Introduction

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This book provides a new starting point for analyses of wartime built environments, framed by the assumption that sovereignty has unimagined complexities and that the material worlds of internment and prisoner-of-war (POW) camps in settler-societies offer valuable insights into the forms of geopolitical awareness surfacing in the mid-twentieth century, a historical period marked by imperial conflict. The temporal, spatial and material transformations wrought by the Pacific War, affecting Asia, Australasia and North America’s west coast, are the primary foci. Across the eleven chapters that follow this Introduction, we envision various Pacific Basin localities as an archipelagic configuration connected by this shared history of violence and by resilient legacies. Architecture, we argue, offers unique historical insights into this interconnected physical geography.

Organized around three geographical areas directly affected by Japan’s military aggression – Australia, Singapore and the USA – the book’s special focus is on the taxonomy of concentration-camp types that emerged, temporarily, in these and related theaters of conflict and that were designed for the incarceration of POWs, civilian internees and certain racially differentiated categories of citizens. By comparing their architecture across representative case studies, we map the changing indices of wartime racialized and political relations in these disparate but temporarily codependent settler and colonial societies. Each of the core case studies examined here offers different insights into how social conditions were politicized by war and affective responses of individuals whose lives were disrupted. We are also interested in a longer history of these physical facilities extending before and after the conflict, applying what Michel Foucault described as a genealogy of power–knowledge relations – in this case as a genealogy of a programmatic type.¹ This book’s

¹ Michel Foucault, Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 83, describes genealogy as a combination of erudite and local knowledge “which allows us to establish a historical knowledge of struggles and make use of this knowledge tactically today.” This approach has been successfully tested
comparative and temporal approach is aimed at globalizing a topic too often confined to national histories.

The imperial and national border conflicts occurring across the Pacific War are reconceptualized as a field of competing sovereignties, drawing on how borders and human displacement have been discussed in the social sciences, through theoretical approaches to “border-thinking” applied more recently in the anthology *Architecture on the Borderline*, on the physical and material manifestations of geopolitical borders and border conflicts. Approaches informed by this method are inspired by Gloria Anzaldúa’s writings on the US–Mexico border, favoring epistemes arising from lived experiences of marginality and resistance at the border of colonial matrices of power. The Pacific War’s distance from the European conflict, leading to neglect of many dimensions of it, the remoteness of battles fought in the Pacific, the tensions between imperialists and colonial and subject populations, and the movement of prisoners and refugees between far-flung geographies heighten the interplay of border conditions and experiences.

An argument for presenting this “assemblage” of conflicts in the Asia-Pacific as a singular Pacific War has already been made by Twomey and Koh in an excellent anthology. Their collection politicizes diverse social dimensions of war, using remembrance, social subjectivity (race, sexuality and culture), the war’s aftermath and the place of veterans as frameworks for inquiry. The physical dimension of the war remains as a background to their studies. In adopting a spatial approach to this “assemblage,” this book reconsiders the “archipelago,” a metaphor used by many authors to characterize penal environments as clusters of gulags. As detailed further in Chapter 1, it contrasts this previous approach with the idea of an “archipelagic consciousness,” after the work of Eduard Glissant, as a possible way of uncovering the heterogeneity of camp environments as spaces where multiple forms of sovereignty may intersect.

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Whereas normative expressions of political and cultural sovereignty are more easily traceable, with its sense of personal sovereignty and self-consciousness shaping the modern profession, architectural scholars are only beginning to explore how the politicization of these positions for the suppression of rights and privileges during national or global catastrophes also implicates architects and architectural production. In addressing these issues, however, many architectural histories tend to take nation-state sovereignty for granted, naturalizing boundaries that have a relatively short historical instrumentality. This insular approach to global histories is partly influenced by postwar nation-building (or rebuilding) narratives.

Accounts of the Pacific War are likewise circumscribed by national interests formed after the war, rather than the broader imperial alliances forged defensively at the time. Multiple processes, such as the dissolution of empires, political decolonization and the divisive alignments of the Cold War era, cloud our understanding of its contested physical geography. The war accelerated the processes by which fluid imperial geopolitical territories were redacted into the narrower, culturally hegemonic nation-state sovereignties recognized today. These many forces act to project the reductive parameters of national sovereignty onto the war’s multilateral histories. Any one of many competing accounts of the war cannot capture the intersecting political and cultural complexities of this shared history.

The same can be said of the human subjects caught up in the war’s many border conflicts. Before geopolitical boundaries were drawn around individual nation-states, cultural and political identities were more porous and fluid, though also, at times, contradictory. Modern subjectivity was not as yet congruent with political identity, as other societal forces of individuation (urbanization, waged labor and psychosocial individuation) were applied unevenly across the colonial world. The kinds of geopolitical awareness that link modernity and national identity, although already prevalent in localized border struggles, became pervasive and global during the two World Wars. World War II’s Pacific theater awakened Europeanized forms of political self-consciousness in colonized populations on whom oppressive systems of colonial government had been historically imposed. The systemic racialization of settler-societies gave rise to an internally divisive race politics that was aggravated by wartime hostilities. The war also shifted the loci of imperial conflict to

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7 The war in Asia commenced against China in 1937, but war with the Western powers began with attacks on European colonies in Asia and at Pearl Harbor in December 1941, ending when Japan capitulated in August 1945.
encompass a previously peripheral geography – the Pacific Basin. As the cultural opacity attributed to its eastern regions lifted, Asia’s peoples were perceived as competitors and threats to European colonizers, who by the early twentieth century dominated South and Southeast Asia. A global comparison of Australia, Singapore and the USA allows unpacking of these sensibilities, as these settler-societies reoriented to confront a rising imperial power in Asia that had never been colonized.

When wartime actions are approached as border conflicts, certain nation-state formations appear more sensitive than others to the upheavals caused by multiracial citizenship. “New World” settler-colonial environments, like the USA, Canada, Australia or New Zealand (identifying more recently as Aotearoa New Zealand), can be differentiated from Europe or Asia because of comparable histories of immigration, labor coercion, land expropriation, dispossession and genocide of Indigenous populations, and of colonial settlement, but also as experimental sites for new exogenous political systems with migrants as their basis. In these nascent liberal democracies, the ruling settler majorities constructed white privilege through systemic racialization alongside selective opportunities for economic equity and social mobility. Colonial settlers in Australia, for example, used fraudulent treaties, annexation or occupation to expropriate land, putting in place a “white” society where the majority culture was not Indigenous to the geography. Generations of immigrants, attracted by settlement opportunities, benefited from previous legacies of violence and became complicit in their histories. Such colonial strains of governance by expropriation were deepened by global conflict. Similarly, the war sharpened and opened to critical scrutiny North America’s racialized boundaries around civil liberties and tenuous claims of geopolitical legitimacy.

The war also shifted large populations within Asia and Europe and between these and other settler environments – evacuating civilians, creating refugees and transporting enemy nationals into hostile geographies, thereby aggravating tensions around sovereign rights related to securing national borders to date. The inadequacies of legislative instruments designed to protect captive combatants, civilian internees and citizens globally were harshly exposed by the war. Lisa Lowe’s attention to the colonial redistribution of land, labor and capital across four continents has served as inspiration for examining the wartime redistribution and deprivation of property and opportunity as a punitive strategy.  

Approach and Framing

Beginning with Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor and simultaneous invasion of Malaya in December 1941, this volume spans the material worlds of the rural concentration camps in southeastern Australia and New Zealand as a discursive entry point into a broader history spanning Australasia and the Pacific. Australia’s defense of Malaya and Singapore, and the experiences of captive Australian and other Allied soldiers in urban and suburban camp facilities during Japanese occupation, form the basis for the second study of the transformation of an entire island into a camp and the dispersal of prisoners across Japan’s emergent empire. Although more remote from Australasia, the attack on Pearl Harbor that drew the USA into World War II, with immediate repercussions on its Pacific coast, acknowledges the importance of testing this content against US and Canadian case studies. Specific rural sites in Manzanar in California and New Denver in British Columbia are compared. Focus on the material worlds of these several sites highlights the ontological conditions of incarceration, but also flattens characterizations of perpetrators and victims, whose identities shift across them.

Related penal processes are instructive in three ways. Firstly, understanding these processes builds awareness of the spatial legacies of carceral environments used to warehouse war-displaced populations across the Pacific Basin, within which similar forms of civic deprivation were reproduced. Secondly, although they were temporary holding facilities for transients, these camp geographies took on the proportions of urban settlements, impacting local communities and their resources in pervasive and unsettling ways. Thirdly, as with any urban community, incarcerated populations often adapted their environments in order to salvage some measure of their undermined civility. Their resilience to the dehumanizing pressures of an overly militarized physical environment gave a range of cultural capacities material form. The complex social processes uncovered through these three lines of investigation frame a specialized disciplinary contribution to social and military histories on this topic. Our interest in the forced or underpaid labor that fashioned and transformed these camp environments provides important overlaps between these and architectural histories.

This book asks how architecture mediates expressions of sovereignty, while looking for various political, cultural or personal articulations of sovereign identity as manifested in the built environments of the Pacific War. This book is preceded, for example, by Jean-Louis Cohen’s *Architecture in Uniform*, which examines the wartime careers of architectural luminaries.  

Studies of Nazi architectural innovations – the forced-labor concentration-camp system and individual death camps like Auschwitz – have been explored in a number of studies, most notably Paul Jaskot’s *The Architecture of Oppression*. When compared with these largely Europe-centered studies, architectural accounts of Pacific War-related environments are few, with camps providing the broader contexts for social and political histories. *Defiant Gardens, Confinement and Ethnicity* and *Archaeologies of Internment* are titles that emphasize physical materialities. Nevertheless, in these collections’ separate chapters, the national lens often persists. By looking at sites and experiences of social exclusion and oppression as border spaces, this book raises broader questions about wartime articulations of sovereignty.

Under the radar of territorial sovereignty, taken for granted in national histories, embodied expressions of cultural sovereignty in minority and diasporic populations offer fresh insights into lives during internment. Material remains are frequently animated and politicized through reflexive memory-making practices that challenge national cultures of memorialization and conservation. Among the architectural histories that bring these issues to the fore, including most recently work on First Nations or immigrant architectures, are analyses of conflict environments, including of World War II. Connie Chiang’s *Nature Behind Barbed Wire* and Lynne Horiuchi’s forthcoming book, *Dislocations and Relocations: Building Prison Cities for Japanese and Japanese Americans during World War II*, examine Japanese American incarceration environments.


war memories, including those linked to commemorative sites, impact the different communities within Singapore’s multiracial society.\textsuperscript{14}

The interdisciplinary umbrella of critical heritage studies aligned with cultural studies and cultural geography has invigorated interest in physical sites, more recently producing the broadest range of analyses on the Asia-Pacific region, including \textit{Places of Pain and Shame}, \textit{Hiroshima Traces} and \textit{Heritage, Memory and Punishment: Remembering Colonial Prisons in East Asia}.\textsuperscript{15} These volumes compare numerous instances of heritage “dissonance,” an approach famously theorized by Tunbridge and Ashworth as a means for confronting nationally sensitive but suppressed histories.\textsuperscript{16}

In focusing on how ethnosocial histories are politicized in the making of physical memorial sites, many of these important works neglect the significance of physical design and planning. The physical effects of war and urban destruction are more likely to be raised in architectural studies on contemporary conflicts such as in Bosnia-Herzegovina or the Middle East, or on urban conditions created by the amassing of displaced persons in Europe’s current border camps.\textsuperscript{17} By presenting the camp as a modern institution and a spatial biopolitical technology, these works critique both national and international humanitarian policies, in ways that resonate with the framing of this book, but usually lack the accumulated wealth of archival resources and reflective memoirs that might foreground human experiences and subjectivity.

Given the richness of available spatial and material data, the lack of mainstream architectural interest in Pacific carceral landscapes is persistent and baffling. One could explain their absence from postwar national or nation-building histories in several ways. Camps tend to be fragile structures, unlike the more aesthetically captivating and permanent, urban penal architectures that are the subject of institutional histories.


While Holocaust scholars have studied camps as laboratories of totalitarianism, machines of mass extermination, spaces of dehumanization and genocide, the enduring horror of concentration-camp histories has not prevented the physical destruction of many sites, and at times has provoked it. In fact, camps with varied programs of transit, detention, forced labor, concentration or extermination for the European theater of war have been enumerated in their thousands. But unlike, for example, the art-deco bunkers of the Atlantic Wall, they remain functional buildings of negligible aesthetic significance, an institutional vernacular of sorts.

Quite apart from the atrocities concealed by their destruction, the camp environments’ short duration and inferior materiality, compounded by hasty erection, prefabrication and basic design or planning, denied them the attention given to permanent or elegant military structures that outlast conflicts. As spaces fashioned for denying sovereign rights, their significance is immense, proving to be empirically rich sites for analysis. Their further modification by local labor or by captive populations defers a self-conscious interpretation of their design attributes. However, camps are often provisional sites for irresolute strategies of punishment and precursors to the institutionalization projected by permanent buildings. As such, they may broker or enforce the conditions of citizenship, protected or violated during hostilities. These largely temporary facilities were substantial interventions in their respective national landscapes, executed on an urban scale.

An architectural history of camp environments needs to review their construction, operation, dispersal and commemoration across four temporal periods. The first period covers site selection, preparation, provision of infrastructure, materials and labor in setting up of camps, including the conversion into concentration camps of extant military or penal facilities or civic institutions, as well as new constructions under appointed military or civilian administrations. Transportation conduits for people and supplies, and water resources for the incarcerated population, are critical site considerations. The planning, design and construction of camp facilities by military, community or private contractors overlap with the second operative phase’s arrival and involvement of prisoners, as the camp continues to be modified. Facilities include: residential barracks or huts, mess halls and utility buildings; associated schools, hospitals, stores and community and religious structures; quarters for military or administrative personnel; surveillance structures and fortifications; temporary structures and landscape features; and camp-related agricultural areas and industries. In addition to those facilities designed for or approved by the military or camp administration, prisoners transformed the camps internally by adapting existing structures, extending them using salvaged...
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materials, or demarcating spaces for recreation or beautification modifying the natural landscape. This period of activity roughly coincides with the duration of war. The labor extracted from POWs or internee populations opens up a broader landscape that extends beyond the camp perimeter and intersects with the surrounding geography.

The third period of dispersal follows the decommissioning of camps: dismantling, auctioning and repurposing of buildings and building materials, and in some instances, retention of some facilities for use as postwar migrant or military camps. The fourth period, typically, has a time lag of several decades, when pressure from redress movements or requests by former prisoner groups prompt the construction of commemorative spaces and structures – officially for interment of the war dead, and unofficially through the activities of former prisoners, their descendants and associated local communities. These take forms including cemeteries, peace parks, interpretive centers, museum collections and heritage precincts. They are drawn together through tourism networks that spill over from established battlefield tours. Sociospatial practices described or recorded at that time, or retroactively, significantly modify our interpretation of all these physical phenomena. In fact, although the focus of this book is on wartime camp environments, given the retrospective nature of this study, the evidential starting point is based on this fourth period’s materialities.

This book’s schema for selecting case studies favors long-neglected sites whose heritage dissonance removed them from nation-building narratives, but whose material and human remains partially withstood deliberate or unintended erasure in the immediate postwar era. While memories are tended through processes of historical recovery, other sites and conditions have surfaced shaping a retrospective politics. That politics remains salient for contemporary crises of statelessness and border control. Camps built during the Pacific War may serve as examples in a prehistory of the current border–camp phenomenon; and architecture, arguably because of its focus on physical sites and materialities, is an ideal discipline for exploring their evolution over time. As stated earlier, we looked for examples where effervescent materialities anchored by real artifacts and conserved by host communities have substantiated these nationally marginalized histories.

The Shape of the Book

Chapter 1, “Carceral Archipelago,” lays out the reasoning behind the book and its investigative schema, drawing links with the interpretations of incarceration familiar to the discipline. The chapter’s central argument
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is that the Pacific War’s imperial border contestations were inscribed in those national populations who were alienated or disenfranchised by new hostilities; and that camps treated as border facilities became places for testing cultural boundaries, advancing programs of assimilation but also of defiance, dissidence and cultural recovery. In Chapters 1 and 10, case studies are viewed comparatively in order to gain an understanding of the differing physical makeup of each camp environment in the various national sites explored.

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 focus on Australia and New Zealand. Chapter 2, “A Network of Internment Camps,” introduces the eighteen major camps created to intern “enemy aliens,” as well as overseas internees/refugees and POWs, in Australia, as an expanding military-camp typology, an extension of the punitive-space typologies that had historically filtered entry into the continent. Unlike in other case studies, the proximity of POW and internee populations from both theaters of conflict forced Australia to devise ever more complex schemes that would segregate nationals of belligerent countries, as well as the political factions within groups. The centerpiece of this chapter is the Waranga Basin’s Tatura group of seven camps – the key camp cluster in Victoria.

Chapter 3, “Prisoner-of-War Resistance,” discusses how the captive population of Germans, Italians and Japanese, their patriotism sharpened by concentration, railed against confinement in Australia and New Zealand’s camps. Using “escape” as its central theme, the chapter examines breakout attempts at camps in Murchison, Cowra and Featherston, offering insights into their enforcement of the 1929 Geneva Convention’s regulations for the treatment of POWs. The deployment of POWs and internees for agricultural projects forms a substantial part of wartime histories. Across the Pacific theater civilians and POWs, as well as alienated citizens (in North America), supplemented wartime industry through their nominally waged employment in manufacturing and agricultural industries. Chapter 4, “Land and Labor,” focuses on farms and rural industries associated with the Hay and Loveday group camps. It looks at the penal economy, the labor regimen and the ways in which the labor of Italian POWs became integrated into a larger network of wartime labor circulation throughout Australia.

Camps in Australia were housed in remote rural locations near small towns that sent large proportions of their populations as soldiers to the Pacific War. The majority of Australian service personnel came to and passed through Singapore. They defended the island in the weeks before its capitulation and suffered greatly as Japanese captives. Chapters 5 and 6 focus on Singapore. Chapter 5, “A Military Geography,” describes the dispersal of camps at the fall of Singapore, following the fate of Australian