

Roundtable 2: Diasporic Architecture and Australia's Unfinished Histories

Chair

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Participants

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Architectural historiography is challenged by the architecture of migrant communities, the diversity of architectural references, the aesthetic palette and the atmosphere of these productions that in Australia and New Zealand have inscribed the landscape for over 140 years. Explorations of the physical impact of the diversity of cultures inhabiting Australian and New Zealand cities extend migration theory to immigrant architecture. Along with international studies, to this date this is understood in five ways: the first focusing on architects, their biographies and works; the second on the urban and suburban environments and immigrants' institutions, cultural presence and mobilities including ephemeral materialities, the third on immigrant housing, the fourth on inscriptions and transformations of homeland sites, and fifth on the transitional/permanent nature of migration.

Outside academia, architectural heritage as practice has intersected with migrant built environments.

However, myths prevail. Positioning diasporic architecture as nostalgic for the homeland tends to de-historicise the discourse, embedding it in a mythic past. Conversely, theories of mobility, popular in architectural thinking suppress migrant patterns of estrangement in migration histories.

Research on the disparities between entitled migrants and those impoverished by displacement evident in the very different ways they engage with the architecture industry is relatively new.

This session aims to explore architectural historiographies of the diasporic conditions. The session invites investigations including –

- The potential de-centring/re-centring of what is taken to be architectural culture as spaces that are/have been adapted/transformed by changing cultural demographics.
- How migration and movement of peoples (or movement of ideas/technologies onto peoples in place) leads to re-making/re-imagining/disrupting ideas of national/local spaces and places
- Borderline spaces and subjectivities caused by conflict, human displacement and material degradation, and the affective and resilient practices by which those affected adapt and recover these spaces for varied forms of occupation and dwelling.

David Beynon
University of Tasmania

Transcultural Place-making in the Geographical/Global South

Tasmania is statistically Australia's least culturally diverse state, but this is changing. In recent years, refugees from Bhutan, Afghanistan, Sudan and other locations have instigated trajectories of spatial occupation and recontextualization, turning areas of its cities into sites of diasporic and intercultural encounter and contestation. The presentation will concentrate on Launceston, and more particularly its suburb of Mowbray, where recent immigrants' socio-spatial practices are generating economic, social and cultural opportunities through acts of transcultural placemaking. While partially echoing earlier developments in mainland states, current changes in Tasmania suggest possibilities for more broadly reimagining architectural futures across Australia's smaller centres and regional areas.

Md Mizanur Rashid
Deakin University

Counter Narrative: Architectural Culture of the 'Malays' in Cocos/ Keeling Island

The narrative of our built environment is centred on the understanding of human experience, memories, rituals and social history that shapes the architectural culture of a place. Hence, the architecture in the collective memory sits intrinsically at the intersection of multiple narratives as palimpsest. Migration and movement of people further complicates the phenomenon by questioning what is borrowed, authentic, and reconstituted as identity through time and space. Citing the case of small diasporic group in Australia, 'The Cocos Malay', and the paper thus argues for the need of re-centering our position to interpret the architectural culture of minor diasporic communities. It raises questions about gaps, or histories untold, as well as necessitate the need to examine hybridised forms and shared architectural narratives to counter the apparently myopic but persistent representation of supposedly authentic forms of a larger tradition, in this case 'Malay' architecture.

Anoma Pieris

The University of Melbourne

Border thinking through border camps

The legal condition of Statelessness or the withdrawal of protections of a nation state does not strip individuals of forms of political consciousness shaped by national cultural belonging. Instead, as evident in spatial and material survival strategies in wartime border camp environments, awareness of individual rights, minority cultural identification and sensitivity to national and transnational political developments converge in multi-layered forms of political consciousness. These sensibilities are later subsumed by uniform and assimilatory models of host - nation-sovereignty. The presentation examines the material culture of incarcerated Japanese internees and prisoners of war in the USA and Australia in an effort to unpack these complexities.

Macarena de la Vega de León

The University of Melbourne

Diasporic Histories: Migrations of Architectural Historians

Just as architectural history is challenged by the architecture of migrant communities, its writing is impacted by the migrations of architectural historians. Migration patterns have become part of the project of globalisation and they influence not only the practice of architecture, but also the construction of architectural narratives. Building on Esra Ackan's formulation of translation as a method of writing intertwined histories, I argue that the foreign historian is a "rejuvenating force, rather than a threat." This paper proposes a reflection (even self-reflection) on the impact of migration in the writing of architectural history in Australia and New Zealand.

Katherine Bartsch, Maryam Gusheh, Mizanur Rashid, & Dijana Alic

University of Adelaide; Monash University; Deakin University; & UNSW.

The Australian Mosque Today

This project aims to investigate collaborations between architects and Muslim communities in Australia. The project will analyse ten mosques, from design consultation through to construction, completed since 2000. This focus on the professional design process will provide innovative insights into creative collaboration and cross-cultural engagement. Expected outcomes of this project include a significant, richly nuanced counter-narrative to pervasive, isolationist representations of Australian Muslim communities. The findings will be presented in scholarly publications and a major public exhibition to promote new knowledge about the place of Islam in Australia and to build faith (literally and metaphorically) in multicultural Australia.