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Re-reading Singapore's 'Black and White' architectural heritage: The aesthetic affects and affectations of adaptive reuse

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[7343 words]

Abstract

Colonial period military estates in Singapore are being gentrified for adaptive reuse producing high-end hospitality and retail venues for expatriate and tourist consumption. These include the feted 'Black and White' residential enclaves synonymous with Singapore's tropical aesthetic. But underlying this reinvention is a disturbing history of wartime repurposing under the Japanese Imperial Army that temporarily destabilised the meanings and representations of these buildings. The seemingly undisturbed architectural typologies of barracks, bungalows and timber huts were backdrops to war, military occupation and captivity. Given the stigmas associated with this transformation, these histories have been muted in the appropriation of these buildings.

This paper explores how the aesthetic affects and affectations that accompany adaptive reuse may conceal or disclose unsettling histories. It contrasts contemporary celebration of these revitalised historical neighbourhoods, to their very different representation by wartime captives.

Key words: aesthetic affects, Black and White bungalows, elite, subaltern, Pacific War, camps, typologies

Introduction

Social histories of oppression, assimilation or exclusion of locals present particular challenges to the adaptive reuse of colonial period buildings in postcolonial societies. The opacity of segregated residential enclaves to Asian settlers—except as service staff—compounds these difficulties. These former social asymmetries are often neutralised in their contemporary reinvention as aspirational environments associated with Western expatriate lifestyles or tourism economies. Colonial travellers' accounts, photographs and drawings, despite their orientalist overtones, frequently record architectural elements which designers proceed to emulate.¹ Local cultural features, colonial ambience and ingratiating service cultures sometimes become conflated in these typologies. Climate-sensitive and hybrid processes underlying colonial architectural practices inspire strains of regionalism. Such illusory and ambiguous representations of tropical Asian architecture have dominated vanity publications for decades.² Their aesthetic affects and affectations are manipulated for various ends.

The term 'aesthetic affects', as used in this paper, refers to the ways in which attitudinal or emotive cues are conveyed through spatial and material features, influencing the reception and interpretation of architecture. Such cues are not deliberately semiotic, but instead present an ambiguous sensibility, in this case of an environment associated with exclusivity. They may involve affectations, for example, in resort architectures, where simple vernacular dwelling practices are reconfigured as markers of taste, or elite or even religious decorative elements give symbolic status to hotel façades. The opposite is also apparent in our recognition of subaltern realities through their material or aesthetic affects. These may be signs of physical degradation associated with impoverished or displaced populations and historically with native environments in colonies. Vernacular architecture, for example, has multiple affects as a subaltern form of material expression appropriated by elites.

An exploration of aesthetic affects is useful for disturbing the essentialist cultural values attributed to specific building typologies; attributes sometimes used to perpetuate tourism's fantasies. While tourist populations may not question dehistoricised values, given their temporary tenure and expectations of comfort, this is not always the case. Visitors to former Second World War prisoner of war (POW) sites, adventurers of a previous era and travellers of a kind, tend to historicise these architectural typologies. Their stories of violence formerly experienced in these sites alter these buildings' scripts. This has been particularly true of Singapore's Changi Prison Museum, whose creation and persistence, even after the prison was demolished in 2004, meets the needs of visiting veterans and ex-POWs.³

This paper contrasts the postcolonial repurposing of elite colonial architectures with their wartime adaptations. It uses a group of architectural typologies: barracks, bungalows and native troop quarters, associated with military "Black and White" housing estates, to uncover an otherwise neglected political history. "Black and White" refers neither to their racist origins nor their social segregation but their colour palette of black painted timber-work against white plastered masonry walls; arts and crafts renditions of the Anglo Indian bungalow with all the familiar elements such as hipped roofs, high ceilings, overhanging eaves, encircling verandahs, portico and tall jalousie windows.⁴ This typology has variants including two-storey bungalows with generous living spaces, two bedroom, three-storey walk-up apartments and individual contiguous cottage units; test cases for inter-war developments in building science (Fig 1).⁵ As noted by author Julian Davidson, their singular architectural tradition is part of the colonial legacy but also evidence of climatic responses in situated building types; a hybrid of Eastern and Western influences.⁶ He attributes their neglect in previous studies of Singapore's architecture to the type's early appearance as

government or corporate housing from 1919 to the 1920s and lack of popularity in the private sector.⁷ Davidson describes military Black and Whites as a late flowering of the same type during the inter war fortification of Singapore against possible Japanese aggression during the 1930s. This was a period when bases were built, military presence was increased and military estates were planned as part of the “Singapore Strategy” for defence in the Far East.⁸ And although interrupted by Japanese occupation (February 1942–August 1945), and decolonization (from 1957 onwards), these former military buildings have persisted, handed over to the Singapore government by the British military when they departed Singapore in 1971 and were rented out by the land authority.⁹ Their revival and repurposing blurs the lines between historical architecture, as early evidence of the tropical aesthetic, and their postmodern cultural invention as “the Singapore house”.¹⁰ The recent gentrification of military Black and Whites suggests a new phase in adaptive reuse strategies.

<Figure 1 near here>

Adaptive reuse of colonial period typologies in Singapore

The adaptive reuse of colonial period buildings was initiated during the economic recession of the 1980s when the shophouse districts of Telok Ayer area were redeveloped as “China Town”.¹¹ This highly controversial transformation, for a population predominantly of Chinese ethnicity, set the pattern for subsequent approaches to built heritage.¹² The tightly knit shop house properties on Duxton Road, an area of some notoriety in the past,¹³ were converted into high-end restaurants distinct from the wet market food centres frequented by the general public. Similar processes of urban revitalization were initiated elsewhere in Singapore. Boat Quay, an embankment of warehouses and shophouses along the Singapore River, was gazetted for conservation in 1986 and developed into a pedestrian mall flanked by bars and

restaurants.¹⁴ Former colonial institutions were reinvented as restaurant, retail and entertainment venues, most notably the Roman Catholic convent and orphanage of the Holy Infant Jesus, restored in 1996 as ‘Chijmes’.¹⁵ The famous Raffles Hotel was declared a national monument and underwent extensive renovation between 1989 and 1991. Many of these spaces had messy histories of segregated colonial and subject relations, but these former associations receded as the new facilities took shape.

The Black and White military estates were designed as separate planned environments, and conveyed the ethos of colonial society, its exclusivity, racial superiority and also general apathy. Despite the influx of Europeans due to military expansion, the cultivated aloofness and disregard for the masses living in squalor around them exacerbated the divisions of the colonial social structure producing an environment of mutual mistrust, notes historian Mary Turnbull.¹⁶ Jiat-Hwee Chang describes these barrack environments as deliberately separated to prevent contamination by native spaces, and as examples of Aihwa Ong’s notion of positive exception, which focuses on minorities who “enjoy political accommodation and conditions not granted to the rest of the population” (thereby inverting Giorgio Agamben’s negative conception of the sovereign as excluding and denying protection to certain subjects).¹⁷ These qualities of separation and exclusivity, although not imposed by the state, inadvertently recur in the adaptive reuse of these buildings, due to the conditions that govern their rental in prestigious locales.

State properties such as the bungalows shown in Figure 1, are high-end rentals given the premium on space in the land-scarce city state. They are typically rented by businesses for their executives. The conditions of rental for the Mount Pleasant area in 2010 stipulated a minimum working capital of fifty percent of the annual rental, a proven cash flow record,

residential or related business for at least five years, expertise in heritage preservation and proven track record in top-tier hospitality.¹⁸ Discussing the Tanglin estate, the Singapore Land Authority publication advises that

A key tenet of estate re-profiling is to creatively extract both social and economic value from these state properties through cluster development. While awaiting the finalization of long-term development plans, new leases of life can now be obtained for Black and White clusters and other heritage collections in the interim period by making them available for adaptive reuse or realigning them collectively to target new niche markets.¹⁹

<Figure 2 near here>

The 2012 conversion of Gillman Barracks on Alexandra Road (Fig. 2) into an arts hub and Tanglin Village into a “unique lifestyle enclave” with restaurants, shops and other high-end services, stand out as examples of this approach.²⁰ Both these environments were concentrated colonial military complexes with varied building configurations, symptomatic of the type. Their asymmetric, compact plans, pared down classicism and absence of decorative detailing are attributed by Davidson to military influence.²¹ He describes buildings at Alexandra Park, Ridley Park, Changi, Seletar Air Base and Sembawang Naval Base that followed this style. The military flats at Portsdown Road and the Royal Air Force headquarters at Seletar shifted to what he calls “Tropical Deco” a later variation of the style.²² *Black and White: our homemade heritage*, the Singapore Land Authority’s (SLA) 2017 publication likewise features a range of properties (from among 500 state properties leased by the SLA) at Malcolm Road, Mount Pleasant, Scotts Road, Tanglin, Alexandra Park, Seletar, Sembawang and Changi (Fig 3).²³ While there is some brief mention of battle scenes and

military origins, the overarching representations in these image-rich coffee table books is of a leisurely tropical life-style illustrated through multiple photographs of furnished verandah spaces overlooking luscious vegetation. Above all they highlight the luxury of privacy and premium on space.

<Figure 3 near here>

It seems that the SLA's rental policy in Black and White neighbourhoods invites social and spatial asymmetries. Elite spaces in the colonial period, their short term rental largely by expatriates seemingly continues a trend of socio-spatial division based on class and, coincidentally, nationality. These aspirational environments require levels of adaptation that come with greater affluence and forms of tropical nostalgia which Singaporeans do not necessarily subscribe to, since housing security is based on more permanent solutions in the multi-storey public housing environments provided by the state. Eighty percent of Singaporeans live in these apartments across twenty three towns and three estates.²⁴ The high end private properties preferred by wealthy Singaporeans tend to be high rise condominiums and 'good class bungalows', not the neglected but charming Black and White houses associated with colonial life. While the SLA publication cites the importance of capturing the 'souls' of these houses, and bringing their wonderful stories to light, the commentaries by many Caucasian expatriate tenants highlight these social and cultural asymmetries.²⁵ "There is a vibe here that just makes me feel like I am on holiday" says Heike Friedrich of her house at Changi.²⁶ The sense of space "gives you a tremendous sense of privacy and luxury", observe Dr. Ooi Kee Beng and Littly Sacker (69) of Seletar—"In an apartment you are immediately in a public space once you step out of your door".²⁷ Residents speak of

entertaining guests and maintaining a connection with the outdoors. For the majority of Singaporeans without landed housing, these are unattainable luxuries.

The wartime histories of these buildings occupy a narrow and seemingly inconsequential space. Perhaps the stigma associated with them has kept them out of these publications, as they would reduce the rental appeal of the buildings. But this is not necessarily true, observes Jon Cooper whose excavations at Adam Park for battlefield heraldry attracted interest and support from resident Western expatriates.²⁸ Cooper's work and that of heritage groups and the numerous social media sites that uncover wartime heritage has opened up a different way of knowing these buildings.²⁹

Wartime adaptation of colonial architectural typologies

The wartime adaptation of these colonial typologies is recorded between February 1942 and August 1945 when British colonial power was temporarily suspended due to their defeat by the Japanese.³⁰ Across three and a half years of occupation, the Japanese military administration repurposed numerous structures for their occupying forces and for incarcerating British, Dutch, Australian and New Zealander soldiers of the South West Pacific Command. The largest concentration of 52,200 POWs was in the Changi area, where the former military cantonment and Changi village formed a clustering of seven POW camps (covering twenty five kilometres).³¹ The barrack buildings were supplemented by rows of timber huts, army issue canvas tents and utility structures all fortified within barbed wire enclosures. Some 3,500 civilians were incarcerated in the Changi Gaol and later moved to the former Royal Air Force barracks at Sime Road. Since prisoner numbers far exceeded the capacity of these buildings, the camps were congested and space was at a premium.³² Numerous smaller camps for working parties distributed in other parts of the island utilised

available structures, including residential bungalows. Timber coolie quarters and hastily constructed timber and *attap* (woven palm frond) huts completed the wartime penal landscape.

These buildings formed backdrops to wartime histories. Singapore's purpose-designed resort environment Sentosa (meaning tranquility in Malay) was formerly Blakang Mati or 'death island' (in Malay), a former military facility and POW Camp. It was among several sites of the Sook Ching purges – the brutal killings of anti-Japanese Chinese civilians in early 1942.³³ The newly built Sembawang naval base was destroyed and abandoned in advance of the Japanese attack as part of the British 'scorched earth' policy. Gillman Barracks was the site of a fierce battle in February 1942. The suicides of several Japanese military officers there at the end of the war, darkened Tanglin's history.³⁴ From the estates documented in the SLA book, only Malcolm Road and Scotts Road were spared this violent history given that the island was small and the Japanese advanced southward across it from Malaya.

The wartime repurposing of the military estates uncovers a different adaptive reuse. As with the contemporary rental policies there was minimal adaptation to physical properties enabling a deceptive continuity of colonial period aesthetics. Wartime changes were not as legible in the architectural expression of the extant buildings. Clues to their incongruous accommodation are found in the photographs, drawings and memoirs of captives, collected in Australian and British archives.³⁵ Embedded in their descriptions is the sensation of entrapment in these formerly elite facilities. The adaptive 'abuse' of colonial buildings unsettles the familiar typologies.

The aesthetic affects of architectural typologies

Whereas the postcolonial adaptation of colonial period buildings enhanced their physical qualities to produce ‘elite’ affects fiscally beneficial to the government, the ‘subaltern’ affects of wartime transformation conveyed British defeat. These two contrasting examples of adaptive reuse utilised similar typologies. Material dereliction and overcrowding combined to degrade *pucca* colonial structures formerly associated with exclusivity, while the same residential typologies were elevated post-war by re-purposing as elite domiciles.

Such affective manipulations of social value are not unique to the ex-colonial architecture of Singapore. They are evident, for instance, in the deliberately semiotic aesthetic projections of the stealth architecture of Los Angeles.³⁶ There, the characterisation of entropy in banal façades deflects attention from and thereby secures the luxurious elite environments secreted within the buildings. The dissonant material affects of “ethno-architecture” described by Mirjana Lozanovska in her recent anthology reveal that unfamiliar compositions and culturally distinctive elements of immigrant houses provoke bourgeois aesthetic anxieties regarding good and bad taste.³⁷

Affect Theory purportedly offers new ways of theorizing “the social” beyond social constructions of meaning. This method has several advocates including Deleuze and Guattari, Brian Massumi, Sarah Ahmed and Nigel Thrift, and builds on feminist, queer and psychoanalytical theories of the body, extending these further to bodily encounters with non-human material affects.³⁸ Affective materialities, interpreted as non-human pre-personal intensities, steer architecture away from postmodern semiotics to sensorial cues. Autonomic bodily responses and technological affects are seen as distinct from self-conscious emotional or social-textual interpretations of buildings. Such affects while preceding social interpretation nevertheless uncover muted social dimensions of a physical space. Aesthetic

affects conveyed through architectural form, materiality and programmatic use are often interpreted through these historicised social values.

Aesthetic affects offer helpful cues for dealing with difficult pasts, because images, sounds or stories may point to the violence suppressed in official histories. The visual documentation of the 1992 siege of Sarajevo recorded in an exhibition of “Warchitecture” by the Bosnia-Herzegovina Association of Architects is an example where representations of physical destruction provide affective evidence of cultural genocide.³⁹ Jonathan Wynn uses the abandoned town of Rhyolite in Las Vegas and Daniel Libeskind’s Jewish Museum—two examples of spaces layered with absent voices, texts and subtexts—to illustrate ‘the affective turn’ through architectural studies.⁴⁰ In Yael Navaro-Yashin’s *The Make Believe Space*, the material remnants of former Greek presence in post-partition northern Cyprus are read as an affective geography.⁴¹ Thus residual materialities capture un-selfconscious emotions and unsettling experiences, in the absence of their human subjects.

The architecture of the captives’ environments in the case of occupied Singapore is comparably deceptive. Designed to accommodate government officials, civilian populations or military troops, they projected a sense of colonial prowess, but also the sensibility of a privileged life. This was most evident in the Changi Cantonment, the expansively laid out facility of seven barrack complexes used as the main Japanese Prisoner of War Camp. It was built during an era of colonial experimentation in thermal comfort, troop hygiene and sanitation,⁴² adapted across Singapore during the 1920s and 1930s. The grand brick and mortar constructions with art deco details embodied the modernist spirit of the early twentieth century. Colonial Engineers developed typologies that could be applied across imperial territories with some climatic variations and these proto-types were disseminated in

successive revisions of the *Barracks Synopsis* notes Chang.⁴³ Until 1942, spaces like Changi Cantonment were regarded as exemplary military environments designed for the healthy accommodation of European troops. After February that year they would be regarded as spaces of penal confinement, disease and neglect. These radical transformations are communicated through soldier's accounts of the misappropriation of the architecture, the overcrowding of facilities and their mistreatment by the Japanese at that time.

Captives' stories of adaptive reuse

The turbulence of the weeks leading to the British surrender is captured in an account of the Raffles Hotel, a colonial establishment known for its elegance and sophistication, epitomising the life-style of the interwar years. Arriving there in early February soon after the British capitulated, retired seaman Captain WA Baker,⁴⁴ found it “more like the left luggage office of a railway station”, where fleeing civilians had dumped their belongings.⁴⁵ The troops were sleeping in the famous ball room, and using it as their temporary barracks. The room allotted to Captain Baker and his disabled wife, Fred, was littered with empty tins and cigarettes. The Japanese soldiers rifled through piles of suitcases to see what they could salvage. Some 350 civilians gathered in the hotel moved from room to room as numbers increased; fed on a diet of rice.

The wartime repurposing of this famous entertainment space sets the stage for the transformations that follow. While crowds of revellers had filled these halls in the past, congestion and litter was associated with ‘native quarters’ where colonial neglect and unequal spatial allocations had led to poor infrastructure, and overcrowding.⁴⁶ Colonial civilians like the Bakers, accustomed to being waited on by an amah and a house boy, were reduced to unwilling captives. The environmental changes that marked their misfortune subjected

colonial civilians to the kinds of treatment experienced by the subject races in the colony. At Changi Prison where the Bakers were subsequently incarcerated, the spaces designed to house Asian criminals now accommodated mainly Caucasian internees. In former military and civilian environments the change was more incongruous because elite programs had turned punitive.

TM Hart, a member of the First Selangor battalion in the Federated Malay States Volunteer Force observed in his diary,

In every building, every available square inch of floor space was used for sleeping accommodation. Each man was allowed a space 6 ft by 2 1/2 ft (1.8 m x .76 m) in which to live, eat, sleep, keep his kit and have his being. Gangways between rows of sleeping spaces were reduced to a minimum and practically non-existent. Meals were served and eaten out in the open except in bad weather when they were eaten in one's bed space. Beds were non-existent and men slept on their ground sheets on the concrete floor.⁴⁷

Overcrowding and material deprivation was used by the Japanese military as a spatial strategy of humiliation and control. When in August 1942 the allied POWs in their only major act of resistance after their captivity, refused to sign a no-escape agreement that resigned them to incarceration, some 15,900 Australian and British prisoners were confined in the Selarang Barracks and parade ground.⁴⁸ After four days in this confined space, with rising levels of dysentery, their officers ordered the prisoners to give in. The photograph of the western end of the Selarang Barracks Square—secretly taken by POW George Aspinall and concealed in the false bottom of his water bottle during his captivity—shows the tented encampment

flanked by seven barrack buildings, rows of trench latrines and high levels of physical congestion (Fig. 4).

<Figure 4 near here>

A Jewish Medical Officer Captain Harry Silman recounted,

Flies were increasing in number and swill etc. was accumulating. Latrines were dug all through the first night; the men worked like Trojans, digging long rows of trenches 16 ft deep while the sappers made latrine tops from doors of billets, men were sleeping on the roofs and all over the courtyard except for the space for cookhouses and latrines. The road running round the billet was out of bounds and the Jap sentries beat up anyone treading on the road. A machine gun was mounted on one corner and surrounded with barbed wire.⁴⁹

The disciplinary regimes anticipated in military architecture are natural precursors to punitive forms of repression.⁵⁰ They were—in this example and in the actions of the Japanese Imperial Army (JIA)—spaces for reducing colonial troops to a status lower than the native populations they ruled over. The barrack architecture of the Changi Cantonment was the stage for the performative inversion of power, representative of the greater imperial victory anticipated by Japan. The confusion and disorder of the Selerang Incident, depicted in these photographs, invokes similar depictions of ‘native’ riots of the previous century, of which Singapore had witnessed its fair share.⁵¹ Colonial military institutions served as the backdrop to scenes of social repression in this case of colonials and their allies by the Japanese.

Silman also commented that despite forty cases of dysentery on that first night at Selerang Square, the men remained defiant,

It was an amazing sight. The courtyard looked like Hyde Park with its flickering lights, men sleeping all over the place, concerts going on in every corner, pianos playing for sing-songs, men feverishly digging latrines by lamp light.⁵²

The scene was set against the backdrop of grand colonial architecture with streamlined Art Deco façades; ominous spectators to the military defeat and complete disempowerment of the short-lived South West Pacific Command. The passage of this typology from a state of colonial exceptionalism to a space of sovereign exception reveals the volatility of military taxonomies.⁵³ The heightened activity was equally a desperate bid for survival.

Repurposed domestic typologies

Three-roomed terraced houses designed as rank married quarters, and detached family bungalows at Changi were occupied by up to one hundred men. However, the expansive cantonment layout now contained within barbed wire, meant that prisoners were not constricted as in Changi Prison or at the Havelock and River Valley road camps, and several similar city-based facilities. They were at least able to move freely in the surrounding landscape. The garden city ideals that seemingly influenced the cantonment's layout offered them considerable relief.⁵⁴

Where working parties were sent out to restore and repair infrastructure outside the city, they too occupied widely dispersed colonial residences, clustered in military or civilian (government employee) housing estates.⁵⁵ While engaged in building Upper Thomson Road, POW Cyril Gilbert moved from an officer's house in Selerang Barracks, occupied by 140–150 persons to the house of the Chief Justice of Singapore on Caldecott Hill. “[I]t was a big

home but there was still couple of hundred of us in that house, all sleeping side by each”, no room to stretch, no wardrobes, no furniture—he noted.⁵⁶ The lack of furniture or any other material artefacts in the once splendidly furnished homes accentuated the losses of capitulation. David Nelson who wrote *The Story of Changi*, a seminal account of captivity, described returning to his home in February to find it ransacked and looted.⁵⁷ Packed like sardines into their former residences, the POWs desperately salvaged, bartered, traded and hoarded for a few items of food or clothing, an activity alien to Europeans in the colony. Cyril Gilbert described smoking all the margins of letters from home, and all the envelopes.⁵⁸ Silman listed his personal possessions as including:

...wristlet watch loaned by Archie, blanket loaned by Eva, Pillow case given by Addy, shoes, topee, towel, ARP rain coat, hankies, and blue shorts borrowed from Mr. Reeves of Singapore without his knowledge or permission, coloured shirt given by Thornhill, short pants taken from some house in Singapore....⁵⁹

Whereas the Army Regulations of India for 1930 recommended ninety square feet per man in the plains (8.36 sqm),⁶⁰ the scenes described by POWs were reminiscent of the congested coolie accommodation in Singapore’s Chinese district, documented by WJ Simpson in his 1906 sanitary report.⁶¹ In the latter case, racial segregation in the colonial plan forced multiple uses of shop house interiors prompting early efforts at urban renewal by the Singapore Improvement Trust (town planning authority).⁶² Inequitable land use, spatial restrictions, and racialisation of spatial allocations previously practiced on ‘native’ populations resurface in these images as subaltern material affects.

While large brick and mortar constructions generously proportioned and laid out in spacious grounds embodied colonial authority and emphasised its inversion, other numerous, hastily

constructed facilities were more fragile and exposed. Civilians were accommodated in the civil prison—Changi Gaol—and later, from May 1944, some 4,510 internees were moved to houses and huts at Sime Road.⁶³ CP Ambler describes how 2000 male internees were cramped into what remained of the former Royal Air Force quarters which had been constructed with salvaged materials by Chinese labourers.⁶⁴ The dimensions of the huts were 120 foot x 20 foot (37m x 6m) containing seventy five men with thirty four inches per man (.8m)—he notes. The women were housed in the officers' huts. One of these huts depicted by Leslie Cole (Fig. 5) offers a poignant image of the plight of the female civilian internees and children. Their emaciated figures occupied in ordinary everyday activities like bathing and dressing conveys their extreme fragility. The bare floors, salvaged furniture, the palsied postures of the stick figures and the hollow intensity of their facial expressions have tremendous affective power. The contrast between the sombre interior and the verdant tropical greenery outside emphasises their destitution. Here, unlike in the masonry barrack buildings, the dereliction of the architecture and the degraded state of its human occupants seem in accord.

<Figure 5 near here>

Vernacular derivatives

The temporary structures used by the prisoners are undoubtedly derived from regional vernacular architecture, due to the use of local materials and climatic adaptations. The barrack huts built by POWs at Changi, while comparable in linear form to long house architecture, lacked the elevation and gallery spaces to be direct derivatives. We might argue instead that the familiar features of urban Malay houses, raised on stub columns, thatched walls and *attap* roofs were usefully adapted by POWs. An hut interior depicted by Murray

Griffin, the Australian Imperial Force's official war artist, shows a split bamboo structure of crude gable trusses, a timber floor and raised sleeping platforms, a standard model found in many JIA camps in Southeast Asia (Figs 6 and 7).

<Figures 6 and 7 near here>

The aesthetic affects of these POW accommodations are largely conveyed through their materiality. They are evidently built by soldiers unused to the typology, materials or climate. They provide an emotive backdrop to emaciated bodies on ramshackle camp cots surrounded by tatty clothing and salvaged objects. The incongruity of their confinement in solid modern barrack settings no longer exists. In fact, the huts present a sub group in the architectural typologies since they were smaller single or two-storey structures, arranged in linear groupings in much closer proximity than the masonry barracks. The long huts also had colonial antecedents in the coolie lines and native troop accommodation which had been replaced with modern brick and mortar structures by the 1930s (Fig 8), and as such were a throwback to an earlier era when the military facilities were thus racialised, but also considered primitive.⁶⁵ The timber India Barracks at Changi—for 'native (mainly Sikh) troops—had been designed along these lines. The use of temporary materials was due to the scarcity of brick and mortar (conserved for JIA infrastructure projects) and the need to put up many buildings in the shortest possible time. There were also many variants on the hut model depending on the numbers needing accommodation or the adaptation of existing structures, and the typology spread across the wartime landscape along the Burma-Thai railroad.

<Figure 9 near here>

Huts became the primary accommodation once the civilians were moved out of Changi prison and all the troops were concentrated in and around it in 1944. A new camp was built there with materials salvaged or provided by the Japanese. “In no time a new town had sprung up which, with the gaol, had to accommodate 12,000 men, a hospital, workshops, cookhouses, libraries and theatres,” writes Colonel DAS Houghton, ⁶⁶

By 1945 the camp had shops to deal with every kind of work. Tin smiths, black smiths and electrical welders produced over 40,000 articles, and repaired a further 20,000 while carpenters, boot and clothing makers and repairers, dental mechanics, opticians, a pottery, paper, cotton, needle, nail, tobacco, tooth powder, brush and rubber factories, some being one man shows, others employing more than 100 men, all played their part in our daily life. ⁶⁷

Houghton also notes that camp gardens begun in 1942, despite the amount of movement of the various groups for overseas working parties, to the Thai-Burma railroad, to Borneo or Japan, saw one hundred acres under cultivation by 1945, employing 1500 men daily and producing up to ninety tons of greens and root vegetables in one month.

The image conjures up colonial traveller’s accounts of the feverish activity in the dense congested environments of Telok Ayer. ⁶⁸ The subaltern practices described in this account appear to occur at an urban scale. But it also raises a different image of POW involvement in manual work, recounted in diaries and art works; methods unavailable to the colony’s Asian subjects. Their stories’ prominence against other absent narratives alerts us to the invisibility of labour in the Black and White building neighbourhoods.

Aesthetic affects of colonial labour relations

Can the marks of labour be considered as aesthetic affects? Although the agency of labourers is not typically discernible in the brick and mortar barracks of Selarang Square or in the military quarters at Changi, we are told these were built by Chinese and Indian labourers under independent labour contracts before the war.⁶⁹ The barrack huts occupied by the Allied POWs following capitulation were built according to POW know-how with materials provided by the JIA. But both these materials and technologies were unfamiliar to the prisoners, leading to sub-standard buildings. Conversely, the invisibility of labour employed in the adaptive reuse of colonial period buildings today can be attributed to the employment of South Asian guest workers on short-term contracts in Singapore's building industry. Given their temporary tenure and their lowly status as non-Singaporean manual workers, their anonymity reflects national and class attitudes towards overseas guest workers. The elite aesthetics of individual designers or of colonial period aesthetics mask labour contributions to built works.

A final example of Black and White bungalows at the former Sembawang naval base suggests the utility of this approach. Built in the 1930s as part of the Singapore strategy and abandoned during the Fall of Singapore, the base reverted to the British after the war and was used until 1971. The buildings housed the Australia, New Zealand, and United Kingdom (ANZUK) Forces and New Zealand's Force Southeast Asia. On the lawn of the house of the Commodore Superintendent at 128 King's Avenue is an ornamental red bridge in a Japanese style garden built by Japanese POWs held captive by the allies until their repatriation after the war.⁷⁰ Retained, perhaps, for its uniqueness, it is a lasting trace of POW presence in the SLA rental bungalow (Fig 9).

<Figure 9 near here>

Conclusion

As evident across several examples discussed in this paper, including the diverse tourism environments in contemporary Singapore and the architecture used by the POWs, all of the attributes associated with aesthetic affects, whether type, materiality, formal structure or construction process are overlayed with social values that alter their meanings. In the absence of resources that historicise their affects, the artefact can be neutralised and made available for appropriation, often for commercial ends. But in those rare moments when buildings are historicised without affectation or motive, they become sensitive purveyors of even the most difficult memories. In some instances dystopian pasts lend character to the objects.

The wartime transformation of barracks, bungalows and huts offer extreme examples of the violence that may be historicised through their forms or of the social and political asymmetries embedded in colonial typologies. In the evidence provided by POWs these buildings become backdrops to social and political oppression —of treatment as subalterns— by the Japanese. But violence of a different kind is also evident in the more innocuous or exceptional architectures that circulate as tourism's fantasies. Their aesthetics are suggestive of exclusive, elite, seemingly neo-colonial values reproduced by uneven economic opportunities. Issues of inequitable distribution of scarce spatial resources, of class distinction, or racial difference, spatial segregation and cultural appropriation are evident across both scenarios to different degrees. I have described their contrasting elite- and subaltern- aesthetic affects. The historical reuse of similar structures for projecting contrasting values, forewarns us against essentialising typologies.

The insertion of war-related military architecture into these comparably tranquil consumptive frameworks seems incongruent with their marketization, but this is not always the case. Military structures have been repurposed for telling war-related stories at Fort Siloso, Sentosa, at the Former Ford Factory museum—the scene of the Japanese surrender—and other sites related to the Fall of Singapore. But, since British military bases were distributed throughout the island and many were reused by the Singapore Armed Forces after the British pulled out in 1971, these have remained unavailable for social memory. Their belated recuperation involves levels of dehistoricisation, or selective representations, which may erase these historically compelling stories in the long term.

Illustrations

Figure 1. Black and White bungalow at Adam Park, single-storey cottage at Sime Road walk-ups apartments at Portsdown Road, and bungalow at Ridley Park, photographed by Anoma Pieris.

Figure 2. Gillman Barracks (left) and Tanglin Barracks (right), photographed by Anoma Pieris.

Figure 3. Map of Singapore showing the distribution of the Black and White bungalows discussed in this paper.

Figures 4. AIF and British Prisoners of War, Selarang Barracks, Changi Singapore, 2 September 1942. Photographed by George Aspinall, AWM 132937.

Figure 5. Charles Thrale, Living Quarters, Adam Park Camp, Singapore, 1945, Art.IWM ART 1541733, pencil and wash.

Figure 6. Murray Griffin, Kitchens and huts outside the gaol walls, Changi, AWM ART25083

Figure 7. Murray Griffin, Interior view of one hundred-metre hut Changi, brush and brown ink wash over pencil on paper, AWM, ART 26492.

Figure 8. Sheets and uniforms hanging on washing lines outside some of the wooden huts that are part of Roberts Barracks, part of Changi Prisoner of War (POW) camp. Photographed by John Rosson, 1942-45, AWM PO4485.042

Figure 9. Japanese garden outside Black and White House at Sembawang, photographed by A. Tsakonas for author.

¹ Amanda Achmadi, “The Architecture of Balinization”, in *Architecture and Identity*, eds Peter Herrle, Erik Wegerhoff (Berlin: Technische Universität Berlin, Habitat Unit, 2008), 73-90, provides a critique on tourism practices based on orientalist themes; John Bastin ed., *Travellers’ Singapore: An Anthology* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1994).

² See by Robert Powell, *The Asian House: Contemporary Houses of Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Select Books, 1993); *The Tropical Asian House* (Singapore: Select Books, 1996); *The New Asian House* (Singapore: Select Publishers, 2001) and by Tan Hock Beng, *Tropical Retreats: The Poetics of place* (Singapore: Page One publishers 1996).

³ Jean Beaumont, “Contested transnational heritage: the demolition of Changi prison, Singapore,” *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 15, no. 4 (2009): 298-316.

⁴ Julian Davidson, *Black and White: The Singapore House, 1898-1941* (Singapore: Talisman 2006, 11).

⁵ Jiat-Hwee Chang, *A Genealogy of Tropical Architecture: Colonial networks, nature and technoscience* (London; New York: Routledge, 2016), 51-93.

⁶ Davidson, *Black and White: The Singapore House*, 1.

⁷ Davidson, *Black and White: The Singapore House*, 8. He notes that Lee Kip Lin, *The Singapore House 1819-1942* (Singapore: Times Editions, 1988) and Norman Edwards, *The*

Singapore House and Residential Life (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1990), paid them scant attention.

⁸ Malcolm Murfett, John Miksic, Brian Farrell and Chinag Ming Shun, *Between Two Oceans: A military history of Singapore from first settlement to final British Withdrawal* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish, 2005), 182-217.

⁹ The British military stayed on after Independence in 1965 maintaining defence in the region but pulled out between 1968-1971 due to changes in British attitudes towards their role in the Far East.

¹⁰ In reference to the book title by Davidson, *Black and White: The Singapore House*.

¹¹ Brenda SA Yeoh and Lily Kong, *Portraits of Places: History Community and Identity in Singapore* (Singapore: Times Edition 1995), provides an overview of the multiple environments transformed by urban renewal.

¹² Kwok Kian Woon, CJ Wee Wan-Ling and Karen Chia eds., *Rethinking Chinatown and heritage conservation in Singapore* (Singapore: Singapore Heritage Society, 2000), lays out the debates surrounding this proposal. According to census data the ethnically Chinese population for this period stood at around seventy seven per cent.

¹³ Naidu Ratnala Thulaja, "Duxton Road", The National Library Board, Singapore Infopedia, accessed 8 June 2018, http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_357_2005-01-22.html. The area was associated with cheap brothels during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

¹⁴ Uma Devi, G. et al., *Singapore's 100 historic places* (Singapore: Archipelago Press, 2002), 66.

¹⁵ Jianna HS Tan, "Chijmes", The National Library Board, Singapore infopedia, accessed 8 June 2018, http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_828_2004-12-15.html?s=CHIJ; "URA: Serenity and ambience of CHIJ site will be kept", *The Straits Times*, 1 April 1990, 13.

¹⁶ CM Turnbull, *A History of Singapore, 1819-1988* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1989), 138.

¹⁷ Chang, *A Genealogy of Tropical Architecture*, 79 and 85 in reference to Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 101. Agamben, *Homo Sacer: sovereign power and bare life* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998). Agamben, writing on the Holocaust, describes the camp as a space of exception where a subject is stripped of political status and reduced to mere biological existence “bare life”, the hidden foundation for sovereign power.

¹⁸ Propertyguru, “SLA Releases 33 B&W Bungalows for rent”, 1 September 2010, accessed 5 May 2018 <https://www.propertyguru.com.sg/property-management-news/2010/9/28556/sla-releases-33-b-amp-w-bungalows-for-rent>.

¹⁹ Davidson, *Black and White: The Singapore House*, 91.

²⁰ Singapore Land Authority, Retail and F&B Tender for Blocks 17 & 18 Dempsey Road, accessed 5 May 2018 undated, <https://www.sla.gov.sg/News/articleid/601>; “Tanglin Village – A distinctive community of lifestyle, education and art interests”, 7 November 2006, accessed 5 May 2018, <https://www.sla.gov.sg/News/articleid/299/parentId/97/year/2006?category=Press%20Releases>.

²¹ Davidson, *Black and White: The Singapore House*, 116.

²² Davidson, *Black and White: The Singapore House*, 134-35.

²³ Alex Lim and Alfred Teo, *Black & White: Our homemade heritage* (Singapore: Singapore Land Authority, 2017).

²⁴ Housing and Development Board, “Public Housing – A Singapore Icon”, accessed 8 June 2018, <http://www.hdb.gov.sg/cs/infoweb/about-us/our-role/public-housing--a-singapore-icon>.

²⁵ Lim and Teo, *Black & White*, 8.

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- ²⁶ Lim and Teo, *Black & White*, 83.
- ²⁷ Lim and Teo, *Black & White*, 69.
- ²⁸ Jon Cooper, *Tigers in the Park: The wartime heritage of Adam Park* (Singapore: The Literary Centre, 2016), 9-16, and based on pers. communication in January 2015.
- ²⁹ For example, The long and winding road, available at <https://thelongnwindingroad.wordpress.com/>.
- ³⁰ See Karl Hack and Kevin Blackburn, *Did Singapore Have to Fall? Churchill and the impregnable fortress* (London; New York: Routledge 2004).
- ³¹ David Nelson, *The Story of Changi Singapore* (Singapore: Changi Museum, 2001), 10.
- ³² Murfett et al, *Between Two Oceans*, 329.
- ³³ Kevin Blackburn and Karl Hack, *War Memory and the Making of Modern Malaysia and Singapore* (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press), 138.
- ³⁴ Mamori Shinozaki, *My wartime experiences in Singapore*, interviewed by Lim Yoon Lin (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1973), 98-99, available at the National Archives of Singapore, Oral history Interviews, Boon Leong Chia, Acc. No. 001813.
- ³⁵ Many private papers donated by ex-POWs are held at the Australian War Memorial and Imperial War Museum archives.
- ³⁶ Mike Davis, "Frank Gehry as Dirty Harry", *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (London, New York: Verso, 1990), 236-240.
- ³⁷ Mirjana Lozanovska, *Ethno-Architecture and the Politics of Migration* (London; New York: Routledge, 2016), 221.
- ³⁸ Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth, *The Affect Theory Reader* (North Carolina: Duke University Press 2010); Nigel Thrift, *Non-representational Theory: Space, Politics, Affect* (London: Routledge, 2007); Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*:

Capitalism and Schizophrenia; Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002).

³⁹ *WARchitecture: Sarajevo Urbicide*, Sarajevo, June 1993; See Andrew Herscher, *Violence Taking Place: The Architecture of the Kosovo Conflict* (California: Stanford University Press, 2010).

⁴⁰ Jonathan Wynne, “Haunting Orpheus: Problems of Space and Time in the Desert” in ed. Patricia Tacineto Clough and Jean Halley, *The Affective Turn: Theorising the Social* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 209-230.

⁴¹ Yael Navaro-Yashin, *The Make-Believe Space: Affective Geography in a Postwar Polity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012).

⁴² Chang, *A Genealogy of Tropical Architecture*, 51-93.

⁴³ Chang, *A Genealogy of Tropical Architecture* 55, 56.

⁴⁴ Imperial War Museum (IWM), UK: Private Papers 10188, Captain WA Baker.

⁴⁵ *The Straits Times* for 1939 describes a number of shows, dances, a circus and several private parties held there during the year, see National Archives of Singapore digital newspaper archives.

⁴⁶ Brenda Yeoh, *Contesting Space: Power Relations and the Urban Built Environment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 137-143.

⁴⁷ IWM, UK: Private Papers 11017, TM Hart, “Changi Prisoner of War Camp, 1942–1945”, 2.

⁴⁸ RPW Havers, *Reassessing the Japanese Prisoner of War Experience* (London; New York: Routledge, 2003), 65-80. This occurred following the execution of four men who attempted to escape in August 1942.

⁴⁹ IWM, UK: Private Papers 18748, Harry Silman, Diary entry, 2 September 1942, 58,

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- ⁵⁰ Such inverse war-time encounters of military and penal architectures in European colonial experience also anticipated the later critique of the coercive instrumentality of Enlightenment Institutions: Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan, New York: Vintage Books, 1979.
- ⁵¹ Yeoh, Brenda. *Contesting Space: Power Relations and the Urban Built Environment in Colonial Singapore*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1996, 243-268.
- ⁵² IWM, UK: Silman, entry for 2 September 1942, 59.
- ⁵³ See Giorgio Agamben, “The Camp as Nomos of the Modern”, trans. D. Heller-Roazen, in *Violence, Identity and Self-Determination*, eds., H de Vries and S Weber eds. (Palo Alto, CA.: Stanford University Press 1997), 106–118, describes Changi as a garden city.
- ⁵⁴ Henry Probert, *The History of Changi* (Singapore: Changi University Press, 2006), 14.
- ⁵⁵ Davidson, *Black and White: The Singapore House*, 109-131.
- ⁵⁶ National Archives of Singapore (NAS), Oral history interviews, Cyril Gilbert, Accn no. 002964/2, disc 1, 11.
- ⁵⁷ Nelson, *The story of Changi*, 6.
- ⁵⁸ NAS: Cyril Gilbert, disc 1, 14.
- ⁵⁹ IWM, UK: Silman, entry for 4 April 1942, 16-17.
- ⁶⁰ Digital Archive of India: Army Regulations India, India Barracks Synopsis, Calcutta 1930, accessed 29 April 2017, <http://www.new.dli.ernet.in/handle/2015/72244>, 28.
- ⁶¹ WJ Simpson, *The Sanitary Condition of Singapore* (London: Waterlow, 1907).
- ⁶² Chang, *A Genealogy of Tropical Architecture*, 129-161.
- ⁶³ Havers, *Reassessing the Japanese Prisoner of War Experience*, 137-65.
- ⁶⁴ IWM, UK: Private Papers 2926, “The diary of Charles Pearson Ambler, held prisoner by the Japanese 1942-45 in Singapore”, entry for 28 April 1944, 52-3.

⁶⁵ National Archives, Kew, UK: ADM 195/111, Singapore Naval Base–Dockyard permanent coolie lines: showing single coolies' blocks, 1937, 20160000015–0068.

⁶⁶ IWM, UK: Private Papers 11062, Colonel DAS Houghton, “Diary of the 88th Field Regiment RA (9th Indian Div. 1941-45)”.

⁶⁷ IWM, UK: Colonel DAS Houghton, 9.

⁶⁸ Bastin ed., *Travellers' Singapore*; George Windsor Earl, 1832-1834, “Singapore in the Early 1830s,” 23-30; Dr J. Berncastle, 1849, “The Baneful Effects of Opium Smoking,” 67-70.

⁶⁹ JFF, “Changi cantonment 1933-37”, *Royal Engineers Journal*, 51(1937), 355-62, 357.

⁷⁰ Melody Zachcheus, History rich Sembawang, gateway to Singapore's WWII past, The Straits Times, 19 June 2016, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/sembawang-gateway-to-singapores-wwii-past>.