

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 Solnhofen, 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

Jan Hogan is a PhD in Visual Arts with a specialist interest in place-based human/nonhuman entanglements and creative processes. Jan is an artist and academic currently coordinating the Drawing and Printmaking studios, School of Creative Arts, University of Tasmania

Jan.Hogan@utas.edu.au

drawing, allowing for multiple editions. Here we have a specific limestone, mined in Solihofen, 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)

References

- Antreasian, Garo, Z. and Adams, Clinton, 1969, *The Tamarind Book of Lithography: Art & Techniques*. New York: Harry N. Abrams.
- Barad, Karen, 2012, On Touching - The Inhuman That Therefore I Am. *d i f f e r e n c e s: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*. Volume 23, Number 3, Brown University.
- Barad, Karen, 2010, Quantum Entanglements and Hauntological Relations of Inheritance: Dis/continuities, SpaceTime Enfoldings, and Justice-to-Come. *Derrida Today* 3.2, 240-268, Edinburgh University Press.
- Bennett, Jane, 2010, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press
- Casey, Edward, 1993, *Getting Back into Place*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Minneapolis
- De Landa, Manuel 2011, *A Thousand Years Of Nonlinear History*. New York: Zone Books.
- Gammage, Bill, 2011, *The Biggest Estate on Earth*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin.
- Moslund, Sten Pultz, 2015, *Literature's Sensuous Geographies*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.