the extractive consensus is what caused the transformation of the commonland to the wasteland in the politics of the *poromboke* - is it commoning or uncommoning that will reclaim this space? In other words, does seeing/feeling/experiencing a surface make a difference? Cadena (2017) argues in 'Uncommoning Nature' of the importance of becoming allies with the *anthropo-not-seen*, of the ability of non-human and human collectives in organizing in the war against destruction. Coal ash surfaces contest the imaginary in their function of not conforming with normative boundaries. They are particularly vital and violent in their excavation, extraction and value-generation within human economies. The politics of coal extraction also remains a highly complex subject - considering the indigenous tribal communities that occupy many of these terrestrial surfaces from Chattisgarh to Nagaland - accounting struggles in some, displacements in others and a few successes in reclaiming. They are indeed the alter surfaces of the urban - connected by coal ecologies of aerosol and energy.

The song explores the transformation in the meaning of the word Poromboke from common lands to waste lands – from how the commons transformed perceptually and materially to a surface of toxic space, expelled and demonized as waste

One can argue that the aerosol surfaces of fly ash are not bound with the style of politics enacted in the process of extraction. Extraction is aerial. Machines (human and non-human) mine the earth of its atmosphere, creating new layers and setting free materials into the stream. Can you hear the high pitch of the rupture? Can you feel the hymn of the machines? Do you see the bodies immersed in labor, lifting minerals into the dump? Can you smell the dust in the air? Let us dredge the earth they say. Crush the surface, displace material and build worlds. The machines of capitalism in operation (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) surfacing new surfaces. As Shiv Visvanathan (1987) notes "If progress demands the summoning of the 'other' into modernity, triage is the dispensing of that other" (p.48). Visvanathan continues "If the tribal was once whipped into modernity because he was savage, today he is being bludgeoned back as being incapable of science" (p.48). He argues that the strategy of obsolescence created by protocols of the market and the sciences participates in the erasure of knowledges and ways of knowing. In writing surfaces of modernity therefore, life escapes. So on 'toxic earth', figuring surfaces - aerosols or otherwise as Povinelli (2016) suggests might have to do with attuning with other "modes of existence register these changes even if we do not" (p.136). Alas! "Everything is on fire" says Povinelli (2017, p.512).

So to the question "Can the study of urban surfaces reveal forgotten facts about urban existence?", I respond with the assistance of fly-ash surfaces - speculative and as real as the dust in Delhi air. These are temporal settlements over tangible material surfaces of sight. They are also temporal as atmospheric sensory beings. Their temporality is only challenged by their constant ever-increasing freedoms in the air. In making the world our own, we then come to realize that in-fact we are not alone in this atmosphere - we are of it.

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The Materials' Catch Dream-Thinking for Architects

Maria Theodorou

Materials appear to be the stuff architects day-dream about, experiment and work with in architecture studios, building sites, prototyping labs. In both design and make, materials' specifications, their properties and performance are always an issue of much consideration that requires solid technical knowledge and thoughtful decisions. But what if materials were to be thought neither as inert entities that architects manipulate for their clients to use and check in post-occupancy evaluations, nor just as matter whose properties are to be tamed to appease architectural obsessions and then offered to colleagues (and theorists) for contemplation?

This text experiments with ways of thinking about or 'together' with materials. To do so, it takes a dream-ride to different cities to recall instances of intense personal attachments with architecture matter, two of which belong to the specific temporal category of the bygone. Architecture ruins and materials of urban pasts are of particular interest as they seem to set up catches that allure and captivate in a visceral way. Such an 'unmediated' encounter with materials has unpredictable consequences that undermine the 'meet the eye/touch the ear/hit the brain' beaten path of recounting experiences of architecture's past in our cities. Unsurprisingly, capricious side-effects emerge as soon as the process of thinking drops its academic respectability to open up to the delights of dream-thinking.

Rome

I am embracing a long lost building by Donatelo Bramante in Rome. My hand runs over the rough surface of the *bugnato*. Moving hesitantly at first, it feels every tiny change on the stone; it drops in the abyss of the channel-jointed blocks and climbs up one by one the abscesses of the adjacent section of the masonry. It starts to accelerate impatiently, rushing to touch the coarse finish of the material to fully grasp the rusticated surface of the Palazzo Caprini. My hand becomes a vector, it falls and rises from joint to joint frantically and compulsively until it gets a life on its own with jerks and twitches so intense that my body starts shaking. It becomes disturbing; I open my eyes, half-awake I watch my hand's spasms and burst into laughter.

I am an architect living in Ostia in winter, the most depressing seaside place ever. I need entertaining dreams to make sense and conceptualise architecture surfaces and materials, for back then I had just started my studies on a dark and deeply conservative political subject: restoration of monuments was all about the integrity of the surface and the originality of materials. I retrace the earlier part of

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*Thinking gets
a hands-on
materials*

the dream: I am in the company of my aged, highly-respected professor, Renato Bonelli, who is also the director of *La Sapienza's* conservation school. Three painted lines, the colours – green, white and red – of the Italian flag, run diagonally across his face. As if he were an Indian indigenous chief, he takes me on a trip on the wild surface of the palazzo. He teaches the core course of the conservation programme: *Historical and Critical Reading of Artefacts*. It's all about old school aesthetics from Plotinus to Schleiermacher's German idealism and up to the Frankfurt school. I have no clue how to read buildings and make a judgement as to what deserves to be conserved or restored. My mind cannot grasp the concepts but my hand is fully able to apprehend by touching and feeling the materials

to make sense of architecture. In my sleep, thinking takes my hand as its refuge.

The thinking we do in the process of dreaming is our most profound form of thinking. It continues both while we are asleep and in waking life, it is multi-layered, nonlinear and involves

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viewing a lived experience from multiple perspectives simultaneously (Odgen 2010). Our dreams appear fragmentary and inconsistent but so is our consciousness and experience of reality, argues Marcus Steinweg (2017); he advocates for a philosophy of thought that enacts the inconsistency of our reality and moves away from the false security of rationality. Could dream-thinking provide a clue for this different mode of thought-process that could affect our relatedness to materials? Being an architect entails relentless thinking about materials; but thinking 'together' with materials could only emerge in the process of dream-thinking: for the glory of dreams lies in their atmosphere of unlimited freedom (Blixen 1937). This freedom may suggest a breaking through the constraints of rational thinking procedures of subtraction and abstraction.

In the Rome dream, my hand that touches/feels the material is not just the collector of information that through a complex system of nerves is transmitted to my brain to process and articulate conscious thoughts about the experience. My dreaming-hand is instead a fully functioning part of an assemblage made of the building, the stones, the carving and finishing architecture techniques, my flesh, nerves, emotions, memories. This assemblage is thinking, and its effects are manifested in muscular action: muscle spasms – first in my hand, then in the laughing grimace around my mouth – eventually triggered the waking of my brain. The assemblage's dream-thinking 'generated a living semi-permeable barrier' (Ogden 2003); it took on the blind spots of actuality and brought about a transformation. My brain overcame the temporary incapacity to think and understand concepts. I was rendered (as a conscious entity) capable of articulating by speech (mouth), or writing (by hand) architecture history's instances and materials and their particularity within a specific classificatory system called aesthetics. Dream-thinking provided an opening to the mode of thinking by assembling and viscerally connecting incongruent entities. It offered the experience of thinking 'together' with materials rather than thinking about materials. It delivered answers to questions never asked.

Athens

*Carved stones
graft death
onto the living*

Springtime high-school day excursions at the Ancient Athens cemetery Keramikos were a handy option: the school building was close to the ruins of classical Athens. We walked the distance and once inside the fence (that clear-cuts the modern city from its past), we were free to play, stroll and chat

amidst the scattered stones. When tired, we reclined on large plinths. Our youthful flesh, squeezed between the cold marble and the bright sunshine, poured out reveries; a field of life-force oozed but we were oblivious of the exchange of matter taking place. Day-dreaming is a form of thinking and as every thinking, it can occur when one is able to select what to remember and what to forget; and we chose to forget that Keramikos was once a cemetery, or the plinths were remnants of graves. For us it was just a handful of marbles we called ancient ruins.

Structures reduced to the state of ruin, especially the ones associated with the material traces of history, have been celebrated since systematic archaeological excavation in Rome and Athens made the remote past tangible in 19th century. Chunks of materials were the object of much speculation by archaeologists, who strived to understand how those remains were once assembled to make a 'whole'. Fragments of matter were reflected and, more often than not, acted upon, cleaned, purified, moved to museums. When deemed adequate, they were completed to better tell the story embedded in matter. Archaeology was a mesmerizing new discipline and, as it is well known, its devoted followers included the inventor of psychoanalysis. Freud was enchanted by archaeology's alluring techniques of excavating, unearthing, recovering long-forgotten past structures. He linked psychoanalysis to the archaeologists' painstaking working through fragments of materials and their awareness that knowledge of the past is doomed to remain incomplete and open to interpretation. Freud's study room was filled with archaeological material (antiquities). His analysis of an archaeological novel generated his theory of repression by which something is at once made inaccessible and preserved. As formulated in his essay 'Delusions and Dreams in Jensen's *Gradiva*' (1907), the repressed material can always return, often unexpectedly in dream-thinking and it has the potential to be turned into transformative thinking. In *Gradiva* a long-dead girl carved on a marble stone withholds and releases the forcefulness of life.

I dream I am an architecture tutor amidst a group of students. We must work together on an assignment set by the school's *strega*, the witch-protector of Venice. The task is to think through and re-design material traces of history in a city. The topic sets me off on a familiar nervous negativity and I listen to myself rushing into the usual depreciating comments on such an outdated task. My argumentation dissects the 80s conservative neoliberal politics intertwined with conservation policies that led to architectural 'mummification' of cities. But the need to design something and start from somewhere is there, and it is a task that cannot be ignored or delayed. And then in my dream, I recall Holbein's painting *The Ambassadors*, that I had visited again at the National Gallery in London the previous evening. There it was a painted canvas whose frontal viewing offers worldly objects and subjects of achievements in full display and just a little haunting hint of something that demands to be deciphered. I followed the ritual as any other visitor in the gallery; I moved to the right of the painting to retrieve the correct perspective, and the image of a floating skull emerged, a ghostly presence at the heart of life's memorabilia. In a flash, in my dream-thinking, the connection was made. The ruins that appear incomprehensible, a mass of stones in the midst a fully-functioning city: could they be seen from a different perspective? Can they appear in open view as the material enclaves of death trapped in the bursting-with-life 'organism' of a city? How can we re-design cities so that the material instance(s) of death (the gap – the absence of life, that is usually softened under the guise of the term monument) could be viewed as clear as in the ambassadors painting? A sense of euphoria overtakes me; it feels as if I have grasped the entry point for a project. I wake up into the joys of architecture invention. My negativity resolved by the architectural potential of designing a visceral connection with material remnants of past structures.

"Every experience – whether a waking perception, a memory or a dream – has the quality of something hidden (held secret) by what is perceived and of something revealed by what is hidden (in being *almost* secret)" (Odgen 2003). In my day-dreaming I return to the Keramikos' excursions

and to the memory of a seminal book on the epigram of the funerary marble statue of *Phrasikleia Kore*. It reads: “*Kore* (maiden) I must be called evermore; instead of marriage, by the Gods this name became my fate.” (Svenbro, 1993, 19). Svenbro makes this a paradigmatic case to argue that writing on funerary stones were read aloud, since there was no practice of silent reading in antiquity. We, the school girls – *kores*, maidens – strolling, sitting on funerary stones and reading aloud the letters carved on them, were unaware of lending our voice to the dead to speak and tell their stories. Those carved stones were grafting death onto the living. This was not just a visual and oral appropriation of our bodies to establish a fleeting comeback-to-life of the dead; we were instead part of an energy field of assembled matter of teeming flesh, swarming voice, past writing techniques, reading habits, euphoric expectations, carved plinths and sun rays.

Here is the architectural task my day-dreaming/dream-thinking offered: is there a way to design cities in which the material traces of the past are not just monuments of which we read about in books or hear by tourist guides or apps? Can those ruins (black holes of memory) be accommodating an architectural visceral, remembering where the configuration of the material deploys an almost aggressive and instant borrowing of life?

London

*The glass valley
bridges
the abyss*

When I arrived in London in the 90s, I kept stumbling on the city's crooked pavements. It took a while to adapt my footing and get used to the irregularities made by tree roots and other invisible underground forces that pushed up the rectangular slates covering the sidewalks surface. I dreamt of smoothness and an excess of it. London, in my dream back then, was made of glass buildings in strange twisted shapes. Its inhabitants seemed to enjoy being engulfed in the complex transparent structures and looked at ease with the fact that the city was a glass valley over a gaping abyss. Life was incubated in pockets of smooth glass and a feeling of impending geological risk was its breeding material. The dream had the ingredients of magical thinking – an invented reality to substitute external conditions. It took hints from the then brewing collective hallucination of architects on the technology and use of glass in architecture projects. In a few decades, London was to turn the architects' hallucinations of magical-thinking into a fully active transformative mode. “In transformative thinking, one creates a new way of ordering experience that allows one to generate types of feeling, forms of relatedness, and qualities of aliveness that had previously been unimaginable.” (Odgen 2010).

Sometimes, when the architect's body thinks it is a cage for wild dreams, an urge comes to the fore: to experiment with re-assembling building materials, flesh matter, thinking, feelings, memories, aspirations, and transform long-solidified living arrangements. Last night my dream-thinking's humble focus was on the architecture hygienics of the bathroom: a place of softness designed with hard materials. I dreamt instead of red velvet imprints on my shower tiles.

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The Thessaloniki Surfaces

by picpoet

This is a series of pictures taken over two days in two streets in the historical centre of Thessaloniki, Greece. They all depict fronts of shops that have shut down during the financial crisis that began in 2010 and have remained shut for years.

Although very central, just a few hundred meters from the White Tower, which is the symbol of the city, next to the International Fair and almost adjacent to major shopping areas and night time spots, these two streets, traditionally hosting small commercial activities such as butchers, have been progressively converted into a series of shut shop fronts, creating an almost unitary surface on



which graffiti and other street art mixes with old posters, political messages, inactive alarm warnings, and other palimpsestic layering.

The signs for Sale or Rent are ubiquitous.

picpoet spent the day there (iphone)photographing the shop fronts and writing short poetic prose for each surface, following the picpoetry technique of capturing the specific atmosphere (picpoems).

Here you see a selection of the mobile pictures.





ΧΑΤΖΗΠΕΤΡΟΥ & ΣΙΑ ΟΕ

ΕΠΙΓΡΑΦΕΣ

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ΕΝΟΙΚΙΑΖΕΤΑΙ
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69420154

Yellow notice with illegible text



Surfacing

Jan Hogan

Settled on the opening mouth of an estuary at the foothills of a mountain, the placement of the city of Hobart takes form in response to the rhythm of the earth's crust. The multitudes of life forms, accumulations of matter and vital forces harden, fold, become buried, get pushed to the surface and become engaged in new entanglements. The milieu of Hobart, Tasmania, is developed from the foundations of a deeper, older space, the earth, which has a continual presence, a material, physical hum in the background.

Two Hundred years of colonial settlement has violently pitted the surface of the valley, reconfiguring mountain and river structures through bridges, dams and dredging, overlaying previous systems and networks. To think through the meaning of the city's surfaces, the storied matter of 'flesh and stone' that comprise this place, I propose a creative and process driven concept of 'surfacing'. Invoking the physicist Karen Barad's (2007) concept of *spacetime mattering* and Jane Bennett's (2010) *Vibrant Matter* this paper explores the idea of surfacing as a process to remember the multiple elements and histories that make up a city. Surfacing asks for a remembering of the generative matrix that the city is built on, to consider how human and nonhuman agents are entangled in the growth of a city and the role of poetic imaginings for the future.

In reflecting on the constant becoming of the city as it emerges in response to material assemblages I consider the active term 'surfacing' a stronger reflection of what determines a city. Our knowledge is from travelling through the arcades and streets, the 'urban exoskeleton' as De Landa puts it, that we build around us that 'control the movement of human flesh'. (De Landa, 2011, 27) The many stages of a city are in layers of sediments, that arise and fall according to political, social and geological factors. The ground for 'surfacing' develops from my engagement in the artistic processes of printmaking where surfaces are altered, given meaning, and placed into cultural circulation. My experience, in particular with lithography, has assisted in conceiving, I would even suggest witnessing, matter itself as having agency with intention, purpose, and action.

The lithography stone presents a smooth sensual surface, cool to the touch and weighty in its presentation. This large block, mined for its homogenous qualities in Solhofen, was formed in shallow lagoons, too stagnant to contain bottom dwelling microbes and free from other mineral deposits that invade limestone in other locations. (Antreasian & Adams, 1969) Lithography stones have an equal propensity for grease and water. When freshly leveled and grained the stone greedily absorbs traces of drawing materials to build an image. Treated with gum arabic and small traces of nitric acid the negative area of the stone becomes hydrophilic, retaining water to repel the ink that is rolled on to the image. For printing purposes, the grease-laden drawing takes up the rolled ink whilst the stone is kept wet with a sponge. The natural repulsion of water and grease maintains the balance of the

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drawing, allowing for multiple editions. Here we have a specific limestone, mined in Solhofen, and now resident in Hobart, that can self-organise its particles to be receptive to grease or water on the same surface. This ability has led to its engagement in storytelling, in becoming part of the business of colonizing, as the printing process peels the ink off onto the fleshy layer of paper for distribution.

The theory and philosophy of Karen Barad's entanglements of physics and humanities seemed to be written by a lithographer. Her description of *spacetime mattering* could be analysing the behavioral patterns of a lithography stone I once processed that offered back the confusion of an ancient fos-

silized seabed (the limestone not always being homogenous), the hard right-angles of a previous architectural drawing amongst the soft washes of a landscape. Barad argues that 'phenomena are material entanglements enfolded and threaded through the spacetime mattering

As 'sedimented enfoldings', these ghosts of the past assembled on the stones surface, confounding the science of lithography, reveal the agency of matter

of the universe. . . . Memory – the pattern of sedimented enfoldings of iterative intra-activity – is written into the fabric of the world.' (Barad, 2010, 261) As 'sedimented enfoldings', these ghosts of the past assembled on the stones surface, confounding the science of lithography, reveal the agency of matter. It is not an inert substance for meaning to be attributed, but a contributor to what will be portrayed. The medium is notorious for its sensitivity and unpredictability and I have learned of the vitality intrinsic to lithography, accepting its occasional recalcitrance and acknowledging Bennett's theory of 'thing power' as an 'active, earthy, not quite human capriciousness.' (Bennett, 2010, 3)

What is it about the stones that absorbs and releases stories? Often considered the domain of human innovation, stories appear from the arrangements of matter at a particular locus in space and time. Heidegger considers art as harboring 'the silent call of the earth.' (Moslund, 2015, 8) To overcome the colonial relations dominating the current state of Hobart, I believe in acknowledging the deeper rhythms of the earth that force their way forward and offer a sensory challenge. Hobart is a small city and surfacing through its entanglement of human and nonhuman constructions, it is easier to become aware of Bennett's thing power where there is a 'greater sense of the extent to which all bodies are kin in the sense of inextricably enmeshed in a dense network of relations.' (Bennett, 2010, p.3)

The creative process of lithography is a dialogue between the earth, the stone, the atmosphere, the social and political pressure and the imagery developed by human intentions. The historical lithographs of Hobart trace the building of the city, the uneven rocky shoreline gradually replaced with timber and stone. The woven canoes of the Tasmanian Aborigines are displaced with the wooden hulks and then the beautiful schooners of the new colonial wealth as Tasmania's resources are shipped around the world. By 1840, the lithographs reveal a thriving harbor town crowded with boats blocking out the view of the city.

Living as a settler Australian in Hobart with all the benefits of privilege and with little of the responsibility to a specific place I struggle to find a language, a text, to put forward in this world that does not continue the same pathways of colonial power and disruption. The work of Barad provides the potential for creative new assemblages that address the past but provide a possible future. She stresses that 'there can never be complete redemption, but spacetime matter can be productively reconfigured, as im/possibilities are reworked.' (Barad, 2010, p.261) As I look at the peeled back epidermis layer of historical prints, the surfacing of Hobart offers the potential of being reconfigured. The lithographic stone may respond to new conditions and current flows of trade, politics and environmental activism.

Lithographic prints are a form of cultural text; they are inscribed into books and the trading culture

of the world. When Europeans first came across the current site of Hobart in Tasmania, they were attracted to the ideal conditions for settlement. The many preferences for European settlement were already in place, the appearance of lawn-like clearings rolled down to the water edge, which was cleared of bush. The mountain and river had wide areas of track open for ease of transport and trees were often in belts circling plains where animals were lured for ease of capture. William Bligh as he travelled into the harbor, recorded in his journal, 'The country looked in all parts pleasant and covered with wood. We saw numerous fires as if the country was full of inhabitants than has hitherto been supposed, and particularly about the shore of the Table Mountain (Mt Wellington) . . . certainly the finest part of the country.' (Gammage, 2011, 247)

Whilst early prints of Hobart were texts of colonization it is also true that they are materials and part of nature. The early lithographs of Hobart reveal a cleared land, very much like an English estate. These colonial images have traditionally been critiqued as a desire by the Europeans to see Tasmania in terms of their homelands. They have been interpreted as desire written over the land, or an inability to draw new forms in nature. However, a more recent reading of the works by Bill Gammage (2011) suggests the images are accurate records of the environment around 1788. Trained as cartographers, scientists, surveyors and botanists, the artists were employed to record in accurate detail the rise and fall of the shorelines searching for safe harbors. Tasmania, in contrast to other settlements in Australia, due to its fresh water and milder climate, had a rich and easy life for the settlers due to the cleared land and abundance of food. (Gammage, 2011)

It did not occur to the newcomers that this was the work of generations of people setting up a network of systems suitable to maintain diversity of food sources and shelter along with access to other spaces for harvesting, ceremony or exchange with other language groups on the island. All had been sustained to achieve a balance in life, alert to seasons and circumstances with the focus on abundance rather than mere survival. Rather than groups of 'wandering savages', they were far more like 'landed gentry', managing the land, using generations of observation and knowledge to develop rich resources throughout the country. (Gammage, 2011)

The creative surface of a lithography stone makes visible the inter/intra active negotiations that occur between humans and nonhumans as we make our place in the world. It is one part of the networking and surfacing that makes Hobart's milieu, providing haunting images of the past configurations and presences in the land; the mapping, the flora, and fauna that once appeared in this particular location. It played a role as a creative assistant in the colonizing and dissemination of claims upon this space – Can it pave a way to its sensuous resurfacing?

Barad points out that 'Reconfigurings don't erase marks on bodies—the sedimenting material effects of these very reconfigurings – memories/re-memberings – are written into the flesh of the world . . . What if we were to recognise that differentiating is a material act that is not about radical separation, but on the contrary, about making connections and commitments?' (Barad, 2010, 266) Making 'commitments and connections' then is my job as an artist in this city that I now call home. For an ethical surfacing of the city, the stain of the colonial past must merge and mingle with the sediments of the present becoming creatively enmeshed to an extent that the network of relations of the cultural world with the natural world is recognized as one of matter.

Art offers another route into the world, observations and facts are made into stories, the creative moment folding time and matter in a deep and consensual dialogue. The surface worrying that occurs in the process of printmaking has shown the eccentricities of matter. It does not behave as it ought, no matter how closely we repeat the processes required to settle an image on a surface, it will slip and slide, bleed out, disappear and reemerge months later to haunt a new work.

The lithography stone has the potential of multiple becomings. It can be reworked and reimagined,

but its tendencies for grease and water remain. Does the flow of the Derwent through the channels of rocks have a similar agency? Will life always congregate at this broadening river mouth at the base of the Mountain, at the site we call Hobart?

Lithographs have traced the gradual mapping and carving up of territory for the European invaders. The environment of ancient streams and ways of life profoundly affect the city that has grown here. As a form of iterative becoming, lithography has the potential to imaginatively engage in Barad's proposition of spacetime mattering. Perhaps we can imagine more fluid boundaries and exchanges of environment and inhabitants? To understand the nature of matter as it shifts and moves is to creatively engage in responsiveness. As we engage in surfacing through our chosen milieu, Barad believes we can also engage in 'an ethics that is alive to the virtual. Being in touch with the infinite in/determinacy at the heart of matter, the abundance of nothingness, the infinitude of the void that is threaded in, through, and around all spacetime mattering opens up the possibility of hearing the murmurings, the muted cries, the speaking silence of justice-to-come.' (Barad, 2012, 216)

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All that glitters is not gold

The surfaces of early Chicago's landscape

Olivier Gaudin

Original Chicago was a village in the mud. Historians recall that “the site was unpromising” (Mayer & Wade 1969: 3). Were it not for its location at the mouth of the Chicago River into the Lake Michigan, the swampy grounds encircling the Frontier outpost's wooden huts around 1830 would never have become a world city. Its environment had to undergo heavily transformation. Which technical operations and artificial remaking of the ground surfaces have given its shape to the Midwest's metropolis?

Environmental historians, in particular William Cronon (1991), have provided extensive material to answer these questions. The amount of available sources is incredibly vast. From urban sociology to studies on colonial dispossession and violence; from the legacy of social movements to the critique of capitalism or to architecture theory; from muckraking to cultural and visual studies: an exhaustive survey of the massive Chicago bibliography is out of reach. This article emphasises some major transformations of the city's visible aspects: through such a well-documented case, it questions the fugitive perceptual experience of urban surfaces. The idea is to connect the issues of urban experience and urban landscape – two interdisciplinary topics *per se* – to formulate a realistic research agenda.

Addressing urban experience and landscape requires combining perspectives. For instance, Lois Wille has tracked down the historical “struggle” which led to make crucial parts of land into public space: on that angle, too, Chicago offers a model case study, with the harsh debates that preserved its distinctive lakefront for public access and use (Wille 1972). This way of crossing the boundaries of disciplines inspires my intention to survey surface transformations. It seems logical to start with the lakeshore, which remains to this day the prominent geomorphological feature of the site. After mentioning the conversion of water into a characteristic element of a new urban landscape, I will emphasize some other central topics for examining early Chicago's superficial and transitory textures. Finally, recalling the hyperbolic World's Columbian Exhibition of 1893, I sketch out possible ways for a further study of perceptual experience of urban surfaces.

Lake

Water is the first natural element that singles out Chicago's site. The natural causes for its presence go back to geological times – stories of glaciers succeeding to tropical seas – exceeding the scale of human memory, but not of our prehistory. Not only the current shape of the Lake Michigan, but the very composition of the soil and gravel beneath the flat, sandy and swampy ground which allowed the grass and the trees to grow on the prairie, are the results of the drainage and melting down of the glaciers (Cronon 1991: 24–25). The lake is really an inland sea, allowing cheap transportation of material resources. The location, used by Indians and settlers as a site of transit between the Great Lakes and the Mississippi Valley, became strategic with the building of the Illinois-Michigan canal

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(opened 1848). The transformation of the land in and around the village of Chicago originated during those years of intense speculation by “boosters” (Cronon 1991: 33–34). The actual metamorphosis was yet to come. The first decades of the city’s existence constantly met the problem of building on a watery terrain. Multiple operations of drainage were needed to make construction possible; every single visitor of the time recalled the overwhelming presence of mud. Streets were covered with planks to make circulation possible; flows of pedestrian and carriage traffic were rarely separated. The lakeshore was a mere strip of strand on the eastern side of the nascent city, which mostly developed south of the river (the northern part of the Loop). Sand, clay and mud were everywhere. As a whole, the presence of water made the ground surface unstable; it was clear from the start that any project of edification on that piece of land would necessitate hard work of engineering.

During the 1850s and 1860s, the rapid growth of the city – now well connected by both fluvial and rail transportation to the East and South, and from 1869 on, to the West – led to spectacular street improvements. City Council decided to “raise the grade level” of the buildings, in order to build up a long-needed draining system and provide the city with an efficient water supply as well as sewer equipment. These actions resulted in moving entire houses and buildings out of the congested centre (Mayer & Wade 1969: 94–96). On the sides of enlarged streets, investors had higher stone buildings replace wooden constructions; the environing countryside turned into suburban settlements. In parallel, reflections about public recreation space led to first discussions, debates and legal decisions about the lakefront, while the shoreline underwent constant modification. A good part of downtown was thus literally built on the water, extending the coastline into the lake.

To this day, the lake gives the city its shape because of the immense scale of its uniform surface, providing a horizon and an orientation for urban development. This was already well noted by authors contemporaries to Chicago’s growth. Architect Louis H. Sullivan insisted on its aesthetic quality of reflecting the changes of natural light:

There was a time a city some three hundred thousand strong stood beside the shore of a great and very wonderful lake with a wonderful horizon and wonderful daily moods. Above the rim of its horizon rose sun and moon in their times, the one spreading o’er its surface a glory of rubies; its companion, at the full, an entrancing sheen of mottled silver. At other times far to the west in the after-glow of sunset the delicate bright crescent poised in farewell slowly dimmed and passed from sight. Around this city . . . lay a beauteous prairie, born companion of the lake. (1924: 241)

In this quite Romantic description, Sullivan depicts 1870s Chicago within its natural context, evoking its cultivated surroundings. The reflections at the lake’s surface take part to a cosmic order; the glowing land and the glimmering lake compose a unified and vivid picture. Yet this disappeared landscape was almost entirely forgotten by 1924.

Transience

“The Garden City vanished”, writes Sullivan (1924: 243), with the Great Fire of 1871. Such harmonious vision of the city by the lake, half mythological, recalls a dream-like picture of a Golden Age or a paradise lost that the author himself had never seen. From his arrival in 1873, he mostly recounts the feverish atmosphere of reconstruction. Yet his nostalgic depiction must have echoed many a witness’ contrasted reception of Chicago’s spectacular changes during the period. The previous landscape was nowhere to be found. As new textures of buildings and street pavement dramatically transformed post-Fire Chicago, all were struck by the swift change of material surfaces in and around the city, and felt mixed sentiments of loss, excitement and irreversibility (Ickstadt 1983). Given the rhythm of the growth, every innovation could appear transitory, and every new glittering building or block, ephemeral or unreal. Such creative destruction conveyed an uneasy sense of transience.

The natural environment was being profoundly transformed by infrastructural operations: the

building of the lakefront, the ecological changes brought into the soil and the land by the opening of canals and the construction of thick railroad networks, as well as water supply and sewage systems. The Fire merely amplified the logic of growth already at work, and became an additional opportunity; as Sullivan recounts, the reconstruction attracted many architects, investors and developers. Moreover, while almost the entire central business district – the Loop – had been destroyed, most of the industrial fabric in the south, including the slaughterhouse district (Union Stockyards, opened in 1865), had not been touched and the rail network linking Chicago to its economic hinterland was intact. This made possible a “miracle of the Phoenix” (Cronon 1991: 345-50). Eventually, the catastrophe had opened the possibility of thoroughly reorganising the city’s shape. Engineers could imagine a functional separation of districts and plan a new layout of streets and services; for Chicago’s unprecedented expansion was tightly dependent on the development of public transportation (streetcars).

The meaning of urban experience does neither start nor stop with surfaces. It involves hidden realities, aborted possibilities, imaginary promises or phantasmagorias

In the following decades, the growth kept its excessive speed. Forgetting the prairie, the forests and the mud, Chicago attracted constructing experiments: asphaltting and pavement techniques; the use of stone, steel and concrete in buildings after 1890 (Condit 1964), the progressive emergence of a park system (Bluestone 1991); and later on, the challenging engineering of multi-layered infrastructures (Castex 2009). The city had become a dazzling open-air laboratory for architectural and landscape experimentation. The lake excepted, every other surface of the material environment was reshaped by human work, assisted by the technological means of professional engineering (the model of Paris played a crucial role, through the impact of technicians like Rambuteau, Haussmann, then Alphand and Hénard).

Such great visible changes are far from only superficial. They involve deep internal and infrastructural alterations that affect the materiality and the entire life of the natural environment. As Cronon emphasised, they transformed the Midwestern and Northwestern landscapes, exterminating the buffalo population and introducing new types of grass for the cattle, plowing and fencing the land, “partitioning” the ecosystem; “Without the sweeping environmental manipulations these developments represented, none of the other changes at Chicago would have been possible” (Cronon 1991: 247-8). Scale breaks and successive threshold crossings do not only concern the spatial and ecological relationships that make up the environment. Perceived changes are radical because they affect landscapes – the underlying relationships between human beings and their ecosystems.

Fair: All that glitter is not gold

Chicago’s “World’s Columbian Exhibition” of 1893 attracted 27.5 million visitors. It combined pretentious monumental architecture with sophisticated landscape work on the grounds of the Fair, by the lakeshore. Ever since the event itself, critics have denounced its grandiloquence (Sullivan 1924: 317-25; Mumford 1924: 148; Wright 1957; Ickstadt 1988; Harris 1993: 17). Janet Ward called it the “most decadent, overblown example of the exhibition age’s excesses in ephemeral surface”:

It was a surface event, in that it was literally built that way – as fakery. The overly ornate structures looked like marble to last the ages, but they were for the most part not real buildings at all but mere façades composed of ‘staff’ (plaster and fibrous binding over wood and steel), which burned down weeks after the fair closed. (Ward 2001: 22)

Built-up surfaces may become screens. Indeed, the supposed duality between the White City, ideo-

logical and imaginary yet powerful as such, and the industrial Dark or Black City, masked the more profound duality which then divided Chicago. The productive grey city was increasingly fragmented into two dominating types of areas: on the one hand its segregated districts, inhabited by exploited immigrant workers isolated by industrial infrastructures; on the other, the expanding greenery of its more affluent suburbs. Yet for careful observers, surface effects tell much more than a mere concealing, as Simmel famously argued:

from each point on the surface of existence – however closely attached to the surface alone – one may drop a sounding into the depth of the psyche so that all the most banal externalities of life finally are connected with the ultimate decisions concerning the meaning and style of life. (Simmel 1950: 413)

Following this line of thought, the White City expressed quite bluntly the aspirations of the corporate elites which funded it – as did then the City Beautiful Movement, and later on, the Burnham Plan for Chicago. It was just that: a surface of projection.

Investigating their visible surfaces reminds us that cities are not only architectural ensembles. They are not even objects with sharp contours, like buildings. Since urban environments are perceptual fields where multiple processes take place, visible surfaces essentially offer a flickering view of cities. They are part of urban perceptual experiences, not their culmination. The meaning of urban experience does neither start nor stop with surfaces. It involves hidden realities, aborted possibilities, imaginary promises or “phantasmagorias” (Benjamin 1999: 14). Urban forms depend on inherited forms of life, transmitted by ways of organising sensory experience. However, as a major relay of this cultural transmission, the physical configuration of urban surfaces may reveal the turbulent and discontinuous character of history, provided we pay critical attention to it.



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A City-wide Art Gallery Project

The Tehran billboards project between Artistic Promotion and Surface Presentation

Narciss M. Sohrabi

Images exposed in urban space can express controversial meanings and power relations by contributing to shape a specific vision of the world (Soderstrom, 2000). Usually, visual materials displayed on city walls represent commercial interests (advertisement) or political propaganda, and reflect the dominant power relations in place. In Tehran, the capital of Iran, billboards have two main functions, namely, commercial and political-religious. In the spring of 2015, however, billboards had a chance to deliver a new message. "A City-wide Art Gallery" was a two-week urban project hosted by the Beautification Department of the Tehran municipality, aimed at turning the city into an outdoor gallery.

It was the first time that the municipality of Tehran allocated billboards to a topic that followed neither economic interests nor ideology. During this time, all commercial ad and political messages were cleared and the billboards were entirely available to the project. Pictures of about 1,600 national and international artworks, including paintings, handicrafts, calligraphy pieces, and sculptures, were displayed. The project has received a vast feedback by social media both in Iran and abroad. However, such extensive urban art activity has not been yet fully investigated as a social event. In this piece, I focus on how the citizens of Tehran reacted to the featured art images.

A short history of billboard images in Tehran

In Iran, city walls are mostly considered public property (Mirshahi, 2003). The simplest interpretation of this idea is that anyone can paste adverts or posters. In the years before the Islamic Revolution, images were mostly commercial – wall paintings, billboards and neon boards on the roof of the shops advertised Pepsi Cola and the like (Sohrabi, 2015). Immediately after the Islamic Revolution (1978-1979) and the eight-year Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), commercial billboards virtually disappeared and featured images included exclusively slogans related to the revolution, the sacred defense of the homeland, martyrdom, and various Islamic messages (Rahbarnia, 2006).

Commercial advertisements began again in 1989, largely due to the "necessity to reconstruct the country". After the Iran-Iraq war, the government omitted grants to the municipality and therefore, finding revenue sources became critical for cities (Kamran, 2006). Tehran prepared schemes that included land sales and changes in land use to finance city management. Only a small part of the municipal budget came from advertising. Since the 1990s, however, this share increased thanks to the deployment of about 250 new billboards installed in locations highly visible at a distance, such as major street crossings and above the highways (in various formats ranging from 8 to 72-meter long).

Advertisements for food products, bank, and insurance services have since occupied most of the city's visual space. A subsequent generation of billboards were installed directly on city walls. On these

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billboards, small and large banners and posters were glued together, so that underneath any poster or ad, a corner of the previous one was visible. According to the municipality, there are currently about 20,000 square metres of billboards in Tehran, with 5,000 square metres for “cultural” messages and 15,000 square metres for commercial advertising. Cultural billboards include commemoration of national and religious events, such as Nowruz and the beginning of the academic year.

A city-wide art gallery

As hinted above, the purpose of the art project was to enhance the cultural level of citizens from

According to the municipality, there are currently about 20,000 square metres of billboards in Tehran, with 5,000 square metres for “cultural” messages and 15,000 square metres for commercial advertising

different social classes and encourage them to visit national museums.

Indeed, the majority of images were gathered from the treasures of Persian museums, allocating 70% of the contribution to the works of Iranian artists and 30% to foreign artists.

Another bias was of geographic

nature. The city of Tehran is divided between a richer north and a poorer south. According to the map guide to the project, the distribution of the artworks across the city was similarly unbalanced. In fact, due to the extensive economic activity in the northern districts, most billboards are found there. Consequently, in northern Tehran more volume of artwork could be seen and enjoyed.

From our interviews, it was clear that organizers favoured drivers over pedestrians as their target audience. If the project was not intended for pedestrians, however, the drivers’ fruition was also constrained by their very speed. From a technical point of view, billboards had to be designed so that artworks could be seen and captions read while driving on a highway without excessive distraction. Framing pictures of classic artworks within rectangles designed for advertisement was also not easy: in some cases the white background was so large that the represented artwork went almost lost in it, in other cases the white passepartout was so thin that the image merged with the texture of the urban space and it was not readily discernible.

We also prepared a questionnaire for city users, whose main finding was that the project interested mainly young respondents, who however were more critical of the selected images. In gender terms, the project has encouraged men more than women to visit museums and art galleries. There was also a positive significant relationship between educational level and satisfaction about featured artworks. However, people with lower education levels talked about the project with other citizens more than respondents with higher education levels. Finally, respondents who spent time in the public spaces were encouraged to visit museums and art galleries more than respondents who spent lower time.

Conclusions

Despite its shortcomings, we can say that “A City-wide Art Gallery” was a successful urban public project. Most importantly, it gave the citizens of Tehran the chance to enjoy important artworks for free. It enhanced, although temporarily, the urban quality and the familiarity of the community with the artistic treasures of Iran and the world, encouraging people to visit museums and galleries. It also stimulated talk about art and culture in the general public, and temporarily suspended the boring routing of the everyday business and the dominance of commercial messages.

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Three in/visibilised surfaces outside the CIEs

Shaping matter through minor architectural tactics

Antonio Giráldez López

The prisoner reaches an outside without “thrusting through the wall.” Escape modes include tapping, scratching, reading, writing, gazing, and pacing
Fill Stoner

Let’s observe three surfaces that can be found in the outskirts of any city. The first is a concrete wall covered with yellow paint; each hole is covered with a perforated steel plate painted in blue. The second is a white wallpaper that covers the whole surface of a small room. The third one is a thick layer of navy blue paint coating the furniture of another small room, similar to the previous one. Apparently, none of them is remarkable; the walls are completely ordinary.

But, the urban pieces to which they belong are not ordinary at all: they are architectures made invisible from many perspectives – not only urban and architectural, but also legal and normative. We will see however how three minor actions carried out on the flesh of certain urban enclaves can turn the situation around. Minor architectural tactics, precarious and temporary, dispel the opacity of surfaces and bring to light a dark interior. They show both the architectural interior and the spatial conditions of the bodies therein enclosed; they offer three different ways of reading, operating and forming new surfaces to connect an in-visibilised interior with a carefully withdrawn further interior.

What is the connection between these different surfaces? Let’s introduce for a moment a fourth surface – the mishmash of concrete, atomised plastic paint, dust and asphalt where the following statements can be found: “Guantánamo is here”¹ and “Extermination Centre”². Here is a first approach to the detention architecture at stake: the CIE, the Spanish acronym of Foreigner Detention Centre. Inside these structures, people are forced to stay in a carceral environment for sixty days before being deported to their countries of origin. In this piece, we observe how such minor, precarious (non)-architectural operations generate new material agencies through the transformation, re-disposition and formation of everyday surfaces.

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White Blankets over Concrete Wall – Find the Pores

The first picture: the rusty concrete wall painted in yellow at Aluche CIE, a neighbourhood in Madrid, has been carefully designed to impede any street-level observer from seeing what happens inside. Each hole and opening in the original architecture have been shut with a perforated blue steel plate. The surface parallel to the street is homogeneous and totally opaque. However, the curved geometry of the steel plate leaves a minuscule pore in it. During the riots inside the CIE, these little holes were stuffed with white blankets, challenging the neutrality of the façade. The smoke and the flames of a raging fire inside also managed to permeate the material layers of the wall and its fissures, showing

The rusty concrete wall painted in yellow at Aluche's CIE, a neighbourhood in Madrid, has been carefully designed to impede any street-level observer from seeing what happens inside

up on the neutral exterior. The inmates managed to find several holes, which offered unexpected pores through which public attention could be reached. Through a destructive action – such as setting fires – the inmates thus communicatively transformed the place. For a few hours

– or a few days, in some riots – the white blankets unsettled the urban façade of a building that few neighbours had ever noticed before. The blankets also captured the attention of the media, and shed light onto the CIE's spatial and political conditions. Herman Melville writes in *Moby Dick* that the prisoner should go through the wall to reach the outside³. In Madrid, however, it was not the human body that appeared publicly; rather, a piece of cloth forming a post-human assemblage. By knowing the location of these holes, and by exploiting each pore and fissure, the inmates learnt about the weakest elements of the assemblage to be broken⁴. This way, their tactical knowledge stemming from “transgression” allowed new spatial possibilities that effectively challenged the designed ones.

The Wallpaper – Skin the Wall

The second surface brings us inside Zapadores CIE, in Valencia. Here we find a piece of wallpaper of approximately 50 square centimeters directly ripped off of the wall. This dimension can be conveniently folded into an envelope and sent by the inmates. The wallpaper, once deterritorialised and decontextualised, has served as blank paper to draw the architectural plan of the interior of the jail⁵. The margins of the paper were also used to describe the spatial conditions of inmates. Elvin, a Bolivian migrant deported two days later, became a cartographer when he decided to transform the existent surface into a map that also offered forensic evidence of detention conditions. His mapping has contributed to a type of “destruction” functional to the creation of new meaning⁶.

Blue Paint – Scratch the Surface

The third surface appears as an accumulation of temporal and material strata, a juxtaposition of successive blue paint layers scratched and graffitied with a constellation of names and places⁷. It works in the reverse way vis-à-vis the former two: from an isolated interior, it reaches out to multiple scattered locations. The scratches and scribbles on the walls of a parlour room form a changing cartography that accumulates information about times, bodies and places that have passed through it. Two actions are condensed on this surface. First, writing is a rebel act and an individual signification inside

³ Melville, Herman. *Moby-Dick; Or, the Whale*. 1851. Ed. Harrison Hayford Et Al. Evanston: Northwestern UP and the Newberry Library (1988).

⁴ Tschumi, Bernard. *Architecture and Disjunction*. MIT press, 1996

⁵ Martínez, Tony. *CIE: El Guantánamo Español*. Universidad Abierta de Cataluña, 2016.

⁶ Benjamin, Walter. “The Destructive Character.” *Revue Française De Psychanalyse* 78, no. 4 (2014): 958-959.

⁷ “Así Es Por Dentro El Opaco CIE De Madrid”. 2018. *Eldiario.es*. https://www.eldiario.es/desalambre/FOTOS-dentro-CIE-Madrid_12_576162379.html.

a collective that is forced to be homogeneous – the migrant population waiting to be deported. Through repetition and layering onto the same surface, individual action becomes collective, gaining greater political potential. It is, once again, a form of “creative destruction” that challenges the deliberate spatial discontinuity created by the authority. As Jill Stoner states, “The act of drawing a line through an object is politicised by the force of the draw. This gives a building new agency”⁸. But, what happens when a surface is read instead of just drawn? The multitude of individual acts hosted within the same surface then provoke a contrary displacement: reading the messages transform the sum of different individual bodies that have inhabited and will inhabit that space into a veritable collective. Reading connects emotionally and creates common affect across the temporal and geographical distance that separates the writer and the reader.

it may be that this third surface is the most complex of the three: even without reaching the outside of the opaque CIE architecture, writing blurs the interior and the exterior thanks to the repository of domestic layers.

Openings

Let’s go back to our departure point and look carefully again at these three in/visibilised surfaces. Let’s look closer at their violent, temporary and precarious process. The three surfaces have been shaped by minor material tactics that use a conflictual, “destructive” stance to convey new meanings. Surfaces thus become a contested space of precariousness spatiality and temporality. These tactical interventions are not going to last: the current riot will be repressed, and the wall will be re-painted. However, a political and spatial agency is revealed, one capable of making current detention conditions visible.

The material agency of these tactics is also autonomous. The success or failure of each of these tactics relies, in some sense, on the capacity to strengthen the assemblage of different material agents, operating and purposefully orienting the assemblage itself. Would it have been possible to use the white blankets were the steel plated had been flat and without holes? Would a map of Zapadores had ever been produced if no wallpaper had been pasted on its walls in the first place? And, in the third case, scratching and graffiti are only possible with certain types of painting. Only understanding the “architectural flesh” from an immediately operative perspective can we understand the agency and affordability of different materials. Only once we shift from designers’ parameters to praxis can we become aware of the creative possibilities and the affective dimension of “vibrant matter”⁹.

Minor architecture calls for digging deeper into this material condition where a creative destruction conducive to new meanings can only emerge from a direct and violent confrontation with the materials. New spatial and architectural possibilities emerge through modification and hacking operations of the existent matter: new unexpected agencies then allow to build new relations between the parts and convey new meaning onto the ordinary surfaces. Individual and collective actions carve, scratch, skin, destroy, they set surfaces on fire in order to connect the visible exterior and the invisible interior: they momentarily blur recto and verso.

8 Stoner, Jill. *Toward a Minor Architecture*, MIT Press, 2012.

9 Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Duke University Press, 2009.



The poetics of experimental ice bridges

Melody Woodnutt

Surface Philosophy

Philosophy itself renders clear an image and feeling of a surface, often one to cross, to penetrate, or be embraced by.¹ In response to Françoise Laruelle's text, *Du Noir univers* (1988), Eugene Thacker considers The Terrain of Philosophy as such:

The cavernous straits of a philosophical optics, a tongue made of sand, the surface of a pool across which philosophy strides, in each of its peripatetic steps. It is across this terrain that philosophy's optics casts its epistemic light – Earth, World, Universe . . . If the Earth is what tolerates us, and the World is that which is made in our own image, then the Universe is “according-to-which” thought thinks these relations at all. To be acted upon, even when acting; to be spoken, even when speaking – to be thought, even in the moment of thinking the hair, mud, and dirt that thinks through me – this is the passion of the Universe.

The *Universe* is evocative, revealing its incantations via conduits (dirt, mud, hair). Passionate relations and Ersilian² strings construct World and Universe that humans use as surfaces for Earth, upon which we obtain subjective controls for an uncontrollable Earth. The Earth is coy, nonchalant, aloof, and out of our league, its private life remaining out of reach. Its presence is made vocal or visible for us like shadows on a thin veil: natural atmospheres, phenomena, witnessed forms of climate, evidential traces, and flux – or rivers of thinning ice. Suddenly we notice a sovereign Earth that is *somewhere else*³. The veil of the occult is thin – that is to say the hidden, the spatiotemporal traces, and the folds of the atmospheric are privy to humans via the *performance of place* that creates noticeable signifiers of 'somewhere else' – an *eco-occult*.

The veil of the eco-occult and emerging bodies from an Earth that is somewhere else may correlate to how we orient the unseen in society within human constructs, like that of the lawscape. The lawscape as posited by Andreas Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos draws for us the scape of law as an affect: a phenomenon and a construct that enables or disables tangibles and movement in society, or lived engagement with in/visible law structures. Just as a chair (for example) exists because it has passed through the enabling laws that have brought it to a regulated coherent existence (or positioned it within space), so too the lawscape harbours and orients larger objects, in/animates, societal influences, atmospheres, or Thacker's *World and Universe*.

¹ As a thinker positioned outside of an academic institution, the following commentary is related directly to my work in the field with *The Weight of Mountains* – a durational, immersive, heterotopian construct and a film and media arts biennial. The last installment was held in Dawson City, Canada from January to April, 2018.

² Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities* (1972: 76). Ersilia is an emergent city born of nomadic abandonment leaving behind only the visible strings defining past relationships of blood, trade, authority, agency.

³ Eugene Thacker, *Dark Nights of the Universe* (2013) p. 1–2: “We scramble and struggle to fix, to repair, to make reparations, and to forecast repercussions, but the world has already moved on – it is, quite literally, somewhere else.”

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Landscape is an emergence from the various micro and macro in/visibilities performed by the bodies that constitute the landscape . . . Bodies carry law and space, indeed generate law and space, through their moving on the landscape. Just as any surface, the landscape is tilted. Bodies fall more readily onto other bodies, and the sliding is more easily allowed by the terrain.⁴

Not of the Earth, judicial law is a construct of human worlding — of Thacker's *World*. It is other to natural laws or universal laws, it is inherited via societal constructs and steered by bodies. To see bodies, emergent veils and occultisms, and sliding socio-political ontologies (gender, racial, socio-environmental) moving together upon a tilted, hovering chess board can be incredibly metaphoric for an in/visible societal frame. Its systematic conflicts (human vs. natural) and global trends (superficial human worlding) may mean the materials of our humanity and constructs: law, power, governance etc. are quite incomplete as a set of languages when illiteracy exists in understanding the performance of place and its reactive undercurrent. Hence, dropping our societal issues from a biased chess board (humanity's worlding) into the running river of Earth's 'somewhere else' invites imagery of piercing splashes in slow motion as we see these things no longer in anthropocentric isolation. By addressing a need to embrace surfaces (listening to somewhere else) and merge new membranes (Earth and World) we may encounter a greater environmental literacy, and comprehend humanity's illiteracy through a failed ice bridge in the far reaches of subarctic Yukon Territory.

Limited surface fluency

Dawson City rests upon Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in land and is spread across two opposite banks of the Yukon River. Around 100 residents on the west bank live off grid and each autumn spend a month cut off from the main services of the small town until the river freezes over completely. Last year, and again this year, the river has not completely frozen over. A thin dark blue vein remains pulsing and rushing in-between two expanded banks of shelf ice. To connect the West Dawson residents to the main town and maintain an ice-highway, Tetra Tech, a government engineering contractor, sprayed water into the air ("ice cannon"), expecting it to freeze and bond to existing ice, providing a catalyst for an ice cover to form and eventually freeze the river over entirely. This experiment lasted one week, failed, and cost a reported \$120,000⁵. Memes of embellished Ice Queens and Facebook posts of exquisite blue arches have been plentiful.

The failure was attributed to an incongruent strategy that worked to human logic and not nature's logic. The sprayed water was not in fact how the ice naturally formed — the river does not freeze over because of falling water or rain (as was simulated by Tetra Tech) but from larger chunks of ice that form upstream then float down and become congested. The drifting ice normally acts as puzzle pieces that jam in together and freeze between — gradually forming a thick ice covering across the river; enabling essential services and a functioning city. Engineered incorrectly, we might discover this failure as a spatial/environmental illiteracy, an unheard eco-occult, or a rebellious refusal from the river to cooperate with the human landscape.

Two men and a symbiotic tree

In response, two locals (Kyler Mather and friend) became mobilised outside of sanctioned governance and strung a rope and a dead tree across the open water one night. It promptly acted as a puzzle piece for ice to grow within the branches and the inbetweens — a bridge naturally formed within a few days, safe enough to walk on between banks. Within weeks snowmobiles and cars could cross.

The difference between these two bridges, one fully formed and one invisibly so, is related to atmospheres and materials. The invisible bridge by Tetra Tech was made of a dominant governance out of

4 Andreas Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, *Spatial Justice* (2015) Routledge, p. 192.

5 CBC News - North, Feb 06, 2018, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/dawson-city-ice-bridge-rope-1.4522963>

touch with local bodies which formed an ineffective surface of moving water. The materials of local intuition, empirical knowledge, and complementary strategy to a naturalistic process succeeded and formed a visible surface of ice and disparity. The consideration of a priori and posteriori knowledge here is at odds, much like the two river banks. The latter bridge formed and succeeded from the atmosphere of the former. The eco-occult in this equation is the ephemeral transmission of tension between forms of human worlding and *Earth*; as an apparition of thinning and thickening ice and the occasional haunting vision of a steaming and fogged over river in February's fluctuating -20°C.

The complication of course comes when government is legally liable for weight load limits and crossing by emergency vehicles and the ice road acts as a continuation of the highway to Alaska. These formalities of governance are not typically a conversation with local or Indigenous knowledge

(and the specialised literacy of local eco-occultisms). The human lawscape here becoming out of touch with the natural bodies of which it assumes authority (likewise, think here of the patriarchy over a feminine wellbeing, just as much as the environmental body).

However in/extricable the human may be, the *performance of place* brings forth and breaks *veils of occultisms* (the hidden, spatio-temporal traces, or folds of atmospheres) to render increasingly visible and vocal an Earth that is somewhere else. Our living surfaces of interactive immersion are reliant on forces, forms, and material outside of anthropocentrism. Understanding our natural and urban ecologies finds an eco-occult more pertinent to unveiling the biased epistemology of anthropocentric historical ontologies and gaining greater agency in navigating futures in an age of dramatic shift. So we ask, who has been the protagonist? Who needs to be the protagonist?

Performance of place is via conduit

A river's skin is a co-auteured space; ephemeral and malleable into a resource or mythology, though a river of servitude is not its protagonist narrative. Two men with advanced fluency in ice surfaces were quietly privy to interstitial environmental dialects, perhaps working as conduits to Thacker's *Universe* they became part of an eco-occultism. In horror films the emergent atmospheres of fog, blobs, ghosts, or threatening surfaces alter our (would be) lives and the occult is centrestage. It becomes emblematic of the rupture of human anxiety, the unknown, mystical, and the hidden antagonists to the human; the protagonist is somewhere else, the human is consumed by its affect. Horror uniquely inverts an hierarchical, tilted anthropocentric continuum.

A global rising of artistic conduits are urging a stance of symbiosis and deep listening to environmental and hence societal issues, particularly with Lawrence English's sound work, Kirsten Delholm and Hotel Pro Forma's environmental opera *NeoArctic*, or Vytautas Michelkevicius's curatorial Inter-PAGAN Network in Lithuania. All based in cities, they travel into the field to hear it. They are artists attuned to nonverbal languages and are eco-occult translators that channel communication theories from the ruptures of an Earthly ecology *somewhere else*. With them, we can encounter the emergent skins and veils of surfaces which follow or indicate change within the World: specifically when driven from protagonist voices that are other than (and indifferent to) the human. Conduits which simultaneously (contradictorily) activate the lull of escapism and mobilise *ruptures* create moments of lies that shake us.

The rupture of the Yukon River becomes emblematic of the anthropocene crisis; humanity's entwined reliance sees a withdrawal of ice as a signifier of threat from 'somewhere else' which can in turn be

The performance of place brings forth and breaks veils of occultisms (the hidden, spatio-temporal traces, or folds of atmospheres) to render increasingly visible and vocal an Earth that is somewhere else

interpreted as engagements with skewed environmental or societal constructs that are systematic of ontological forces we embody. As the body breathes fogs, it becomes fogs: our systematic inheritance is like breathing. Such a rupture of ice then dunks us below the river and we are suspended in muffled water trying to become fluent amidst a new fog of blooming algae and limited bubbles of coherence. We need conduits for fluency in eco-occult ruptures to adapt to an ongoing performance of place. These moments also exist in spatial justice as a *rupture in the continuum*⁶.

Spatial Justice is mirrored in an Ice Bridge

Ruptures of spatial justice⁷ may be interpreted as temporary emergent realities between and from folding depths of conflicting, desiring, moving bodies that reorient the landscape. Think of an analogy of air, temperature, and water within an ice bridge as negotiating, expanding, conflicting, moving, and responsive bodies that change a surface, passage, or ontology. In reorienting landscapes or constructed Earthen surfaces, frozen rivers may not come to mind – rather war, immigration, or territorial conflict. However, in this instance, the plethora of micro and macro effects upon the subarctic are symptomatic of climate change and shifting ground from industry and the anthropocene, becoming apparent or seen only via the *performance of place* and its accelerating, louder language of eco-occultisms. It can be compared to reorienting a *World*.

Dawson, a river city with a thick blue vein of open water between two banks of shelf ice, has reflected unique divisions (geographical) and inclusions (societal) within the town⁸. The river conjures the metaphorical imagery of a physical and philosophical rupture, the attempts of human hierarchical dominance failed, the attempts of making kin with a rope and a tree did not. As Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in elders have warned and continued to do so in 2018, hard times are coming and they are here⁹. The horror of anthropocentric dominance is currently mid-rupture. Hierarchies are slacking as we rupture the patriarchy. Open networks of the ecological, environmental, feminist, non-binary, minority, non-human, are in front. Change resides here, in symptomatic cracks of a comprehensive symbiotic icebridge in rupture.

Should we then recognise an ice bridge surface as impactful on an urban city elsewhere? As a global *Worlding* harbours open networks reducing a city's isolation, critical reflections from remote locations turn a single city into one stop on Harry Beck's London Tube Map. The phenomena of eco-occultisms (a visible sign of Thacker's *Earth*) press through veils of human perception and are slowly co-Worlding station to station. This interconnectivity is a surface that when seen in varied cities is different due to tensions, context, class, policy, or governance which form the visible shadows of ruptures. Apparitions of the eco-occult are thinly veiled between perception, tension, and evocation; heard loudest via conduits in the field (remote or urban) shaping the emergent reciprocity needed between 'city' and Earth.

6 Andreas Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, *Spatial Justice* (2015).

7 Ibid.

8 Geographical: division between Dawson, West Dawson, and Moosehide (Indigenous residential area). Societal Inclusion: In the current Dawson City application to UNESCO (between partnering bodies including First Nations) for a heritage listing, placer mining is positioned within the habitat as an historic cultural activity and value. Additionally, the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in first nation community and locals of Dawson are generally collaborative, integrated and the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in are self governing, they are revered by other neighbouring Indigenous groups [as stated by Art Napoleon, Cree Tribe (British Columbia), Myth and Medium Conference, Dawson City, Yukon Territory, February 2018].

9 Elders and Land Users round table, Myth and Medium Conference, Dawson City, Yukon Territory, February 2018.





Under the fucking skin

A whore and her hotel room door

Victoria Brooks

Isserley, the heroine of Michel Faber's Under the Skin tells a truly intimate story of her body: inter-species flesh, blood, cumbersome breasts, inconvenient sexual drives, stray hairs, skin, disappointment, vulnerability and humour. She tells a story of her sometimes terrifying and perfunctory capture of men, while revealing the failure of her skin to cover the truth of her body. This is an achievement that accounts of sexuality and of the city rarely manage. The figure of the 'whore', 'the mistress', the sexually 'promiscuous' woman is often painted as a cold, non-maternal, sexually free and capable woman, who is adept at containing her 'affects', otherwise known as her emotions and vulnerabilities, under her skin, thereby presenting an easily consumable and pristinely fuckable surface. The city is a space that could easily be thought of as her 'playground', especially hotels, where their commercial, cold and solid surface are built to conceal the painful and joyous nature of her fucking. Urban hotels are one part of the 'tiles of the visible', which are complicit in the production of the surface effect of sexuality, and the painful rationalisation of fucking, yet simultaneously embodying a mine of historical fucking artefacts in the form of women's experiences. This piece tells a free-flowing story of one self-confessed whore and mistress, her encounter with hotels, and her failure in two respects: to contain her body beneath her skin, and at complicity with the city's deception.

When the hotel room door slides shut, it makes this slick sucking noise (*or is it some breathy human whisper of some concept or other? Probably used as part of its construction – perhaps a lubricant*). The door slips snugly into its glove-like frame. The room is perfectly plush in (admittedly very tasteful) carpets of immanence, yet almost paradoxically, it is also full of the smells of fucking and treasured bodily intimacy. Upon the door closing, the room is steeped in the loudest silence. It's one absolute fucker of an abyss of silence too – like the silence that follows turning off the bath tap, but much heavier, like the sound after a pig is slaughtered. The silence is so loud that she cannot even hear his footsteps making their way down the deep red carpeted corridor. She can hear his breath though, as it leaves her body – making its transition from animal to human – it slows, from the rhythm of licking, nuzzling, warm squeezing, playful animal sounds, into a much faster, shallower inhalation and exhaling that will keep pace with the humans that will be on the train he catches, carrying away his (now disguised) fur-covered form. The moment the hotel room door slides shut, she feels this heavy slicing pain in the upper-left side of her chest. It cuts across her soul so badly,¹ that it makes her toes curl, and she rubs the spot with her right hand, as she curls into the foetal position in the bed clothes.

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¹ The soul is where skins of all kinds fold together (animal, human, inhuman, substance), meaning a cut to the soul is not a mere perception, nor romantic 'abstraction', but material, bodily and physical. See Deleuze, G (2001) trans. Patton, P, *Difference and Repetition* (London, Continuum) p95 and De Miranda, L (2013) *Is a New Life Possible: Deleuze and the Lines*, *Deleuze Studies*, 7:1, 106-152, p2.

She clings to them, like she would cling to him. She brings them to her face, so she can breathe those fading fibres of him.

Her eyes moisten. It's not a slow cry, but one of those that turns her body into a piece of contorting wire wool. Metallic, sore, twisting into her veins she feels the hotel room door shut throughout her body. The contrast is too much for her to bear; from being as light as air, inhuman, happy, to being this metal-laced ugly human being again. Her limbs ache suddenly from being made to sleep on this bed made for humans, her eyes ache as they ooze these big ridiculous tears, only an animal could cry. She makes this noise like the animal she is – it is a cry, a screech, as the wire takes hold, tearing all the fur from her skin. In five minutes, the cleaning lady will knock on the door to eradicate all their traces and restore the surface of the room. In 10 minutes, she will be in the shower, to restore *her* surface. In 20 minutes, she will have to check-out, alone. In an hour, she will be at her office, looking depressingly human. In two hours, she will be eating lunch, talking to other human beings. He will be back there, not thinking of what happens on *her* side of that hotel room door, when it shuts.

She realised with horror that it was the door that made her grow the skin of a whore. It had crept up on her slowly. That door's aperture was of the most unfaithful kind. While it had opened earlier with such promise, showing her this little place where she could be an animal, at home for a little while in the arms of the creature she loved, it was really waiting to close again. She wondered if he and the door were in it together – a malevolent plan, indeed. Such a plan would keep her in her place, she thought, it all makes sense. It would ensure that she would feel at ease enough to remove her skin for him – one of these rooms even had a kitchen, she remembered. The closing of the door though, forces the return of her skin. That was why she had this metallic feeling! It was her skin growing back.² It was her mistress-uniform colonising her dermis, giving her a recognisable human identity, a concept to walk as, making everyone comfortable, apart from her.³ She was sure that so long as he knew this happened, it made it easier to put her through the pain, because he thought, like humans, that the skin was an armour too.

She thought about it some more. There was still some time before she had to check-out. There was this other room they were in, she remembered. Incidentally, this was a night preceding the most painful animal-human conversions ever. Before he arrived, she had shaved her legs, but very badly, meaning not only was some tell-tale animal fur present, but worse – her animal blood was flowing across this smooth human surface and spilling onto the bed clothes while they were fucking. How absurd she must have looked! An animal pretending to be a whore. Did he know his mistress was not a mistress at all, but actually a creature? If he didn't know (and she suspected he did – it was what made her fall in love with him) the blood gave it away.⁴ So too would the smell of her slippery pussy – there was no disguising that. Also badly shaved. The bestial juice of her slit was saturating not only her thighs, his cock and the bed sheets, but the air itself. It would be no surprise if it coated the

2 See throughout Faber, M (2014) *Under the Skin* (Edinburgh, Canongate Books) the consistent and painful references to Isserley's struggle with her severely altered form. Her body has been operated upon drastically from being a sophisticated and furry pig-like animal (or what she refers to as human) to being an odd-looking human (or what she refers to as 'vodself' or animal) with perfect but uncomfortable prosthetic breasts. In this form, she suffers intense pain as a cost to appearing human. She must appear as such to fulfil her task on planet earth. Her true form often betrays her through the sprouting of fur in inconvenient places, her animal eyes and her strange appearance.

3 In Deleuze, G and Guattari, F (2011) trans. Burchell, G and Tomlinson, H, *What is Philosophy?* (London, Verso) p. 69, the authors folded concept and thinker together, meaning we can see the problematic dimension of concepts – they can seem abstract, playful and mouldable, yet heavy with the authority of the philosophers that crafted them. They are insidious, finding their way into the body and even into matter, helping to sustain the primacy and illusion of surface.

4 Amlis Vess, who is the object of Isserley's affections from her home planet is disturbed by Isserley's human form, yet also clearly in love with her. They sit together in Isserley's car, watching the snow fall for the first time, through the window. Despite her 'monstrous' appearance, he is drawn to her strange beauty.

very door conspiring against her while they fucked. No human pussy would ache and drip like that. Likewise, no whore could know the intricate folds of his cock like her. Those folds she had mapped with her tongue – the only reliable way. His body she mapped with her nose, as only animals do. The only time she used her eyes, was to drink – his sperm, his gaze, his sweat and the long contours of his body. She used her hands only to hear his pulse.⁵ Also covered in fur he was – she knew his skin had to grow back too, when he left. Was it as painful for him, as it was for her? Imagine if those people on the train saw – imagine if he accidentally left his skin behind! How funny that would be, she laughed to herself. Her pussy was good at mapping, too. The slippery inhuman strands, sometimes like mucus, some alien-like liquid it was, that she deposited as a way of knowing (not in the human, sense you must understand, but a surreal a-conceptual animal kind of ‘knowing’).

The surface of that room showed nothing of ups and downs. It presented perfectly as serene, unrelenting, stable and hard – not ever joyous, not ever laughing, nor shaky, jealous, hurt, nor struggling with its animality

This worked especially well when he licked her. This tongue of his was stunningly animal too of course, but designed also to give the impression of humanity. To speak complicated words. These words were about animals, in a language that seemed unfamiliar, though spoken with what was unmistakably his voice. Her pussy knew the difference and just played and danced provocatively with these concepts he tickled her with. Sometimes she balanced them on her clitoris, seducing them, so they might topple. They hardly ever did though, even when he penetrated her at last. Yes, they were crushed a while, between their bodies, but the problem was, they ended up inside her – stuck they were, immovable. Outside of her body though, on this human door-like surface, they lubricated the perfumed ply-wood, ready for the door to shut again. Making it ‘easier’, faster, more efficient, more pristine, more recognisably a human skin.

No, he could not be complicit. She loves him, it’s impossible, she decided. Perhaps he accidentally put those lubricating concepts on the hinges of the door. Maybe he intended them to be worlds, instead. Microcosms for her to find and watch, like snow-globes of homely scenes, or his sperm landing inside her womb, lazing on one of the cushions there, or sea creatures in an aquarium, floating among freshly made spaghetti, or a soup of beans in a transparent consommé.⁶ Perhaps they were not supposed to lubricate the door, but were secret gifts, which is why he wanted her to spread her juices – he just could not say. That tongue was too used to speaking about what humans called concepts – how silly! OK, so if concepts are so sophisticated, then she wanted to ask him (in his human form) what the concept was for the closing of the hotel room door. What was the concept for her pussy. What was the concept for her unconditional, uncompromising, unflinching desire. What was the concept for how it felt to have him inside her. What is the fucking concept? What is the concept for fucking? Fucking what is the fucking fucking concept? Maybe the real answer could be seen through the transparent surface of the snowglobes. He knows what’s in there, he feels what’s in there. That human skin is so badly designed, so ill-fitting, she saw through the surface immediately. Even the hotel room door is only made of some vulnerable kind of wood.⁷

⁵ To subvert the surface, an experiment (or to ‘sing with your sinuses, see with your skin’) akin to an animal use of senses is needed, see Deleuze, G (1997) trans. Smith, D and Greco, *Essays Critical and Clinical* (Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press) p. 167.

⁶ Each snowglobe is a bubble emanating from the soul folding into pleats of matter – an impossible world lifting its skirt and showing a flirtatious glimpse of its alternate reality, or otherwise, possibility. See Lypka, C and Sigler, D, *Sense and Impossibility: Deleuze’s The Fold and the Baroque Jane Austen*, rhizomes emerging studies in cultural knowledge, at <https://doi.org/10.20415/rhiz/033.e03>, accessed on 1 March 2018.

⁷ See Deleuze, G and Guattari, F (1988) *A Thousand Plateaus*, as cited by Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, A (2014) *Critical*

It was strange though how these surfaces had upon them no dust. There was no mould, no trace of skins before hers, no marks out of place, no droplets of condensation — just pure invulnerable stability. It was like the human skin, like the whore, like the mistress, like the human — it showed no imperfections. The surface of that room showed nothing of ups and downs. It presented perfectly as serene, unrelenting, stable and hard — not ever joyous, not ever laughing, nor shaky, jealous, hurt, nor struggling with its animality.

She heard the knock at the door. It was the cleaning lady and she shouted to her to come back in 10 minutes — she heard her footsteps, but why not his? She sat up in this increasingly human bed and heard the air screeching as the smell of them together was already rushing out of any tiny crack it could find — a sure sign that she must begin the process of gathering what she could of the snow-globes on the hotel room door. After she had left this room and once she was home, she would curl up with them in her animal bed. Sometimes she would use them to soak up fluids leaking from her body. Some of them though, she found difficult to look at — they were either too bright or too dark; these ones, she smashed upon the floor in pain, or in anger — only for them to reconstitute.



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LIKE EMBRYONIC TISSUE



Taking rubbings

An exploration of surface texture at The Southbank Festival Wing, London 2013-2018

B.A. Zanditon

Introduction and objectives

As an artist, my interest is in site, surface and memory trace. I recently discovered 'surface' as an area of academic discourse. This came as both a revelation and a relief – I've spent the past five years obsessing over an area of the Southbank known as the Festival Wing comprising the Queen Elizabeth Hall and Purcell Room (QEH), a structure containing two concert halls and a large foyer, and the Hayward Gallery (HG). I had long wanted to take rubbings there and, in September/October 2015, spent two weeks, after the site had closed for refurbishment, making rubbings and latex casts to catalogue both interior and exterior surfaces. I joke that the rubbings are the nearest I can get to becoming one with the buildings: enmeshing myself into their textures.

In the 1960s, the London County Council's architects (LCC – the municipal authority for London) were responsible for making a site with cultural buildings to sit between the Royal Festival Hall and Waterloo Bridge. Festival Wing finished the redevelopment of the land used for the Festival of Britain – the signal that we were embracing Modernism and turning toward the future.

I am struck by the thought that what was actually being created, particularly by the Hayward, was a fortress: a promise that the art within would be guarded and kept safe. The building is uncompromising: it juts out at odd angles. It hurts you to rub against it – whether you touch the fine or the coarse aggregate. When I press my flesh into its surface, I am temporarily marked. To make my rubbings, I placed paper to catch texture and pattern, the residual marks of making: the trace of formwork (<http://zanditon.com/southbank/e03-r2dscn3620e-2.jpg>). To me, these buildings were and are wonderful: Portland cement, aggregates (the proportion of flint in the coarse aggregate carefully monitored to be not greater than one third of the whole by weight¹) dug up from British earth, mixed with water and pressed into a framework of carefully selected soft wood, the texture of stone mingling with its grain: read this, the surface shouts, though not everyone can hear it. On my last day at the site, a young man stopped to watch. "I never noticed the texture before," he said, "was it deliberate?"

I have always liked concrete. Until I began making rubbings at the Southbank, I did not know anything about how concrete buildings are made. I could see the traces: a grain of wood, or the creamy smoothness of a polished surface, I was aware of round marks – sometimes filled flush and sometimes left indented on a building's face – but I knew nothing about formwork or shuttering,

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¹ London Metropolitan Archives, City of London GLC/AR/PL/21 from Greater London Council collection, p 1/2/25. The full title of the document is, 'Descriptions of Workmanship and Materials, and Notes on Method of Measurement.' Appendix B. March 1962. This was issued for The Royal Festival Hall but other documents issued at the same time make clear that these specifications would have held across both this site and the site of the AG (art gallery) and CH (concert hall).

bolts or rebar (<http://zanditon.com/southbank/r4.htm>). Before, I was intrigued by the mystery of surface texture; my new knowledge still cannot 'explain' the deep pleasure I get from seeing how buildings feel. It is not just that with in situ concrete the surface and structure are indelibly linked but that there is a visceral pleasure in the solidity of concrete that is different from the slick visual enjoyment one might get from a surface of reflective glass and steel.

Background research

In my efforts to 'understand the site', I wanted to see plans of the buildings and eventually found my way to the London Metropolitan Archive (March and September 2015) where I found the original tender documents issued by the LCC Architects' Department: documentation regarding the development of the pyramid lights, the original contract with the builder, Higgs & Hill and the Ove Arup site drawings². The tender documents provided meticulous instruction on exactly how the concrete was to be made, where the materials were to come from, how testing would be carried out and how repairs should be made to unsound concrete. Being neither architect nor engineer, I was fascinated – it was a new world. It was a bit like looking at an x-ray of a body – not quite sure what you are looking at but thrilling to see beneath the skin. Looking for images of the site, after it was finished and before any changes were made, I visited the BFI Mediatheque to view old footage of the area. I looked at old issues of *Concrete Quarterly* and found original site photographs on the RIBA website, but none of this revealed the soul of the buildings to me.³

Methodology

The impetus to approach the Southbank came in the Spring of 2013 when the latest redevelopment plan for the Festival Wing was published and included removing some features (balustrades where a new staircase would bring people up from ground to terrace level) and covering over others (a glass box over the space between the two buildings would alter patterns of weathering). I approached a contact explaining that I wanted to do a project cataloguing some of the surfaces – preserving the history and memory of those that would be removed and those that would be enclosed. I was put in touch with the then head of estates who shared my enthusiasm for concrete and agreed to give me permission to make work.

During 2013–15, I spent time walking around the site, taking pictures, doing tentative mapping, trying to get the *feel* of it (<http://zanditon.com/southbank/perimeter.htm>). I felt I needed to 'get' it to know how to proceed but it's lack of regularity and visual clarity perplexed me (<http://zanditon.com/southbank/projections.htm>). I considered various approaches, for example, taking the conceptual route: rubbings at shoulder height at x intervals around the perimeter. But there were no places where you could do a complete walk around the exterior of the building itself at the same level. And it was too random. I realised that what I wanted to capture was a range of materials and textures and, in particular, anything that might change materially with the revamp. I had agreed I and my assistants (Dan Dowling and Simon Wallace assisted me at various times) would work at body height and not require special equipment. In August 2014, Dan and I spent a day on site looking at surfaces (did I want to catalogue spalled concrete? old, now blocked, drains?) and trying out a range of papers and rubbing

² London Metropolitan Archives, City of London LCC/CL/GP/02/134 from the London County Council Collection. Un-numbered pages including a letter from Gabriel White of the Arts Council to the London County Council dated 4.8.60 raising the possibility of providing the AG with natural light and two reports from the LCC, South Bank Development Scheme – Exhibition Gallery, General Purposes (Special Development and Arts Sub Committee), Report (9 Nov 1961) by the Architect, and Report (12-7-62) by the Architect addressing the development of pyramid lighting by Holophane Ltd. LCC/AR/CON/02/9024 shows the Higgs & Hill contract for the AG (Arts Gallery) and CH (Concert Hall). GLC/AR/PL/21/130 shows LCC architectural drawings. GLC/AR/PL/21/123 GL shows Ove Arup plans.

³ See <https://www.concretecentre.com/Publications-Software/Archive.aspx> and <https://www.architecture.com/image-library/ribapix.html?keywords=south%20bank%20centre>

materials (<http://zanditon.com/southbank/dscn0949.jpg>). We found that the efficacy of the materials depended very much on the underlying surface texture. We also discovered how idiosyncratic rubbing styles are: Dan, a tall young man, pressed down hard to make strong dark marks. I, 70, and with an old rotor cuff injury, developed a light, even pressured stroke that would let the underlying texture emerge and keep the mark of my hand to a minimum.

I wanted to make latex casts as an alternative way to explore surface. I had experimented in my studio, making small casts of breeze blocks (<http://zanditon.com/southbank/latex.htm>) and printing from them. I realised, when I made the first print, that what I was exposing was the surface's negative space. Dan and I made some successful casts that I could print from (<http://zanditon.com/southbank/negspace.htm>) and I played with making a cast from a cast to show iterations of negative and positive space (<http://zanditon.com/southbank/pos+negspace.htm>) but in the long term the casts were not successful. I subsequently saw the work of Jorge Otero-Pailos, large-scale latex casts of Westminster Hall, and realised the insufficiency of the scale of my ambition (<https://www.artangel.org.uk/project/the-ethics-of-dust/>).

I joke that the rubbings are the nearest I can get to becoming one with the buildings: enmeshing myself into their textures

Implementation

Because of opposition to the original Festival Wing plan, the start date for renovations was delayed. The head of estates had left and I was put in touch with Clare Wood, the Southbank archivist, who was supportive of my ideas. In the autumn of 2015, after the site had closed to the public, I spent two weeks making work. I had good access to the site including the QEH plant room which was going to be stripped out (<http://zanditon.com/southbank/r49.htm>). Because the plans had changed, there were fewer surfaces that would be materially altered. The HG upper gallery floor was one of these; it has been refurbished. This shows the original concrete floor with metal stud (<http://zanditon.com/southbank/r9.htm>).

The rubbings were made on cartridge paper, canvas and Tyvek using graphite sticks, brass rubbing sticks, and crayon. Each rubbing was documented with a unique document identification number, the date, and a brief description. I took a photograph of the site of the rubbing and recorded the compass point I was facing, and longitude and latitude. I recorded the size and type of materials used. Subsequently we took photographs/scans of all the rubbings and included this documentation in a master catalogue. Although I made every attempt to document my work with meticulous care, I did end up with one or two undocumented rubbings and some missing data.

I made a tabulation to analyse the types of surfaces I'd made rubbings of and from which part of the site (<http://zanditon.com/southbank/table/rubbings.htm>). I realised I did not have an accurate memory of what I had done and, though I had wanted, at the outset, to make a comprehensive set of rubbings – a sort of dictionary of place, that is not what happened. My project was solipsistic providing an emotional map of my feelings of longing for place. I wanted to capture what I saw, to hold onto it, not just on paper, but to make it a part of me. I am uncertain how to convey this longing for (union with) place: English has no word for it but Google offers me the Welsh *hiraeth* and the Portuguese *saudade*.

Conclusion

I have been trying to remember where I saw a reference to the formwork being made from Douglas

fir. In The National Trust Souvenir Guide, *Brutal Utopias*, published in 2015 to coincide with their *Brutalist Utopias* project that included the Southbank Centre, there is only a reference to 'sawn board finish' (p. 11). But here, *The art of concrete Building the South Bank Arts Centre*, on page 26, is a reference to rip-sawn Baltic pine and another to Douglas fir. It is mentioned again on page 28.⁴ This document brought the making of the building to life for me. Part of a project done at the University of Westminster *Constructing Post-War Britain: Building Workers' Stories, 1950-1970*, is a series of interviews with men from Higgs & Hill who made the Festival Wing. They turned 'Descriptions of Workmanship and Materials and Notes on Method of Measurement' and two dimensional architectural drawings into construction drawings for formwork that was then built out of soft wood or ply and into which concrete was poured. When the formwork was removed, its mark remained.

My rubbings document my experience of site. This photograph sums up the project for me (<http://zanditon.com/southbank/calendarcover.htm>). It's a small teak access door, near the red stairs, at terrace level. I've placed my rubbing of the door over the wood. The rubbing both conceals the original wood surface and reveals details of the grain that are otherwise not visible to the eye. It brings together the hands of the workmen who made this door 50 years ago with mine. It is as close to the heart of this place as I can get.

Since 2015, I've been experimenting with ways to work with the material I gathered. Interest in Brutalism has been increasing and it seems easier to find information now than it was even a few years ago. The Southbank Centre has been developing their archive and is beginning to make it accessible to the public. Clare Wood, the Southbank archivist, was my primary contact and enabler from 2015 onward and I am grateful to her and others at the Centre who gave me access to the site.

⁴ <https://www.westminster.ac.uk/probe/projects/constructing-post-war-britain/the-south-bank>

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Io Squaderno 48
Surfaces & Materials

edited by // Andreas Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos & Andrea Mubi Brighenti

Guest Artist // picpoet

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Art performing places

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