

editorial / SUSAN HEDGES,  
TINA ENGELS-SCHWARZPAUL  
AND ROSS JENNER

## Surface / Pattern: a pursuit of material narratives

INTERSTICES 18



Fig. 1 James Turkington & Tibor Donner (1957). Parnell Baths mural, Auckland. [Photo, Susan Hedges, 2017]

*God is in the detail*

—Aby Warburg, 1925

The tie between surface and ornament is a long one. The patterning of surfaces in accordance with the latter has been extensively reviewed, admonished, and discarded, only to re-emerge more recently as a rehabilitated and indeed pressing arena of inquiry, in part due to the plethora of animating possibilities arising with digital technology and image-saturated life. Concomitantly, there has been a renewed interest in the writing of Aby Warburg (1866-1929) and Alois Riegl (1858-1905). Warburg, German art historian, ethnographer and cultural theorist, recognised an afterlife of images arising from antiquity during the Florentine Renaissance and pointed to the potency of ornament and decorative motifs in cultural interpretation. Riegl, Austrian art historian, attended to the decorative arts, until then routinely unexamined in art historical canons, and found in ornamental details significant historical resonance and elucidation. Numerous studies have addressed these issues relative to Gottfried Semper, Adolf Loos, Hermann Muthesius, and Le Corbusier. They have recently become relevant in questions concerning demarcations between the animate and the inanimate (see, for example, Papapetros 2012, Payne 2013, van Eck 2014) given digitalisation particularly (see Spuybroek 2008 and Schumacher 2009). If, as Alina Payne (2013) has suggested, ornament shifts from being a nineteenth-century surface

concern in architecture, to become in the twentieth a matter of detached objects carrying an already highly mobilised ornamental impetus (as décor), this impetus achieves extreme mobility and detachment in the twenty-first century. At this stage, objects themselves increasingly provide a focus for image repertoires ('lifestyle'-indexing), which are simultaneously hollowed out in 'smart' networks, enchained in stretched vectors of production, distribution, and accelerated obsolescence.

Architecture, left to find its own course after the eschewal of ornamentation, faces the continuing "problematics of appearance" following the division between an aesthetics expressive of (modern) production and one of (traditional) representation, as David Leatherbarrow and Mohsen Mostafavi (2002: 1-6) have argued. In twentieth-century modernism, façade design—a hangover of representation—gave way to a certain "autonomy of the surface", a façade independent of structural frames that could be viewed as 'skin' (8). Enunciative concerns favouring volumetric over rhetorical effects came to define multi-faced compositions (13-14), leaving behind the relative representational freedom of nineteenth-century architectural expressionism—rich in physiognomic and moral/therapeutic implications (10). Yet, in the tension between building technology and expression, as Leatherbarrow and Mostafavi insist, a more or less generic logic of production remains seemingly at odds with a singularizing will in architectural figuration (20). The former has previously been seen as indicative of *repetition* (at times in an anonymising and alienating way) and the latter of *identity* (itself assumed to respond to immediate locality, climate, and social mores, etc.; 7, 22). Yet, repetition—itsself intrinsically caught up in continuities but also in breaks and irregularities—offers one way of understanding how production and representation might commingle in complex ways (23). This complexity is perhaps better understood as patterning. Over the past decades, emerging digital fabrication technologies have certainly offered an avenue for a new profusion of patterning, shifting the previously site-less and substance-less 'stuff' of digital design into varied, non-standardised material manifestations (Pell, et al. 2010: 11-12). The result: incrustations, protuberances, textured expressions, smoothed surfaces, surfaces enlivened as screens—all, in their own ways, erasing the distinction between ornament and cladding.

This is the territory contributors to *Interstices 18, Surface/pattern: a pursuit of material narratives* explore: the tension between ornament, adornment, object enlivenment, cladding, surface and pattern, and the strange animations inherent in surface-pattern continua. Etymologically, *surface* accords with the revealing of an upper or outward layer, but it also points to things that receive a surface through polishing or finishing. *Pattern* suggests the imposition of a plan or design that models or leans on exemplars for its form and rhythms—an underlying principle taken up materially. So, what might their continua potentiate? Thought in one direction, the smoothing of surfaces, particularly territorial ones, is indicative of a prevailing politic and policing, as Paul Virilio (1986) has emphasised, with speed and frictionless transfer made a global ideal—if a contested and problematic one. Thought in another, pattern imparts rhythm to surfaces, potentiating deceleration, awareness and contemplation, even deviation and delay. Hence, the journal issue is motivated by the renewed fascination with the surface of things and the expressive effects and underlying patterns they mobilise materially.

Any anatomy of pattern soon runs into repetition. As Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987) have argued, repetition, far from a surface-effect, is what makes a patterned (and therefore recognisable) world possible. From the encoding of milieus founding territoriality and place-specificity to social behaviours and cultural distinctions, concretisation and mobilisation of rhythms consolidate and release the very differences through which life assembles itself. Performative and plastic arts in the Pacific, like those elsewhere, use repetition as an aesthetic device. However, they also use it “to symbolise and effect relations of mana” (Tomlinson & Tengan 2015: 17), to channel affective force and to represent memory and knowledge to those who understand (Clark 2006: 12; Nepia 2013: 133, 197). Hence, pattern and rhythm run free of, and extend beyond, all planar fixity. Surfaces are not simply seconded within the hierarchies of built place; they also open onto insistently moving and shifting states (Taylor 2009: 47). Far from keeping an outside apart, architecture, then, can be rethought to transform and crystallise the radical rhythms of an outside at large (Grosz 1995: 135). Patterning answers to this chaos, providing environments rich in repetition, difference and affect. Seen this way, the decorative and the detailed, the immediate and the superficially apparent, all partake of domains of repetition extending into the very ontological depth of things. Contributors to this issue have sampled some of this complex continuum.

### Invited contributions

Preceding this issue was the *Interstices Under-Construction Symposium* held in June 2017. There, the first keynote speaker, Spyros Papapetros (Associate Professor in History and Theory of Architecture at Princeton University), extended his work on the historiography of art and architecture, the intersections between architecture and the visual arts, as well as the relationship between architecture, psychoanalysis and the history of psychological aesthetics. In his address, Papapetros reminded us that animation, in architecture and design, starts with little things like ornament, accessories—things we might consider marginal, but which, nevertheless, are at the very core of the visual and material culture of their and our times. A recording of the address is available here, and we provide a summary in the following.

Beginning with the image of a Kaffir chain necklace from South Africa, made of heterogeneous artefacts perforated and strung together in a chain, Papapetros raised the seemingly self-contradictory notion of a “portable ecology”, which became the core of this paper. Moreover, before Adolf Loos banned it, ornament was already buried by the very weight of ethnographical and archaeological literature that had been piled upon it. From this point of departure, Papapetros raised a succession of issues.

1/. *Atrophy by decoration* examines headgear, in particular, the spiked helmet and accoutrements of Kaiser Wilhelm II, the last German Emperor and King of Prussia, which veer between pageantry and a military attachment. Here, Papapetros refers to a primaevial relationship between ornament and weaponry; arms, he quotes Gottfried Semper, are “the true adornment of man”.

2/. *Regressive evolution* refers to *Evolution by Atrophy in Biology and Sociology* by Jean Demoor, Jean Massart and Emile Vandervelde (originally in French 1899), who argued that certain organs atrophy to the point of becoming mere

accessories, there being no progress without recoil. Papapetros draws attention to the strange case of the senators of the city of Hamburg who, when the lower classes challenged their authority, reverted to sixteenth-century costume.

3/. *Ornamentation through rudimentation* refers to three main texts: anthropologist Alfred Cort Haddon's *Evolution in Art* (1895), in which ornament is seen as organic, Richard Clazier's *A Manual of Historic Ornament* (1899), and Semper's Lecture of 1856, "On the Formal Principles of Adornment and its Meaning as a Symbol in Art". The last was one of the first to use evolutionary terms to describe ornament, specifically in the earplugs of the Brazilian Botocudo, which, Semper speculated, could have represented rudiments, or the origin, of archaic Greek ear pendants and, by extension, those of today. In this lecture, Semper defined three "axes of formation that correspond to the three extensions of space" from which "three spatial characteristic qualities of beauty emerge": Symmetry (macrocosmic unity), proportionality (microcosmic unity), and direction (unity of movement).

4/. *Warburg reads Semper* unravels Warburg's analysis of Semper's lecture in terms of cosmic forces of both attraction and repulsion. Warburg articulates three universal categories of ornament: one to do with movement and oscillation—the macrocosmic; one to do with the ring—microcosmic radial movement of expansion; and one to do with direction—projective, regimented space.

5/. *World Histories of Adornment* treats the legacy of Semper's theory of ornament in J. Matthias' *The Human Ornament (Der menschliche Schmuck, 1871)*.

6/. *The Ornament of People* pursues the theme in Michael Haberlandt & Martin Gerlach's *Völkerschmuck* (1906), Emil Selenka's *Der Schmuck des Menschen* (1900) and the ethnologist and zoologist, Carl Semper's (nephew of the architect) *Reisen im Archipel der Philippinen* (1868-1916) and *Palau-Inseln im Stillen Ocean* (1873).

Papapetros concluded by returning to Selenka's study of the minutiae of hair in apes, where direction is grafted into the layer of the skin—as in an expanded animate field. Here, hair is still a cosmic directional ornament, which undergoes a regressive evolution into its origins, according to Selenka. It is no longer a figure in front of a background, but the background itself. Ornament has not disappeared but turned into landscape, forest, sea, coral reef or sky. If Selenka's wish to limit ornament to nature eventually allowed Loos to extricate ornament from modern civilised culture altogether, Papapetros, nevertheless, encouraged us to rediscover ornament in an afterglow, in a mediated presence, "where there are no rays, no pendants, no directions, but only an animated field of constant yet variegated extension ..."

The second keynote speaker, Tēvita O. Ka'ili (Associate Professor at Brigham Young University, Lā'ie, Hawai'i), has ancestral connections to Samoa, Fiji and Tonga and is a long-time member of the Tā-Vā theory group in the Moana-Nui region. His keynote, *Hoa patterns: binary, repetition, symmetry, kupesi, and mana*, demonstrated the application of an area of the Moana-Nui (Pacific) theory of Tā-Vā (Time-Space) that is relevant to design generally, and to the key theme of the symposium, *Surface / Pattern*, specifically. Opening the Pacific Spaces panel of the *2017 Interstice Under Construction Symposium*, Ka'ili asserted that all things stand in relations of exchange, through intersections/connections or separation,

in relations of order or conflict. His presentation focused on a concept that is common to the entire Moana-Nui region: *hoa*. With over 40 cognates in different locations, the term refers to the relations between two or more entities: companions, friends, but also adversaries (hoariri in Māori), involving complementarity, duality, harmony, equality, but also tension and conflict. Ka'ili presented this field of connotations primarily from a Tongan perspective but often considered variations prominent in other areas of the Pacific. He showed, for example, how the very notion of pairs recurs in many Moana-Nui ways of thinking about the world: in cosmogonies, there are primordial and cosmic pairs, ancestral twins, and pairs of plants and fish. This duality also underpins *kupesi* (patterns) and *heliaki* (poetic, metaphoric comparisons: *fakahoa*). Well-established patterns are Manulua (two fish) and Kau-ika-lilo (Hidden School of Fish), for example, with the latter also featuring in the Fale Pasifika in Auckland. Mathematically, patterns rest on binary numbers systems—in use, for instance, in pre-contact Mangareva and in Tonga, where the system was called *Nga'ahoa*.

*Mata* and *ava* are crucial elements of *kupesi*. *Mata* (eye, point) is the point of intersection between two or more *kohi* (lines), while *ava* is the symmetry of *mata*. *Kohi* themselves are collections of two or more *mata*, and *vā* (space) arises out of a collection of *kohi*. These elements are deployed across different forms of symmetry (radial, bilateral, spherical and fractal), which mediate their levels of energy, order and conflict. Energy is most dense and intense at the *mata*, which is the location of, or/or creates, *mana*—which itself is constituted as a surfeit of energy. As a basis for plurality, the duality of *hoa* is in principle dynamic—and thereby in important ways different from binary marked–unmarked oppositions in contemporary Western thinking, which assume the dominance of one term over the other. On certain occasions, though, as in the Tongan *kava* ceremony, order is tapu (sacred)—preserving the state of harmony, order and beauty.

Tēvita O. Ka'ili's keynote is available [here](#).

## Reviewed papers

John Ruskin offered a different angle on the debates concerning constructional polychromy in Victorian Britain, according to Anuradha Chatterjee, who considers their larger context and Ruskin's place within it. Ruskin, she argues, favoured the decorative use of materials' innate colour to achieve concealment of a building's structure. Though his theory of polychromy, especially his attitudes to colour and pattern, remains far from obvious, Chatterjee offers insights into them through the lenses of gender, body, soul and dress. She presents his triadic theory of architecture: a) architecture is a combination of painting and sculpture; b) it is feminine; and c) it is analogous to a dressed body. In this light, she revisits an ambivalence between *colour as pattern*, and *colour as effect*, arguing that, for Ruskin, simultaneity and vacillation, not singularity and stability, essentially characterise the visual field. Ruskin's writings, she proposes, undermined polarities prevalent in contemporary understandings of polychromy and rendered them more complex, since he not only refused to resolve the difference between pattern and effect but also to settle the difference between sculpture and painting; canvas and textile; and flatness and texture.

In "On territorial images: *Erewhon*, or, chiastic desire", Andrew Douglas explores a surface-pattern nexus by way of what he terms *territorial images*. Arguing that

there is no territory without repetition patterns, which in turn inscribe a semiotic generating images, he draws on the role of ‘picturing’ to account for the possessive and demarking dynamic implicit in territorial assemblages. Crossing Hans Blumenberg’s (1985) thinking on “existential anxiety” and its mythical reworking of horizons of unknowing with the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987) on repetition patterning and the refrains of territoriality, the paper looks to modes of imagined place-solidarity emerging with nation states. Drawing on Andrea Mubi Brighenti’s (2010) call for an expanded *territorology*—itself building on Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987 & 1994) notions of territoriality—Douglas emphasises the extent to which territory, usually regarded as a spatial phenomenon, in fact rests on temporal and psychical geneses consolidating differences in modes of repetition—in the case of the nation-state, as Benedict Anderson (1991) has proposed, spanning commonly imagined daily routines, memorialising, and re-fashioned futures. In particular, the paper draws on the role of utopian discourse in the transition to Europe nationalism and, in turn, to the transmittal of utopian aspirations and imaginings to colonial places. Central is a reading of a novel influential in a range of Deleuze’s writings: Samuel Butler’s *Erewhon, or, over the range* (1872/2013), a utopian satire set in Aotearoa/New Zealand’s Southern Alps. Developing links between the novel’s philosophical uptake; its deployment of topography and modes of imagining specific to Aotearoa/New Zealand; and Butler’s deployment of a Neoplatonist empiricism more broadly, the paper plays out the significance of chiasmic desire—a criss-cross patterning that draws surface configurations (landscape picturing, textual place descriptions, topographical delineation, perceptual routines) into deeper relations of grounding, imagination, and the drawing of place sensibility out of the imperceptible.

Sébastien Galliot, in his essay “From ritual efficacy to iconic efficiency: ritual encoding, surface/pattern and global perceptions of Pacific tattoo iconography” draws on fieldwork conducted between 2001 and 2013 in Samoa, New Zealand and Europe, as well as his curatorial activities involving Pacific and Samoan tattooing. Building on previous research on ritual efficacy and ritual transmission, the paper examines changes in the mode of reception of Samoan iconography and questions the changing status of Pacific tattoos. Galliot first establishes the context of production and reception, discussing the emergence of what he terms a *tattooscape* in Pacific tattooing. Theoretically, he takes a pragmatic, rather than Kantian, approach to the interpretation of images in their field of practice, by exploring Charles S. Peirce’s semiotic categories, *index*, *icon* and *symbol*. The dual nature of iconicity, where surface and depth interact to produce *iconic power* (Alexander, Bartmanski, & Giesen, 2012), is particularly relevant for tattooed images since iconic power gives the mark inscribed on the skin both effect and meaning—both ritual efficacy and visual saliency. In their original practice context, completed tattoos index primarily a well-conducted ritual, in which two parties (the recipient and his or her family on one side, and the tattooing expert on the other) managed to maintain respectful and caring interactions throughout the process. From that perspective, tattooed images index good relations and the physical and psychological strength of the wearer. When looking at the elements of tattoo patterns in detail, though, their iconic aspects come to the fore. In a multimodal reading of Samoan tattoo iconography, juxtaposing primarily indexical and iconic aspects of tattooing and tattoos, Galliot reworks Peirce’s own realisation that icons and indices are always partly symbolic, and that the icon/index/symbol trichotomy is an abstraction. Tattoos, like any sign, combine all three characteristics and,

depending on the context, any one aspect can dominate. While tattoos can be seen as being detached from their original destination (the human skin), they retain some iconic power even in branding campaigns that deploy them to connote Samoan-ness or Pacific-ness—or, more generally, to convey notions of authenticity. Ultimately, Galliot demonstrates how the global (re)appropriation of Pacific designs has caused a change in their mode of production and reception.

In “Binding and arresting: surface and pattern in a contemporary traditional Pacific building”, Tina Engels-Schwarzpaul considers modes of patterning evident in the University of Auckland’s Fale Pasifika. The Fale is a gathering place intended primarily to connect the university with Pacific communities in the region, but it also appeals to wider audiences and is often used for the reception of international visitors. Recognised as iconically Pacific by the university, it draws mainly on Polynesian traditions, with its *lalava* (lashings) also referencing Micronesian and Melanesian patterns. Engels-Schwarzpaul proposes that the Fale owes its *iconic power* (Alexander, Bartmanski, & Giesen, 2012) to a fusion of surface and depth, mediated by the very materiality and meaning of those patterns, which provide diasporic communities with shared histories and a starting point for trans-Pacific identifications. In the right constellations, *lalava* is able to bind together ancestral knowledge and present practices, despite many concessions to alien regulations and rules of production. Tongan *tofunga* (expert) Tohi asserts that *lalava* is “deeper than just the lashing”, more connected to a changing world and cosmos-in-motion than given credit. Patterns extend, indeed, into cosmological, social, technological and subjective realms. Over time, they can engender relationships between people and things (Gell, 1998). Such relationships between arresting figures, ensnaring ground and viewers are founded on mimetic experiences (Rampley, 1997). The paper explores the conditions under which arresting patterns on refined surfaces can both symbolise and effect relations of mana and channel affective force (Tomlinson & Tengan 2016). The paper suggests that iconic power could be a valuable strategic resource for Indigenous trans-Pacific concepts, integrating aspects of materiality, performativity, atmospheres and non-human agency with more traditional, structuralist insights generated in cross-overs between architecture and anthropology.

### **Reviewed postgraduate creative design research projects**

In “Interiors of memories: A study of personal memories based on the works of Luigi Serafini and Georges Perec”, Joanne Choueiri, in a project undertaken at the Piet Zwart Institute, Rotterdam, utilises personal memories as an oneiric foundation for the creation of new forms of interior. Drawing on the work of Italian illustrator, Luigi Serafini’s *Codex Seraphinianus* (1981) and French writer, Georges Perec’s *Species of spaces and other pieces* (1997), memories are reconfigured as narratives, which themselves form the prompt for the production of fantastic interiors. Room by room, domestic typologies and their programmatic functions are called into question via an appeal to the fantastical, a genre merging the imagined and the real—in a manner, in fact, coextensive with French philosopher, Gaston Bachelard’s (1994) claim of a psychically dense layering found in the dwelling places of childhood.

Building on David Leatherbarrow and Mohsen Mostafavi’s (2002) consideration of surface in architecture, John de Manincor, from the University of Queensland,

Australia, devised “Whethering station: Thin surface, thick surface”, a pavilion project exploring parametric modelling and novel fabrication processes. This doctoral research project plays out the implications of the undefinable thinness of digital lines to rework the notion that drawn lines connote a surface indicative of a volume coming into being. Manincor unpacks a suggestive reading by Andrew Benjamin (2006) of Gottfried Semper’s thinking on the wall as a paradigmatic element—both harbouring and concealing depth—in order to articulate a pavilion of acute thinness, both conceptually and technically: a pavilion whose materiality is nought but surface.

## Reviews

As series of reviews draw this issue to a close: a book review by Sean Flannagan of *The Auckland School: 100 years of architecture and planning*, edited by Julia Gatley and Lucy Treep (2017); John Walsh’ exhibition review of *The Auckland School: Celebrating the centenary of the University of Auckland School of Architecture and Planning* (2017); and book reviews by Jonathan Hale of *Atmospheric architectures: the aesthetics of felt spaces* by Gernot Böhme (edited/trans A-C Engels-Schwarzpaul, 2017) and by Jan Smitheram of *The Baroque in architectural culture 1880-1980*, edited by Andrew Leach, John Macarthur and Maarten Delbeke (2015).

Papers and projects presented in this issue show, across a considerable range, that surfaces are anything but ‘surface-affairs’. No surface—even the most austere—can absent itself from the work of patterning, punctuating and spacing. In short, no surface is ever shorn of the implications of repetition and, with them, enlivening rhythms and echoes that carry on into the very constitution and depths of what is surfaced.



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