

# Back to the Land

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## Land Scale

In what he describes as “Architecture’s Geographic Turns,” David Gissen explains the field’s embrace of the territorial scale, both conceptually and as a question of representation, as “less a wholly new form of practice or an abandonment of a previous generation’s critical discourse than an actualization of the contemporary links between the discipline of architectural theory and geography.”<sup>1</sup> This instinct and the history of architecture’s thinking about territories resonates with a post-critical graphic proliferation of “datascares” and the recasting of architecture as a technique of organising and mediating systems.<sup>2</sup> Rather than extend the early-twenty-first-century “turns” in a novel direction, however, recent scholarship on the relationship of architecture to land and property has instead taken up a new way of understanding architecture’s historical situation, and hence architecture itself, as an historically contingent discipline. One line of enquiry, for instance, makes visible the role of those “hidden” resources upholding not only the cities they surround and the technologies underpinning the city-not-city complex, but also a concept of architecture undergirded by industrial extraction and production—binding architecture explicitly to the history of the city as a complex reliant on resources.<sup>3</sup> Another upholds the idea of a cultural landscape that can be understood as rarefied in terms of corresponding to the way certain highly regarded buildings and important sites of social significance can be monumentalised—or mourned, in their passing. This older idea extends architecture’s claims as a form of high culture to landscapes both natural and culturally formed, demanding a different set of descriptive categories to account for a change in scale, but within a consistent concept of culture and heritage.<sup>4</sup>

The more recent development we wish to consider, however, goes beyond drawing the territorial scale into the lens of architectural criticism and history. It also goes beyond using the contemporary tools of cartography and the data saturation they allow to locate architecture and cities in the midst of the life-cycles in which they undeniably participate. In what follows, we consider moves and methods that have long served the historiography of architecture, but which are unambiguously implicated in new kinds of historical evidence that have become more central in recent years to a fuller historical picture of

<sup>1</sup> Gissen 2008: 59. Compare his issue of *Architectural Design (AD)* (2010).

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, Abrams and Hall 2006. It is, in this sense, an extension of a direction of architectural enquiry and action declared in such projects as Greco 1964.

<sup>3</sup> As disparate examples, consider Osman 2018: 45–80; Aureli, 2011: 47–84; Bremner 2023; and the review of it in Ledger-Lomas 2023; and the H. Allen Brooks Travelling Fellowship reports by Ludewig (2023–24).

<sup>4</sup> Cp. Longstreth 2008.

architecture's past: balancing historical centres with “new” territories, and hence the architecture of colonial powers with colonial possessions—historically, and in the present-day persistence of those conditions and their effects.

We turn, therefore, to the methodological space between evidence and purpose, in which architecture-as-architecture certainly figures, but on terms at odds with the most ingrained of our disciplinary habits and their unstinting attention to the artful building and the architect as a kind of artist. This starting point is consistent with the consequences of a half-century-long practice of conceptualising architecture's edges through historical enquiry. That practice has long challenged the most ingrained scholarly habits, pushing the edges of what we know of architecture in its history. Here, we approach architecture as the monument and its echoes: architecture as well as architecture (“mere” building), and architecture (as an analogue). Authorship takes on a multivalent character: no longer (simply) questions of composition and significance, but of agency within a system defined by imperial powers, Indigenous peoples, pastoralists, surveyors, and markets. The architectural history that emerges from this move, we argue, comes closer to forms of historiography asking questions of imperial and colonial conditions, and the operations of capital in the modern world, offering conscientious resistance to the neutrality of architecture-as-artful-object even as it goes further and further from an idea of architectural history as a kind of reservoir of ideas and measures for architecture alone.

In what follows, then, we describe a relationship between architecture and land being formed through the recent historiography of architecture, in which architecture is subordinated to the politics of land as architecture's (political, cultural, material) precondition. This has been especially prevalent, and especially compelling, in those extra-European settings where land has been acquired as territory, or property, by force or deceit, through the processes of colonisation and settlement. The frame of this line of enquiry is, consequently, chronologically limited to the modern era of empires and their afterlives. As a limit, however, it allows us to ask: what kind of history of architecture might result from an idea of architecture that begins first with the “architecture” of the property on which it is built, and (beyond Europe, within this chronological frame) a foundation of dispossession?<sup>5</sup> The first thing to say, then, is that this limit need not be itself geographical.<sup>6</sup> The flows of resources, expertise, techniques, and power serve what some still regard as the centre, as much as what the centre might still call the periphery.

## Original Sin

The years since the turn of the century have seen efforts to figure architecture in fields of a territorial scale and within long-standing but long-overlooked urban-agricultural relationships.<sup>7</sup> This has served, in many respects, to cover over a set of deeper historical relationships that scholarship on the relationship between labour, race and the advent of modern settler-colonisation have not only made clear, but urgent in the current period of accountabil-

5 This essay documents our ongoing conversations across a series of intersecting projects in order to understand the conceptual stakes of land for the history of architecture. It is, first of all, a necessary extension and corrective to Leach 2010; but it likewise pursues themes tested in Andrew Leach, “Doing Architectural History,” Stuckeman Lecture, Penn State University, State College, PA, January 22, 2020. Most recently, it has been informed by Ludewig's research under the Brooks Fellowship (see note 3, above), and our collaboration on the project “Mapping the Frontiers of Private Property in Australia,” supported by the Australian Research Council (Discovery Project no. 240100395). On the latter, see this early article by the full project team: Rogers, et al. 2023.

6 We describe a disciplinary reorientation also predicated in, for instance, Hertweck (2018, 2020). We thank one of our reviewers for identifying this and other correspondences with the argument above.

7 Cp. Koolhaas and Bantal 2020–21.

ity, in which intellectual work, too, is invited to test its own complicity with processes once regarded as safely distant from it. What has land been for the history of architecture? The answer depends on how architecture has been historicised. At the outset of his final book, Manfredo Tafuri described the advent of representation for architecture as “an ‘original sin’ that demands exculpation”—the presence of which a self-reflective architecture can sense, and for which an alert historiography of architecture ought to account.<sup>8</sup> The originality of this sin, however, relies on its effects on both the extent of architecture’s historical field (for Tafuri, a modern history of architecture conceived first as a project, in the realm of the unrealised) and of architecture in history (for Tafuri, a product of the labour of the architect and those, like the *proto*, working in his manner). The advent of constructed orthographic and perspectival drawing is only an original sin so long as the consequences of that sin lie with a fault in architecture’s relationship with representation: in *Ricerca del rinascimento*, the gap between reality and the (ideologically constrained) future towards which the architect’s labour aims.

It is not difficult to recast architecture of the modern age as an agent and embodiment of colonisation, and hence of an operation of capitalism contingent on the acquisition of land as property—as a tool of imperial expansion (military encampments, reservation school buildings, courthouses and gaols, rural towns, etc.); as a permanent marker of an empire’s intended endurance (town halls, larger courthouses, agricultural colleges, homesteads, and so forth); and as the evidence of the translation of that foreign occupation into capitalisation (farms and their buildings, roads and railways and ports, public administration buildings and the structures of private enterprise).<sup>9</sup>

This conception of architecture is embedded in European history, but projected at a continental scale on to, for instance, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Americas, South-East Asia, Australia, the islands of the Pacific (as an oceanic accumulation), and every other major geography subject to European colonisation (or by former colonies acting in the manner of their progenitors, thinking of Australian and American experiments across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries). It is not an echo of the artful building of the historical cultural centres, or an occasional moment of resonance with them, but rather a state of normality for much of the globe—certainly, the world beyond Europe. This gives rise to an entirely different set of conditions than one of understanding site (or ground—to invoke the language of late-postmodernism) as a contextual condition of architectural design; or of boundaries as determining scale, density, or vectors of development, which is to say, through which site is understood on architecture’s own terms and absorbed into its techniques of representation. This conception of architecture, in its history, instead centres on something more fundamental—the question of what architecture is, and where its history begins. If this is in the colonial project, then architecture follows land.<sup>10</sup> What happens with land, before architecture, is therefore another kind of “original sin,” for another kind of architectural history.

<sup>8</sup> Tafuri 2006, xxvii. This sentence invokes the ambitions described in the preface to the second edition (1970) of *Tafuri’s Teorie e storia dell’architettura* (1968), in which he names his task as “a first step towards the acknowledgment of what architecture, as an institution, has meant up to now.”

<sup>9</sup> Not only is it not difficult, but in recent years widely acknowledged. Consider, among recent books that locate land in these terms, Bhandar 2018—one of a large number of significant works on this theme published by this press. Consider, as signals, the titles of a number of recent sessions at the annual meeting of the Society of Architectural Historians, as it parses questions of land in relation to architecture as a question of history: “Designing the Global Countryside,” chaired by Ijlal Muzaffar and Petros Phokaides; and “Labor and Landscape,” chaired by Jay Cephas and John D. Davis; and “Architecture of Extraction in the Atlantic World,” chaired by Luis-Gordo-Peláez and Paul Neill (all 2021); “Architectures of the South: Land, Bodies and Violence,” chaired by Catalina Mejía Moreno and Huda Tayod (2022); “Colonial Surveys,” chaired by Samia Henni and Dalal Msaed Alsayer; “On Belonging: Architecture and Property Law,” chaired by Lisa Haber-Thomson; “Lines of Property and Regimes of Ownership,” chaired by Peter Christensen and Claire Zimmerman; “Rewriting Architectural History through Reparative Descriptionism,” chaired by Martien de Vletter and Michelle Joan Wilkinson (all 2023); “The Long Histories of Land, Value, and Climate Change,” chaired by Deepa Ramaswamy and Dalia Munenzon; “Beyond Food: Uprooting the Architecture of Agriculture,” chaired by Ruth W. Lo and Samantha L. Martin; and “Architecture, Planning, and the Law in the Early Modern Spanish World,” chaired by Juan Luis Burke and Manuel Sánchez García (all 2024). This is not an exhaustive list, and does not account for individual papers within sessions framed in terms other than those with the most explicit signalling. One cannot find a comparable concentration of such topics in the years leading up to 2020 as is evidenced in this conference cycle in the years since.

<sup>10</sup> This notion of architecture commencing with colonisation can likewise be read against an idea of “traditional” or “vernacular” architecture as distinct from forms of architecture inflected by, or imported from, the European tradition. Disciplinary territorialisation has regularly aligned the latter with architectural history, while the former draws upon, or is found within, archaeology, anthropology and ethnography. Consider the entry in the Cambridge *Encyclopedia of Australian Architecture* dedicated to “Aboriginal Architecture” (Memmott 2011), distinct from the concept of architecture activated throughout the balance of this reference. (We imagine that the same book, edited more than a decade later, would treat this eighteenth-century boundary on different terms.)

If the history of architecture is not anchored to the figure of the architect, such as he might have been identified in the Italian peninsula, in France, or Germany, or Britain, but instead to histories both indexed and enabled by thoughtful building in aid of the rise of global capitalism, and not least by means of the exploitation of “new worlds” in service of the Old, then representation hardly addresses the full extent of architecture’s imbrications with modern world history as its medium, index, or vehicle. In one sense, this could not be further from a form of architectural history that takes up the task of understanding how buildings or aggregates of building came to be in its strictest form. Conversely, though, the question of origin and circumstance has already been shown as a natural complement to those older, more familiar modes of locating architecture in (its) history.

Consistent across these developments are a series of themes that bind architecture to land: race and labour, colonial territoriality, property formation and transfer, extraction, and governmentality. This land is not stable, as a ground-plane, but read through forms of representation and intervention that render it something other than what it once was. To name an example close to us, on the Australian continent, Country (in Indigenous terms) after 1770 becomes property, defined by legal devices, as well (from the 1790s) as by both fences and defensive practices, upon which building becomes an improvement; what happens thereupon becomes the property owner’s (or leaseholder’s) contribution to markets that might be local, or half a world away (especially after the invention of the Torrens system)<sup>11</sup>, and for which they are compensated through sale of capital accumulation. A lot of this work still, however, presupposes a material separation between land and architecture, as though one can simply study the details of a farmhouse, or the disposition of a sawmill, while acknowledging the deeper relations with land and property as a field in which it participates. That is to say, land remains the setting for an architecture that bears ideas that can be understood through historical enquiry. The nature of the relationship might change (becoming, say, more intensive under industrial conditions, etc.), but the historiographic categories themselves (land and building) remain firmly in place.

If we adopt Kathryn Yusoff’s axiomatic formulation that “every building is a mine” (2023) what does this mean for histories of architecture? One rather solipsistic way to describe “the content of architectural history” is as “architecture, historically considered,”<sup>12</sup> but the contingency built into each term holds the other to account. Architecture in history is delineated by the operations of historical enquiry and representation, which responds in turn to a concept of architecture introduced to history by architecture itself. There is no single authority on which either architecture or history can rely, which means that every novel account of architecture by historical work is a matter of fragile suspension. The nature of historical enquiry shapes that which it draws towards its questions, and hence the legitimation of historical works, themes, techniques and figures that history bestows. We therefore locate architecture as a form of cultural object in relation to land. But we also locate

<sup>11</sup> For an historical perspective on Torrens title in Canada, for instance, see Taylor 2022, and especially his historical account of its conception and early implementation in the Australian colonies (3–30).

<sup>12</sup> Leach 2010: 76.

it within a complex, or cast it as a complex, in which architecture-as-object and an analogous *architecture* of possession and dispossession both respond to the larger matter of colonialism and its capital through the production and delineation of property. Such works of architecture as homesteads and grain silos, or such grey architectures as tractor sheds and labourer dormitories<sup>13</sup> indeed manifest the possession and working of land (architecture-as-mine). But architecture-as-object also, and more importantly, defines architecture in general as the entire territory one claims to lawfully inhabit—a system, that is, in which the surveyor’s boundary line serves as the wall once did.

13 Cp. Bremner 2016: 75–76.

We argue the need to declare a methodological turn towards an idea of architecture indistinguishable from land (and its politics)—akin to the turn of the 1970s and ‘80s towards an architecture indistinguishable from its representation, and representability. Within that turn, we can begin to name those projects in scholarship and criticism that show its promise, or describe our own efforts to locate architecture as a question of land (within the history of architecture itself). A number of recent projects (two in North America, two in and around Australia) that trade in this turn therefore suggest how historians of architecture—and, hence, those who draw on their work—might move past this material separation, locating architecture not only within, but as constituent of, the problem of land, and vice versa. In this present moment, confronting the effects of the imperial project, it is not surprising that these begin with the problem of dispossession and the possibility of restitution.

## Landed Histories of Architecture

Consider, for instance, the work of the Canadian collective Architects Against Housing Alienation (AAHA), who curated their national pavilion at the Venice Architecture Biennale in 2023. Through graphic means and a polemic discourse slung between Venice and a series of corresponding Canadian cities, a contemporary national housing crisis was positioned as “a direct result of [First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples] to connect to their natural and cultural homelands.”<sup>14</sup> Both in its demands and in its curatorship, the project proposed solutions to problems with urban housing (in general) and Indigenous housing (in particular) as predicated by more than 90% of the land taken up as British Columbia (BC) in 1858 being held in Crown ownership rather than its original custodianship. While this percentage alters province to province from one coast of contemporary *c\an\ad\*a (as they style it) to the other, it remains that, overall, nine acres in ten are held in “public” ownership. As activism, the project’s ambition to recast alienation from housing provision to a deeper alienation from land is unambiguous. The historical project it demands is to locate architecture not simply as the medium of a contemporary crisis, but of the alienation on which it rests. This extends back past the colony’s formation (in the case of BC) to the machinery and markets of the Hudson Bay Company, which commodified this land in the first instance, and used architecture to do it—the “Architecture” of Fort Vancouver (fig. 1), for instance, and those other structures that ensured entry into this

14 AAHA 2023.

**Fig. 1** Lt Herney Warre, Fort Vancouver, ca. 1845–46, from *Sketches in North America and the Oregon Territory*, London, 1848. University of Washington Libraries Special Collections.



territory. It also locates as a subject of criticism and history the *architecture* of the devices that placed this territory in a new world of trade and exchange. To render the machinery of Crown ownership itself alien, and hence unnatural, as a state of affairs, requires attention. Attending to this machinery and its effects within architectural history is both a response to the politicisation of the cultural and legal alienation described above, but it is also, and importantly, one predicate among many for direct political action against the long-term legacies of colonial dispossession.

Recent work by Keller Easterling has been advanced on similar terms, albeit at a larger scale. Her ongoing mapping project, ATTTNT (fig. 2), identifies strips of land around 1,000 feet wide, spanning the Appalachian Trail (AT), the Trail of Tears (TT), and the Natchez Trace (NT) in the US, that together form a proposed “spine for a national infrastructure of reparations land trusts.”<sup>15</sup> Here, land is open for “rescripting” through transfer from state ownership as a form of redress for Black and Indigenous dispossession and subjugation under white supremacy. Rather than hosting infrastructures designed to circulate commodities, ATTTNT regards land as itself a form of infrastructure, capable of redistributing value and supporting forms of political order beyond those sanctioned by settler colonial capitalism historically. The project as architecture, connecting the developments named by Gissen as a “geographical turn,” here evidences a way of thinking of dispossession as the original sin described above—working backwards through its effects to isolate the lapsarian instant as one in which our received present and possible alternatives began to diverge. The projective work of architecture, in this instance, isolates historical moments, and, in pointing to consequent counter-histories that might have followed them, shows how architecture’s own tools can locate architecture’s stakes in histories of land.

15 Audisho et al. 2024.

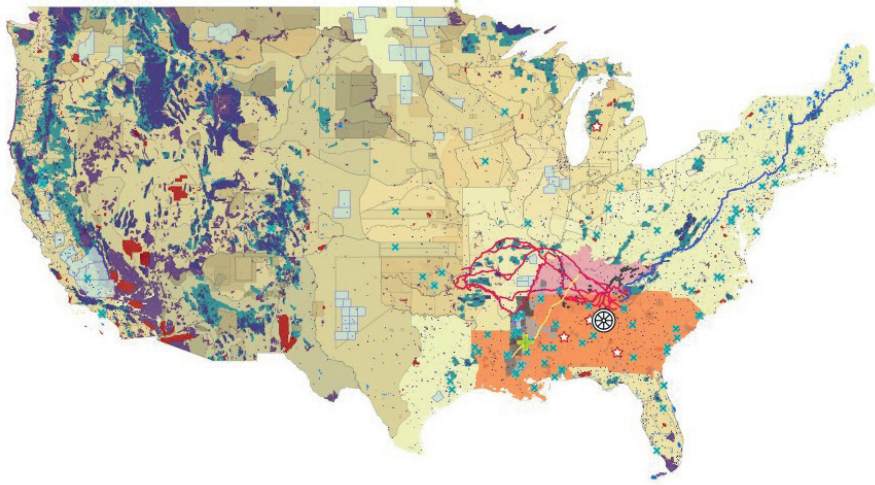


Fig. 2 ATTTNT—A Planetary Line for Reparations, 2024. Courtesy of Keller Easterling.

The place of land within political economy is explored by Jasper Ludewig in his H. Allen Brooks Fellowship project (2023-24), which investigates the spatial history of the Indo-Pacific superphosphate industry at the turn of the twentieth century—in the south Pacific, and in systems that bind those sites to imperial and sub-imperial powers. His analysis charts a triple displacement of land, understood as a cultural and technical medium, whereby the rock phosphate deposits on Nauru (fig. 3), Banaba, Christmas Island, Makatea and Angaur were exploited to produce the chemical fertiliser superphosphate, which in turn fuelled Australia’s expanding wheat industry, which was itself a major agent of settler colonial dispossession in the Australian colonies. Making land productive by intervening in the biogeochemical cycle thus involved a telescoping of space across scales, tethering the geological material excavated from the Pacific and Indian Oceans to chemical processes controlled in urban factories in the colonial metropole, to yet more chemical processes in the engineered soils of settler colonial agriculture. Buildings, equipment and infrastructure stitched these scales together at every turn, securing remote material deposits for a white ethnostate that understood itself through its extraction of value from stolen and supposedly unproductive land. Around Ludewig’s project we might gather others that reinforce its historiographical claims, such as a succeeding Brooks Fellowship project by Michele Tenzon on the palm oil industry in Sub-Saharan Africa (2024); in the premises of the seminar “Cotton: An Architectural History of Nineteenth-Century Globalization”<sup>16</sup>; or even the relationship between extraction, resources and mar-

16 Kockelkorn, et al. 2000.

Fig. 3 Steel cantilevers and conveyor system on Nauru in c. 1932. Maslyn Williams Nauru Photographs, State Library of New South Wales, PXB 293, Image 116.



itime territory in André Tavares’s *Architecture Follows Fish* (2024)—a corollary to an architectural history that figures land, but a most informative one.

Improving land was in fact a key justification for Indigenous dispossession according to the doctrine of *terra nullius*. As recent work has shown, settler colonial contexts clarify the extent to which architectural production was implicated in processes of property formation and, therefore, Indigenous dispossession. In nineteenth-century Australia, historical accounts of the division of land in preparation for its sale in townships and rural landholdings routinely stressed the importance of building and construction, alongside clearing, draining, cultivating and enclosing land, as both material practices of capitalisation, as well as legal manoeuvres upon which the alienation of land from the state depended. Colonial property law established minimum requirements for the improvement of land within certain timeframes, marshalling the colonist’s transformations of their lot as a string of physical evidence read against the legal record of ownership. Brenna Bhandar has argued that “if the possession of land was (and remains) the ultimate objective of colonial power, then property law is the primary means of realizing this desire.”<sup>17</sup> Close study of colonial property formation reveals the inherent interdependency of such law and its spatial correlates, including architectural production. Moreover, the inherently processual nature of improvement introduces temporality and contingency to regimes of colonial dispossession, typically portrayed as uniform and absolute.<sup>18</sup> Legal scholars have argued that in conferring rights and obligations to landowners, property systems transform land into a tool of governance grounded in the state’s claim of sovereignty. The state’s conferral of power over land to individuals is, in this sense, an apportioning of sovereignty to landowners, contingent on the latter’s fulfilment of sanctioned forms of construction and development.<sup>19</sup> At stake in a history of what architecture does to land and how land informs architecture under settler colonialism is therefore not only the distribution of land ownership, but the evolution of colonial sovereignty itself. Attending to architecture’s transformation of the individual lot—a process conducted over time and in materially specific ways—to satisfy the requirements of property law is thus also to attend to the topography of Indigenous dispossession at the scale of the territory.

In the British colony of New South Wales, the discourse and exhibition *Dhuluny: The War that Never Ended*<sup>20</sup> takes the Wiradjuri word for “truth” to bind the overlapping processes of informal settlement, the sale and granting of land, and the removal of Indigenous people to make way for colonial agriculture to acts of violence and resistance.<sup>21</sup> Architecture is at the centre of these events: a stone monument and flagpole to mark the first declaration of martial law in the colony; the fences defining boundaries recognisable to those who had newly arrived to the region, but entirely unfamiliar to those whose Country they had determined to occupy. We might follow Gapps and account for the history of this episode within a larger history of colonial violence. We might admit to this violence within the history of the modern town-

17 Bhandar 2018: 3.

18 Cp. Etherington and Ludewig 2023. This conversation extends work also explored as Etherington and Ludewig 2022, the published version of which is forthcoming.

19 See Storr 2022: 179–99; Cotula 2017: 220–82; Babie 2013: 1075–1108.

20 Jones, et al. 2024.

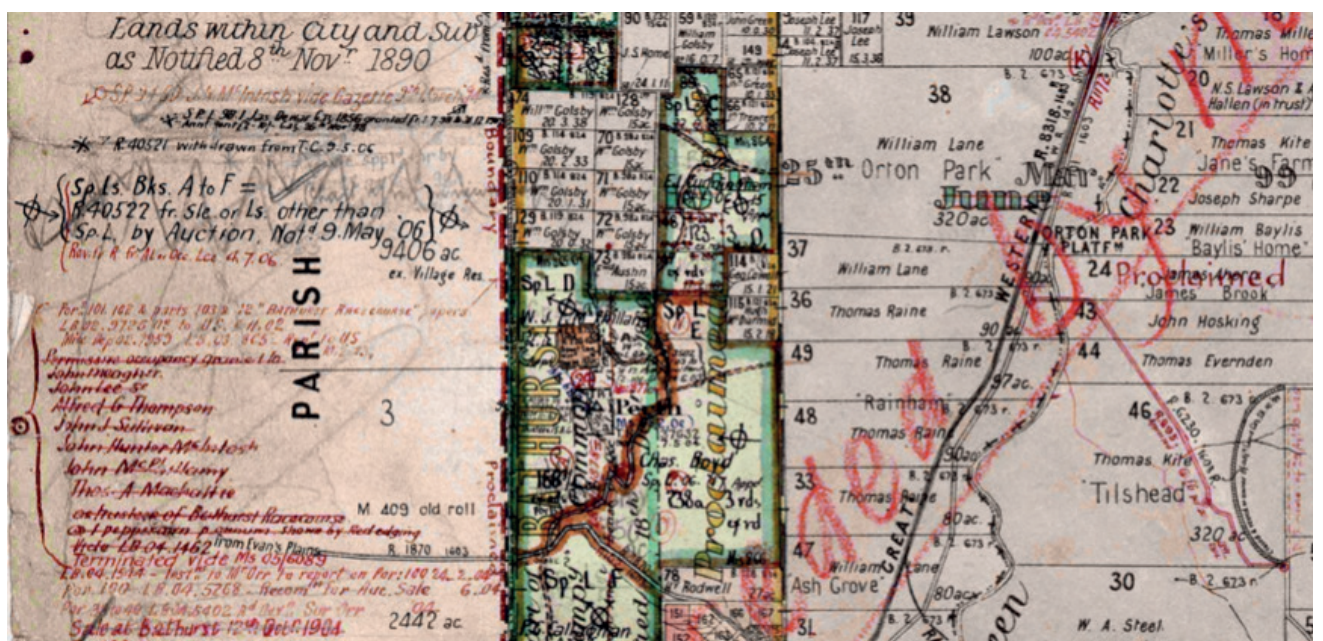
21 Gapps 2021.



ship of Bathurst in which it took place (fig. 4). We might, too, overlay the devices of land ownership upon sites of dispossession and violence, placing the benign geometries of settlement—topography rendered as irregular shapes, town plots as composed rows of comparable rectangles—into direct conversation with the acts of violence and removal that cleared the way for white occupation, and that kept reinstatement of Indigenous agriculture, mobilities, and other cultural customs in check. The appearance of this juxtaposition can be shocking, as the digital humanities project *Colonial Frontier Massacres, Australia, 1780 to 1930* has shown.<sup>22</sup> But as with the projects described above, figuring in the actions undertaken to secure and defend the land on which works of architecture are raised activates a wider and more problematic concept of architecture than that which ensures that nineteenth-century structures have the protection of heritage measures. This concept operates across monumental or intentioned structures (homesteads, courthouses, gaols) to the ancillary structures of military occupation (tents, parade grounds, flagpoles) or farming (from machines to the sheds in which they were stored), to those legal devices (topographical surveys, parish maps, property deeds) determining what can happen where, under British law, and allows us to appreciate a complex historical structure that can be read with the tools of the history of architecture. While historians of architecture might once have explained how and why certain buildings were realised as they were, the field is more than ever equipped to articulate ways in which architecture figured in alienations both legal and cultural. This takes us beyond the disciplinary capacity to read works of architecture and architectural drawings and other documents as evidence of decisions around the composition and realisation of works of architecture, but to those documents, and hence forms of analysis that have not, historically, been part of the architectural historian's training: recovering the very different kinds of evidence that accrues to precolo-

22 Ryan/Debernam, et al. 2017–22.

Fig. 4 Bathurst Parish Map (detail), 1896, Historical Lands Records, New South Wales.



nial conditions and subjects, which might include language, customs, forms of building, travel routes, and so one, and according them the same status as house plans, deeds of ownership, building supplier collateral and historical media. The challenge of this work is not to produce histories that simply speak to the present imperative to confront this history, but to write history in such a way as to re-establish the definition of architecture in these settings, such that it then has a history to tell.

### Land as Moment

In what ways, then, does a turn to land—its techniques, its materiality, its scale, and its history—constitute a novel development in the history of architecture? To place it before the history of architecture’s historical subject matter, including monumental works and the representation of both the architect’s intentions and the work in the world, is to undermine the conceptual stability of the architecture’s literal grounding—taking something solid and fact-bound and extending our enquiry into its layers. This constitutes a redisciplining of architecture as something held in equilibrium with the work of surveyors, cartographers, sales agents, and a range of informal practices (grazing, squatting, mining, and so forth) that approximate the claims made by architecture at different scales. Beyond some signals as to how we might proceed, locating land as part of a system organised around architecture, as we have here conceived of it, rather than as a neutral counterpoint to those ideas we have ourselves received through disciplinary transmission, still remains ahead. History’s first question is “what happened?” The disciplinary uptakes of the lessons of social justice that we have observed entering the historiography of architecture through the question of land neither turn scholarship away from building—artful or mundane—nor render historical scholarship a set of pathways leading to a predetermined conclusion. The more complete form of architectural history towards which these developments are, instead, oriented locate works of architecture and architectural systems in an historical field that does not assume the neutrality of property, materials, or signification. Indeed, only the most naïve works of architectural history of the last decades would make such an assumption. Figuring in land, property politics and the mechanics of dispossession is methodologically akin to reading the history of architecture through the operations of money, or power, or gender—with just as much at stake. A moment is both a point in time and a pivot around which something turns, propelled by forces beyond itself. As it signals a more complete form of history, it exposes new lacunae to address—as these processes of disciplinary reassessment always have done. This moment, though, of locating land as part of the history of architecture, and not simply its prehistory, constitutes an adjustment of scale, temporality, politics and ideology, and purpose—and through it, a new basis for understanding architecture’s mediation of the relationship of the past to the present.

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