Visualising surfaces, surfacing vision: Introduction

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Abstract

In this Introduction to a special section on Visualising Surfaces, Surfacing Vision, we argue that to conceive vision in the contemporary world it is necessary to examine its embedding within, expression via and organisation on the surface. First, we review recent social and cultural theories to demonstrate how and why an attention to surfaces is salient today. Second, we consider how vision may be understood in terms of surfaces, discussing the emergence of the term 'surface', and its transhistorical relationship with vision. Third, we introduce the contributions to the special section, which cover written articles and artworks. We make connections between them, including their exploration of reflexivity and recursion, observation, objectivity and agency, ontology and epistemology, relationality, process, and two- and three-dimensionality. Fourth, we consider some implications of an understanding of visualising surfaces/surfacing vision.

In 1988 Donna Haraway critiqued the elision between vision and objectivity in the God's eye trick; the view from nowhere that is able to see everywhere and anywhere. In a now infamous formulation, she insisted instead on 'the embodied nature of all vision and so reclaim[ed] the sensory system that has been used to signify a leap out of the marked body and into a conquering gaze from nowhere' (1988: 581). Put simply, she argued, feminist objectivity means '*situated knowledges*' where vision is located in specific bodies, technologies and contexts (1988: 581). Haraway's argument can be understood as part of social and cultural theory's wider interest in vision and visual representation in the 1980s and 1990s (see e.g. Brennan and Jay 1996, Jenks 1995, Mirzoeff 1998), an important aspect of which is that vision

is not neutral but is historically and culturally specific; it is constituted and located through its relations with bodies and technologies (see e.g. Crary 1990, Beer 1996).

A decade earlier, Hannah Arendt's interrogation of 'the old metaphysical dichotomy of (true) Being and (mere) Appearance' and 'the old prejudice of 'Being's supremacy over appearance' posited (after Adolf Portmann) 'the value of the surface' (1978: 27). This special section both draws on and pushes Haraway's argument, paying particular attention to the relationships between vision's complex sensorium and 'the value of the surface'. The critical and creative contributions to this special section indicate that – in different ways and with different foci – to understand vision in the contemporary world it is necessary to examine its embedding within, expression via and organisation on the surface. What we are suggesting is a review of surfaces and a concomitant re-evaluation of vision to understand it in terms of a surface.

An attention to the relationship between vision and surface can be identified in social and cultural theory's visual turn. Jonathan Crary, for example, argues:

> what determines vision at any given historical moment is not some deep structure, economic base, or world view, but rather the functioning of a collective assemblage of disparate parts on a single social surface. It may even be necessary to consider the observer as a distribution of events located in many different places (Crary 1990: 6).

If vision is composite, that is in Crary's view, if it works 'as a 'collective assemblage of disparate parts', vision's corresponding focal point is coolly flattened into 'a single social surface'. Thus, one of our aims is to pay specific attention to this plane; another is to consider the political significance of surfaces.

This Introduction's title 'Visualising surfaces, surfacing vision' has a twofold meaning. It refers both to how surfaces become a means by which particular ideas, relations, aspirations may be visualised and materialised, and to how surfaces may themselves

visualise, that is be a spatio-temporal site through which relations and materialities become visible, or not. One of these processes may be apparent in any example or case, or they may both be evident. Surfacing vision refers to how vision becomes located within or on a particular kind of surface – that is, how vision is relocated from the view from above to a plane, or surface. Such a focus requires an examination of, as well as a questioning of, a straightforward hierarchical binary opposition between surface and vision. What are the implications of positing a 'single' surface for understanding vision? To what extent is a surface mapped, engaged, interacted with, made visible? Does a surface 'belong' to any particular entities, human or non-human? How is vision (part of or constitutive of) an assembled surface? We approach these questions through academic papers and art works, seeing language alone as incapable of articulating their complexity and drawing attention to the multiple practices through which they are being addressed. Reading the articles alongside the artworks makes connections between seemingly exceptional and quotidian encounters. Yet there are similar questions at stake: for instance, how does vision work to materialise or obscure particular material entities, and what kinds of sensory, embodied and political experiences are created through encounters with the surface? In sum, we suggest that vision is productive of and produced via surfaces. Vision is located 'on' or 'in' surfaces. At the same time, vision draws attention to surfaces in ways which ultimately complicate Crary's concept of a 'single social surface'. 'The surface' is thus potentially manifold and politically contingent.

As well as discussing the various contributions to the special section, this Introduction sets out what 'a surfacing of vision' refers to, what it might involve, and what some of its implications are. First, we discuss how and why an attention to surfaces is salient today, drawing together recent social and cultural theories where surfaces are both explicitly and implicitly addressed. We emphasise especially the processual and transformational quality of surfaces and hence we highlight how a focus on surfaces is at the same time a focus on (its) surfac*ing*. Second, we consider how vision may be understood in terms of surfaces, discussing the emergence of the term 'surface', and its transhistorical relationship with vision. At this point, third, we

introduce the contributions to the special section, discussing how they address the question of visualising surfaces and surfacing vision. We make connections between them, including their attention to reflexivity and recursion, observation, objectivity and agency, relationality, and a re-working of the relationship between two- and three-dimensionality. And we also consider how they put forward distinct theoretical approaches and empirical foci to show the divergences between them; the special section does not propose a unified account of visualising surfaces and surfacing vision so much as reflect on the multiple ways in which these processes take place, and the different agencies and actors they involve. In the last section of the paper, we draw out what we see to be some of the implications of an attention to visualising surfaces/surfacing vision in relation to social and cultural theory more widely.

I. Reviewing surfaces

According to Christopher Kelen, 'seeing and (re)theorising surfaces between cultural entities (peoples, cultures, languages, and any of their characteristics) is increasingly *de rigeur* for cultural criticism. A variety of synonyms and metaphorical schemata are available for the purpose' (2007: 50). Lisa Adkins and Celia Lury (2009) designate a 'turn to the surface', which they explain in part as 'a need to redefine the relations between ontology and epistemology, and in particular a problematisation of surface-depth models that is articulated in historical understandings of representation in relation to, for example, hermeneutics, translation, concept formation, involvement of publics, and so on' (2009: 15). For Adkins and Lury, a redefinition of the relations between ontology and epistemology as part of a turn to the surface is necessary not only to correct a dualism within theory itself, but also to account for how the social is 'open, processual, non-linear and constantly on the move' (2009: 18). This understanding sees the social as in process or becoming. It is in this sense that our focus here is not only on surfaces but also on surfac*ing*; or, better, that surfaces are understood in terms of (a) surfacing.

The relationship between surfaces and surfacing, as well as a rationale for why these are appropriate methods through which to understand the social (for Adkins and

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Lury) and vision (for us), can be helpfully developed through recourse to Tim Ingold's work. Concentrating on the surface of the earth, Ingold explains the relationship between surfaces and surfacing as processual: 'the ground surface is not pre-existent, but undergoes '*continuous generation*' (2010: S125), and it is thus 'perceived *kinaesthetically*, in movement' (2010: S125). He also proposes that the surface of the earth is '*composite* […] matted from the interweaving of a miscellany of different materials, each with its own peculiar properties' (2010: S125), and as such, 'far from comprising a featureless and perfectly level plane, the ground appears *infinitely variegated*' (2010: S125). While the surface is a plane, it is also patterned, textured and knotty: a conception that suggests that relations of power exist and are co-ordinated (see also Coleman 2016). These characteristics of (a) surface lead Ingold to argue that a surface is 'its *surfacing*' (2010: S126). As kineasthetic, composite, infinitely variated and continually generated, a surface is always in the process of – and is constituted through this continual process – its surfacing: a surface *is* its becoming.

The publication of Joseph Amato, *Surfaces: A History* (2013), Giuliana Bruno, *Matters of Aesthetics, Materiality and Media* (2014), and Glenn Adamson and Victoria Kelly (eds) *Surface Tensions: Surface, Finish and the Meaning of Objects* (2013) alongside symposia such as our own *Theorising Surfaces* (2013) and Mike Anusas and Cristián Simonetti's panel *Surfaces: Contesting Boundaries Between Materials, Mind and Body* for the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (2013)[1] exemplify the scrutiny of surfaces' materiality in the second decade of the 2000s. Concentrating on surfaces of different scale and scope, including buildings, faces and plants, Amato's phenomenologically-inspired monograph foregrounds human perception's variability. Surfaces, for Amato,

> furnish our primary encounters with the outer and inner layers of things – their cover, epidermis, membrane, bark, rind, hide, and skin. They also present us with our first experiences of the primary disposition of objects, bodies, and life out there, beyond us. In other terms, humans, ourselves a

body of surfaces, meet and interact with a world dressed in surfaces (2013: xv).

Amato's human-centric conceptualisation of surfaces puts it in tension with other recent work. For example, the special issue of *Environment and Planning A*: 'What are surfaces?' provides key essays on the subject as the journal's guest editors Isla Forsyth, Hayden Lorimer, Peter Merriman and James Robinson answer their titular question by way of concepts of and case studies on the surfaces of earth, bodies and faces and commodities, technologies and materials (2013: 1013). This line of argument allows them to 'rethink surfaces as multiple, embodied, and practised material productions' (2013: 1015), corporeality refigured by 'Deleuzian, Foucauldian, and Leibnizian conceptualisations of interiors as pleats or enfoldings of an outside' (2013: 1016), and the ways in which '[a]n array of different technologies…have fundamentally altered the way we think about and understand the world' (2013: 1017).

In one way, Forsyth *et al*'s attention to the 'emergent field of critical, surficial thought' (2013: 1017) is analogous to our objectives in this special section. Here, surface refers to both tactile and tangible entities such as skin, screens, piecework quilts and the Earth, and to more abstract and ephemeral forms and processes embedded in temporality, spatiality and photology. As with vision, the surface is material and immaterial, actual and virtual. A focus on the surface therefore requires a consideration of the boundary making and unmaking between such states, and how they might interface and/or become through their relationality. We also want to note and frame what we see as an emerging field of thinking (about) surfaces. However, by interlacing critical essays *and* creative pieces, and by broadening the scope from geography to social and cultural theory more generally, we also have two further aims. One is to bring together some of the wide-ranging and interdisciplinary ways in which different surfaces are currently being theorized, performed and practiced. A second is to foreground a particular 'art of inquiry' in which 'the conduct of thought goes along with, and continually answers to, the flux and flows of the

materials with which we work. These materials think us, as we think through them' (Ingold, 2013: 6).

Branden Hookway develops an 'art of enquiry' by focusing on interfaces as a border between social phenomena. In his monograph *Interface* (2014) he makes distinctions – albeit uneasy ones – between interface, surface, edge and adjacency. 'As a boundary condition that comes into being through the active relation of two or more distinct entities or conditions', Hookway observes, 'the interface may be distinguished from the surface. The *sur-face*, as a facing above or upon (sur-) a given thing, refers first of all back to the thing it surfaces, rather than to a relation between two or more things. A surface exists primarily as an aspect of that which it surfaces' (2014: 13). In an endeavour to confound the enduring opposition between visible and impalpable structures and their referents, Hookway is interested in processes of relationality:

> An analysis beginning from the surface privileges the question of what a thing is or what its properties might be, while one beginning from the interface privileges the question of how a relation may come into being and how it may produce behaviours or actions. A surface presents form, while an interface performs a shaping. (2014: 14)

Whilst this special section is concerned with the means by which surfaces come into view, it further probes the binary between 'form' and 'performance' and unsettles the nexus 'upon, above and between'. Our understanding of surface moves between what Hookway defines as 'surface' and 'interface', in that we examine both what may be 'sur-faced' and the surface as a surfacing of relations and sensations. In 2008, Susanne Küchler noted that 'a new kind of surface ontology which replaces the opposition of inside and outside, invisible and visible, immaterial and material with a complementary relation that thrives on transformation rather than distinction' (116) has become particularly significant with the emergence of a 'technological materiality'. 'Wearable computing, and smart fabrics in more general terms', she advocates, distort 'the seams between mechanism and material' (2008: 101).

Küchler's positing of a new surface ontology is also proposed by other social and cultural theorists who analyse the functioning of social and cultural processes as networks, assemblages and planes of connections and linkages. For example, developing the significance of the concept of assemblage to actor-network-theory to explain his notion of 'working surfaces on the social' – and in ways that echo Crary – Tony Bennett (2007a, 2007b) suggests the social be approached as 'a single-levelled reality', where 'there are no hidden depths or structures to be fathomed' (2007a: 33). He goes on to argue that:

> This commitment to the analysis of natural/cultural/social/technical networks and assemblages of actants as consisting only of visible surfaces, a single-planed set of wholly observable events, actions and processes with no hidden, deep or invisible structures or levels, stands in contradistinction to the dualistic ontologies of the social that still characterise those versions of the cultural turn that have most influenced the development of cultural studies (2007b: 614).

The understandings of surfaces and surfacing that we introduce here vary in their foci and approach. While for Bennett, Adkins and Lury, and Küchler, surfaces enable a thinking through of the connections between what Bennett calls 'natural/cultural/social/technical networks and assemblages', for Ingold it is more phenomenological, whereby the point is not 'to be beguiled by an ontology that consigns the living world to the inertia of its objective representation' (2010: S137, N. 3) and epistemology is developed through the tactile relationship with the ground. In bringing these sometimes disparate approaches together, our intention is to draw attention to both the increasing interest in surfaces across different disciplinary perspectives and practices and how these may draw through and challenge certain historical conceptualisations of surfaces. It is also to highlight how, despite their distinctiveness from each other, certain common themes can be identified. These include a concern with process and movement, and a reformulation of ontology and epistemology, depth and the superficial, movement and change – and the relations or boundaries between them.

II. Surfaces and vision

But what are the implications of surface/surfacing for understanding vision? In scrutinizing the word 'surface' itself, a significant relationship with vision emerges. Derived from the fourteenth-century Middle French term defining the 'visible outside part of a body, outermost boundary of any material object'[2] the word 'surface' makes a striking appearance in the English vernacular in Thomas Bowes' 1594 published translation of Pierre de la Primaudaye's *L'Académie française The second part of the French academie Wherein, as it were by a naturall historie of the bodie and soule of man, the creation, matter, composition, forme, nature, profite and use of all the partes of the frame of man are handled, with the naturall causes of all affections, vertues and vices, and chiefly the nature, powers, workes and immortalitie of the soule*. In his epistle 'To the Christian Reader', Bowes writes that *'Seneca* the Philosopher reporteth…that the looking glasse was first invented to this end, that man might use it as a meane to know himself the better by (b1r)'. Bowes continues:

> In which respect this Booke may most fitly be resembled to a glasse, as that which affoordeth unto us both these uses in farre more excellent maner then can be performed by any looking glasse how rare and surpassing soever it be. For even the best of that kind doth represent unto our eyes only so much of the *surface* of our own bodies as is directly before it, but as for the hinder parts we take no view of them by a glasse, much lesse is it able to give us a sight of the internall members of our bodies, wherby we may attaine to any profitable knowledge of them. (b1r; our emphasis)

It would be foolish, of course, to suggest that surfaces were disregarded before 1594. The publication of the first English translation of Euclid's *The elements of geometrie of the most ancient philosopher* (Henry Billingsley 1570) complete with its three-dimensional fold-up diagrams showing geometric shapes, for instance, indicates that this was not the case.[3] However, Bowes' quotation is noteworthy for 'the ways in which the terms 'surface''' 'looking glasse' 'and "'bodies'' are brought into close proximity' (Oakley-Brown 2017). By contrast with the brass or dark glass of

earlier mirrors that produced murky reflections, in 1507 the Venetians discerned how to manufacture transparent glass. While '[i]t continues to be hotly debated whether glass is a liquid or a solid' (Garrison 2015: viii), glass-making was a process which Herbert Grabes called the 'technological marvel of the age' (Shuger 1999: 21).

For the French philosopher Georges Gusdorf, such mirrors 'gave rise to modern reflexive self-consciousness, which, in turn, led to the sudden proliferation of autobiographical genres' (cited in Shuger 1999: 21). By contrast, Deborah Shuger argues that the sixteenth-century clear-glass mirror does not record a specular moment of subjectivity (1999: 21). Unlike its everyday modern equivalent, the reflective surface of the sixteenth-century mirror was generally convex. With a bulging outer layer facilitating a greater field of vision, the material fabric of Bowes' 'looking glasse' encourages the viewer to look outward not inward, thus supporting Shuger's central thesis that 'early modern selfhood was not experienced reflexively but, as it were relationally' (Shuger 1999: 37); this mirror calls attention not so much to depth – 'the internall members of our bodies' – but to the relations that may be detected on and through its surface. Hence, 'the early modern mirror functions according to an ontology of similitude rather than identity/difference; it reflects those whom one will or can resemble' (Shuger 1999: 37) in an interpersonal and interactive process of reflection. In Bowes' case, the relations are white, Western, elite and patriarchal; his 'looking glasse' is a 'technological marvel' in favour of but not (yet) consolidating 'depth ontology' (Miller 2010: 16). In the twenty-first century, *The second part of the French academie's* efforts to bring the 'looking glasse' and 'bodies' into dialogue with selfhood and identity also helps to explain how materiality, technology, epistemology and ontology, as we discuss below, are bound up with the semiotics and sensations of surfaces: selfhood, subjectivity and identity become known and understood, and materiality comes to be shaped and made actual, through particular visual technologies.

Evidently informed by contemporary discourses, Bowes' Elizabethan episode and its primary concern for the early modern Christian-humanist condition might seem far removed from contemporary theory, culture and society. However, as Bruno Latour

(2010) has observed, 'we are actually closer to the sixteenth century than to the twentieth, precisely because the agreement that created the Bifurcation [between Nature and Science] in the first place now lies in ruin and has to be entirely recomposed' (2010: 480). Looking back, as Latour suggests, may help us to move forward. Or, put more topologically, '[t]hings that are seemingly distant [...] turn out to be far more promiscuous and can be shown to be in far closer proximity than one might initially imagine' (Michael and Rosengarten 2012: 104). Such topological thinking can therefore bring apparently disparate elements into correspondence, connections that bring into focus what might be termed an interface or a fold – *a surface* – rather than a linear trajectory from past to present to future. In a broadly Latourian sense, like their sixteenth-century pre-Cartesian counterparts, twenty-first century Western ontologies are 'caught up in the same story' (Latour 1993: 1) of considering the material means by which surfaces, vision, technologies and materiality are enmeshed. Taking inspiration from the 1594 appearance of the word 'surface' and its subjects as bound to the new technologies of book and glass production in sixteenth-century England, places emphasis on the relations between surfaces, materiality and (contemporaneous) technologies through which vision operates (differently).

III. Visualising surfaces, surfacing vision

If, then, a focus on the surface involves an understanding of a circuit of visual technologies and materiality, one question that is raised is whether or not it is possible, or desirable, for the human to be placed as the central orientation point from which to understand surfaces. In addition to – or indeed supplanting – Amato's exploration of how 'humans [...] meet and interact with a world dressed in surfaces', what the contributions included here demonstrate is the inextricable links between humans and technologies. It is not so much a case of humans moving out into a world that is somehow 'beyond' them, but, in Patricia Ticineto Clough's (2000) words, 'the body and the machine, the virtual and the real, and nature and technology are inextricably implicated, always already interlaced' (2000: 11).

Clough expands this configuration of nature and technology through the example of television, arguing that television does not serve as an 'extension of the human body, […] maintaining the intentional knowing subject at its centre and as its agency. Instead, television makes the subject only one element in a "network imagination" of teletechnology' (2000: 99, references omitted). Clough's argument is made via an appreciation of how television is an integral and ongoing aspect of contemporary network imaginations; television is thoroughly embedded in the flow of social life. Television invites that gaze. However, the television screen understood as a surface is a nuanced threshold for both folding in and excluding its audience in ways that chime with this special section's content.

Furthermore, while it may have intensified, the functioning of vision and observation in such a distributed and assembled manner has not emerged with the digital; for example, the mirror that Bowes discusses is agentic in its relationality with other aspects of a vision and observing assemblage. Modernity's 'immersion in the primacy of surface' (Cheng 2011: 10) is illustrated by Siegfried Kracauer's practical, empirical and theoretical essays produced in 1920's Weimar Germany. In 'The Mass Ornament' (1927/1995), Kracauer observes:

> The position that an epoch occupies in the historical process can be determined more strikingly from an analysis of its inconspicuous surface-level expressions than from that epoch's judgements about itself. Since these judgements are expressions of the tendencies of a particular era, they do not offer conclusive testimony about its overall constitution. The surface-level expressions, however, by virtue of their unconscious nature, provide unmediated access to the fundamental substance of the state of things (75).

While his overarching interests in 'marginal, quotidian phenomena' (Levin 1995: 15) and 'surface-level expressions' are outstanding, Kracauer's understanding of their 'unconscious nature' allowing 'access to the fundamental substance of the state of things' remains indebted to the hierarchical relationship between surface/depth; visibility/invisibility. More recently, and in opposition to 'ocularcentric paradigm[s]'

(Elsaesser and Hagener 2010: 109), late twentieth-century thinkers such as Laura Marks have examined the ways in which 'vision itself can be tactile' (Marks 2000: xi). Film theorist Vivianne Sobchack (1991, 2004) argues persuasively for an understanding of vision as multi-sensory, while others demonstrate how images are felt (as well as seen) and lived out sensorially and affectively (see for example, Coleman 2009, 2012 Oakley-Brown 2017). Bruno draws attention to the tactility of material surfaces onto which vision is projected, mediated, transmitted and transmutated (2014: 3), be that the surface of a building or the screen on which a film is projected and viewed. She argues that the screen is 'a plane that makes possible forms of connectivity, relatedness, and exchange. Such a surface, far from being superficial, is a sizable entity: it is a space of real dimension and deep transformation. Conceived as such a space of relations, the surface can contain even our most intimate projections' (2014: 8).

Produced in the wake of such optic and haptic theories, Meredith Jones' essay in this special section probes 'an underexamined tension between two- and three-dimensional embodiments. This tension lives, necessarily, between flat representations of bodies (images) and the shapes, sizes, and dimensions that those and all bodies have in their living forms, as and when they're being experienced within and having capacity through three-dimensions' (2017: XX). Jones' essay explores relations between bodies and surfaces through a focus on labiaplasty, the cosmetic surgery procedure that deals with the 'complex and fraught' history of the vulva (2017: XX). She understands the procedure in terms of the surface for the ways in which it moves between two and three dimensionality, complicating boundaries between inside and outside, body and media. Jones' argument is that contemporary media culture creates what she has termed in previous work 'media-bodies' (see e.g. 2008), where skin and screens, usually understood as distinct and incompatible surfaces, are increasingly merging. She argues that skin and screens can both show and communicate, hide and conceal, and that there is 'a theoretical and an everyday *movement towards each other, a coming together of*, skins and screens' (2017: XX).

Jones' wide-ranging discussion takes in recent representations of vulvas in popular culture (including of Kim Kardashian and understandings of censorship from film board members), how representations and understandings of the vulva have a racialised and racist history, and extracts from empirical research with women who undergo cosmetic surgery. Drawing on these examples, she argues that labiaplasty is 'intricately connected with a growing conflation of skin and screen, where the surface of the skin becomes more expressive and visual' (2017: XX); for example, bodies become increasingly part of a media(ted) gaze, and the gaze comes to (literally) shape bodies. As Marina, a participant in Jones' research about to undergo cosmetic surgery says, 'I wish we could just do Photoshop to me now' (2017: XX). Jones attends clearly to the gendered and raced politics of labiaplasty; but she also cautions against it becoming the subject of a moral panic, tied especially to any collapse of the surface into the superficial (read, feminine: shallow, silly, artificial, oppressed). Instead, in ways that resonate with our earlier discussion of the emergence of the mirror as a surface, she proposes labiaplasty and cosmetic surgery more widely as 'allow[ing] for potential new forms of subjectivity to emerge: subjectivities that offer alternatives to Cartesian depth/surface binaries and offer new ways of being' (2017: XX). Marina's comments, for example, can be seen as 'a wish to exist in two-*and* three-dimensions, to be able to operate on more than one plane' (2017: XX).

Figure 1: Sarah Casey, 'Dark Nets', 2015.

Moving between two- and three-dimensions is also key for Sarah Casey's artistic contribution to this special section (e.g. Figure 1). As part of her collaborative AHRC-funded project 'Dark Matters: Interrogating Thresholds of Imperceptibility', Casey's drawings are informed by 'theoretical cosmology, fine art and anthropology of science to explore the relationship between human knowledge and perception and the realm of the imperceptible' (Ellis and Casey n.d.).[4] In acts of drawing, as John Berger explains, '[a] line, an area of tone, is not really important because it records what you have seen, but because of what it will lead you on to see' (Berger in Grønstadt et al 2016: 9). Drawing is thus a particular 'gestural form of seeing' (Grønstadt et al 9): hand and vision work in tandem at the surface of inscription. Arguably an anthropographical exercise, that is a 'correspond[ence] with the world through drawing' (Ingold 2013: 129), Casey's work interrogates the representation of ontological limits and the thresholds between what is perceptible and imperceptible through exploring how drawing works on and with particular surfaces. Recalling 'Irigaray's analysis of the erasure of sexual difference as the founding gesture of

metaphysics in an undoing of photology that can be described as an engagement in the texture of light rather than in relation to light's value as either an ideal physical medium originating metaphorically or naturally from the sun' (Vasseleu 1998: 11), Casey's creative exploration of 'invisible dark matter' exploits photologic epistemologies alongside superficial effects: 'light itself appears layered, coated, and textured' (Bruno 2014: 74). In one piece, for example, (Figure 1), Casey drew the fine nylon mesh 'cages' used to house sandflies in biomedical research, as a means of exploring the sense of barriers and limits. Using dark blue ink on dense dark indigo paper, Casey expected a 'barely perceptible result' (Casey 2015). However, 'surprisingly, the blue ink emerges as a coppery reflection. […] the ink on indigo paper drawing is contingent upon lighting and the viewer's spatial relationship to the drawing in order to be seen' (Casey 2015). In Casey's work, as Day and Lury put it, 'relations of observation are constantly shifting, implying and sometimes precluding points of view, and shaping the contours of events by providing ever-changing conditions for visibility and invisibility across situations' (Day and Lury 2017: XX).

Of importance here then are the circuits or systems by which bodies, machines, vision, observation and reflexivity plug into or are in relations with each other. On this point, and of relevance to a focus on surfaces, is the argument made widely across different theoretical movements – including ANT (for example, Latour 1993), new materialisms (for example, Barad 2007), affect theory (for example, Clough with Halley 2007, Blackman and Venn 2010, Gregg and Seigworth 2010) – that a network or system is composed of many different types or kinds of entity, all of which may be agentic. Agency here is not the preserve of the human, but is distributed across different actors that may more usually be understood as active and inactive. It is necessary to examine both the actors themselves and the connections between them, reconfiguring hierarchies (between organic and technological, human and nonhuman for example) into what might be a single levelled and textured surface on which different entities are capable of acting. In terms of Crary's conceptualisation of vision, the 'single social surface' via which vision functions is an 'assemblage of

different parts'; both vision and that which observes is disparate and distributed – and may be composed of human and non-human elements.

Rather than perceiving vision as a God's eye trick, Day and Lury's essay draw on Flusser's (2014) philosophy of photography to propose an understanding of vision as always-already within the situation that is imaged; that is, the observer – which might be the photographed, the photographer, the viewer or the observational tool – is not outside the photograph but inside the situation of photography. As such, and in ways that make connections with Haraway's and Crary's arguments noted above, observation is immanent to the situation rather than transcendent of it, and vision may move and be positioned differently, constituting different visions as it is located differently. In Day and Lury's contribution, vision and surfaces are thought together as a means of understanding things that disappear from view in a context where composite images from satellite data 'might lead us to imagine that contemporary visualisation has no limits' (Day and Lury 2017: XX).

It is to understand this potential moving and changing quality of vision that Day and Lury concentrate on the surface. The cases of disappearance they examine are those of Malaysia Airlines Flight 370, which disappeared over the South China Sea on 8th March 2014 prompting international search efforts and struggles over what satellite images different countries were willing to share with each other, and the 276 girls who went missing after their abduction from Chibok, Nigeria by Boko Haram. Through these two distinctive examples, Day and Lury ask how planes and (specific kinds of) people can disappear from 'today's apparently boundless surface of visualisation' (2017: XX), drawing attention to how this surface is not as smooth or all-encompassing as it might appear. Instead, they focus on recursion and rendition as two particularly significant functions of contemporary surfaces of visualisation, which demonstrate how 'the grounds of observation may only retrospectively be established, and even then only temporarily' (2017: XX), and how 'relations of observation are both formal and constitutive of events' (2017: XX).

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Figures 2 and 3: Karen Shepherdson, Band Apart, 2012.

Day and Lury's interests in visibility and invisibility chime with Karen Shepherdson's practice-based research which is underpinned by a concern for visioning surfaces 'created by our perceptual apparatus' (2013). Shepherdson's artwork *Band Apart* (2012, Figures 2, 3) is a multimedia installation comprising two pieces – the three-dimensional 'Landscape with Unified Forms' and the two-dimensional 'Landscape with Fragmented Forms'. As she walked around her local landscape of the Isle of Thanet, Kent, UK, Shepherdson used mobile phone technology to photograph in situ one thousand rubber bands discarded by postal workers during their rounds. Each photograph fashioned 'its own space around each band, framed by different surfaces, textures and juxtaposed objects'. These images were then 'randomly located by a computer program, to a contained space within a 3810mm by 1120mm

frame' (2013). In so doing, Shepherdson explored how this arbitrary 'reappropriation' altered the prosaic and mundane nature of the materials and how 'surface, form and colour coalesce as viewing distance from the work increases' (2013). Next, Shepherdson fashioned the same one thousand rubber bands into a ball and set the object within a transparent resin container. As Shepherdson explains, these 'two interconnected works,…[open] up new research, making explicit connections between photographic images, surface, texture and three-dimensional installations'. Invested in capturing the simultaneous forming/performance of surface, Shepherdson's *Band Apart* presses Hookway's view that '[a] surface presents form, while an interface performs a shaping' (2014: 14).

Figure 4: Anais Moisy, Jen Southern, Chris Speed and Chris Barker, Unruly Pitch, 2015.

Jen Southern's artistic contribution also shows how movement and lines move across different planes/surfaces, for example, from walking on the earth to stiches on different fabrics. Combining bodies, movement and technology, she primarily 'works with hybrid places as lived environments' (Southern, n.d.) Like Shepherdson, Southern is interested in the forming and reforming of surfaces. But whereas *Band*

Apart uses mobile phone technology to isolate and immobilise materials and surfaces, Southern's technique of 'live mapping'

> offers participants…a shared experience of 'comobility', of being mobile with others at a distance. As smart phones allow GPS to be a networked technology this form of mobile communication becomes possible, and […] participants reflect on what it means to them to be connected at a distance through their movements, location, speed, trajectory and mode of travel (Southern 2013).

By contrast with Shepherdson's interest in recording surfaces-in-suspension, Southern's 'shared experience of "comobility"' emphasises movement and real-time documentation. Southern's focus on mobility and mapping resonates with Day and Lury's identification of the changing and live modes of contemporary satellite data visualisations, as well as with whether and how particular bodies' movements may and may not be tracked across surfaces of visualisation. Moreover, Southern's work explicates the relations between vision and surfaces through the selection of specific surfaces to work with. The video that constitutes part of this special section, *Unruly Pitch* by Anais Moisy, Chris Speed, Chris Barker and Jen Southern was created for an exhibition at the National Football Museum in 2015 (Figure 4). In this work GPS tracks of the collective movements of players in a mass football game, usually seen as individual trajectories on a static map, are traced onto a white screen, revealing footage of the mass of male bodies in a scrum. The mapping of GPS co-ordinates onto the flat screen show the temporal and visceral intensities and actions of the game. At the same time, the video holds a tension between the surface of the screen and a line that seems to wipe away this surface, revealing the movement 'below'.

Addressing the issue identified by Bennett of the 'dualistic ontologies of the social' that still permeate social and cultural theory from a different although complementary angle, Susanne Küchler discusses the means by which Oceanic piecework quilts 'deflect the Western eye unaccustomed to representations motivated by topological calculation' (Küchler 2017: XX). Küchler argues that

piecework quilts from the Cook Islands, Eastern Polynesia, where 'composite parts
[…] are repeated over the surface in a symmetrical, iteratively replicated and
transitively arranged pattern' (2017: XX) are fundamentally topological and non-
representational, concerned not so much with interpretation but with the
arrangements of parts across a surface and the relations they compose. These
textiles form an important and distinctive case of thinking through the relations
between surface and vision/visualisation in themselves. She offers the Oceanic
pieceworks as potentially productive in this regard: 'That the surfaces discussed in
this article are at home in societies in which information exchange has operated
across vast distances for some time should make us look at our own [Western]
preconceptions, and provoke a rethinking of how surfaces bind an inner, profoundly
imagistic and geometric world of action with an intentional relation to the world'
(2017: XX). What is highlighted in Küchler's essay, then, is how a concern with
topological surfaces is not new, and how geopolitical shifts – in the form of disaporic
movements across the globe and in how Western culture is 'becoming topological'
(Lury *et al* 2012) – influence and shape 'visualising surfaces, surfacing vision'.

IV. Reviewing surfaces now

The six contributions to this special section are bound by shared interests in
objectivity, depth, movement, relationality and composition, and individually and
collectively, these essays and artworks both illustrate and complicate Crary's (1990:
6) assertion that 'what determines vision at any given historical moment is not some
deep structure, economic base, or world view, but rather the functioning of a
collective assemblage of disparate parts on a single social surface'. The implications
of such a project open out to a series of issues and trends in social and cultural
theory that we have begun to indicate here. Thus, we locate a rationale for a special
section on vision and surfaces within broader interest in surface/surfacing. In
particular, and in part emerging through a series of theoretical (re-)investments in
materiality, ontology, relationality and topology, and in part responding to
contemporary social and cultural changes initiated by technological systems and
mediations, we suggest that surfaces are important devices for exploring and
understanding how vision functions today. Challenging the notion that has

permeated Western thought that surfaces are things to be delved under and got beneath, our argument is that surfaces should themselves be seen as sites of interest: as interfaces where spaces and times – virtual and actual – might be brought together for example, or intersections where different senses or materialities – human and nonhuman – might rub up against one another, or boundaries where certain limits may be made, or breached. As this Introduction has suggested, a focus on surfaces draws attention to the points where potentially different entities both meet and are made distinct.

More specifically, we argue that understanding vision and visualising in terms of a surface draws attention to how traditional dichotomies – between the organic and technological, real and representational, interior and exterior – themselves require re-working or are being re-worked, as surfaces may operate not only or so much as a dividing line as a *fold*: 'pleats' of matter, the continuous textured and fluid enfolding and unfolding of relations between bodies, technologies and worlds (Deleuze 2003). As we hope we have begun to show, while the individual contributions are informed by different conceptual models, the special section suggests more generally that the study of surfaces is rhizomatic; it is an inherently interconnected and interdisciplinary network with no firm foundation or clear centre (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). In this way, our identification of the significance of surfaces/surfacing to understanding vision today resonates with Martin Jay's comments on the pictorial turn in the 1990s; 'a heterotopic space without a single totalizing vantage point. The 'pictorial turn', like the 'linguistic turn' before it, shows itself to be richly varied and irreducible to one model' (1996: 9). By contrast to the continued oscillations of the dialectical exchange between subjects and objects, inside and outside, nature and culture then, we suggest that an attention to surfaces encourages alternative configurations of the technological and material conditions through which culture and society transforms, and of the ways in which social and cultural theory may fold into such transformations. In bringing the different approaches proposed by these original articles and artist videos into dialogue, the aim of the special section is to begin to co-ordinate what we see as some of the key conceptual framings of this emerging field of a turn to a surfacing of vision.

Indeed, responding to the 'paradigm shift' that Jay identifies in the 1990s through a recognition of the proliferation of images in contemporary culture and the displacement/replacement of a primarily linguistic model of understanding social life with a visual one, what we are suggesting with this special section is that there may be a further shift underway. What it examines is how surfaces are a productive way in which to understand the emergence of new and apparently boundless modes of visualisation, how a concern with surfaces may be understood topologically and relationally, the techniques through which vision becomes visible, or not, and the fusion between skin, screen and image. We suggest, therefore, that a contemporary concern with vision must take into account the specific techniques, conventions and practices via which vision and materiality are co-produced through surfaces/surfacing. We see such a project as necessarily concerned with politics and ethics: it draws attention to how images are produced, viewed and engaged (with), how actors or agencies are entangled and 'cut' (Barad 2007), and the effects and affects of location, vision and/or observing technologies.

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Surfaces in Early Modern Thought' (2017, edited with Kevin Killleen). She is currently working on a book-length project about Shakespearean surfaces.

Notes

[1] Theorising Surfaces: An Interdisciplinary Seminar, 24th May 2013 and Surfaces in the Making Art Exhibition, 23rd May-1st June 2013, The Storey Creative Industries Centre, Lancaster, UK: see http://www.surfacestudies.org/events.html and 'Surfaces: Contesting Boundaries Between Materials, Mind and Body', 6th August 2013, Manchester, UK: see

http://www.nomadit.co.uk/iuaes/iuaes2013/panels.php5?PanelID=1662 . See also Mike Anusas and Cris Simonetti (eds), *Surfaces: Transformations of the Body, Materials and Earth* (forthcoming 2018). At the former events, Celia Lury, Sarah Casey and Jen Southern were among those who presented work; in the latter, Susanne Küchler participated.

[2] We were reminded of the general OED definition in Forsyth et el (2013: 1015). For an extended discussion of premodern surfaces see the special issue of the *Journal of the Northern Renaissance* edited by Liz Oakley-Brown and Kevin Killeen on *Scrutinizing Surfaces in Early Modern Thought* (2017).

[3] See Kathleen Crowther, *Euclid and Book History in the Digital Age* http://www.math.ubc.ca/~cass/Euclid/dee/dee.html>date accessed 1 September 2016

[4] See http://darkmattersproject.wixsite.com/thresholds . In her earlier *Murmur* works (2009-11), Casey considers the interplay between light, matter and drawing with a view to capturing the ways in which medical technologies reveal intimate and

otherwise inaccessible fabric of the human body. See further

http://www.axisweb.org/p/sarahcasey/ .

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the frame of man are handled, with the naturall causes of all affections, vertues and vices, and chiefly the nature, powers, workes and immortalitie of the soule. London.

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