



ICS SEMINAR SERIES 2024

The Anthropocene waterline: coastal reclamations and seawalls in Asia-Australia

29 August 2024 | 11:30am - 1:00pm

Room: EA.1.28 Parramatta South Campus

Abstract

I propose that we think of the land reclamations that have been increasingly infilling the nearshore zone of many of Asia's coastal cities over the last 50 years as technofossils of the Anthropocene. Commonly, new blocks of reclaimed land have been added to older reclamations, pushing human habitat further and further into the sea and in the processes erasing the habitat of marine plant and animal species. Serial reclamation like this creates a kind of chronologically ordered horizontal stratigraphy, comparable at a stretch to the vertically ordered stratigraphy of an archaeological site. This idea is explored in relation to case study coastal reclamations in Japan and Hong Kong. The paper also explores a connection between coastal reclamation in Japan and the concept of 'artificial land' in Corbusian modernism and in the work of the avant-garde Metabolist architects of 1960s and 1970s Japan. Both relate to the tabula rasa fantasy that tracts of land or sea represent a blank slate for human enterprise. This paper is inspired by the proposition that changing the trajectory of the Anthropocene requires, as a precondition, cultivating a new knowledge of the *things* of the Anthropocene.

Biography

Denis Byrne is a professor of archaeology and heritage studies at the Institute for Culture and Society, Western Sydney University. With a focus on Asia and Australia, he works across the fields of the archaeology of the contemporary past, critical heritage studies, and the environmental humanities. He is currently studying coastal land reclamations in the Asia-Pacific, framing them a signature landform of the Anthropocene. His books include *The Heritage Corridor: A Transnational Approach to the Heritage of Chinese Migration* (2022) and *Counterheritage: Critical Approaches on Heritage Conservation in Asia* (2014).

Presenter: Denis Byrne
Discussant: Gay Hawkins
Chair: Michelle Whitmore

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