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# Archipelago of Steel and the Island at the Woolstore in Geelong

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The steel angles and plates that form the rivetted columns and girders found in Level 1 of Deakin University's Waterfront Campus in Geelong, were produced at the end of the 19th century by two manufacturers on two continents: The Lanarkshire Steel Company Ltd in Motherwell, Scotland, and The Carnegie Steel Company in Pittsburgh, USA.<sup>1</sup> This array of columns and girders can be understood as a vestige island of technological heritage and cultural significance that connects the Waterfront Campus and Geelong to Motherwell and Pittsburgh, and to other locations around the world, through a diaspora of steel. Erected 1901 in the basement of the Dalgety & Co Ltd Warehouse as the second phase of an expanding industrial complex,<sup>4</sup> they stand collectively as an island of foreign materiality, surrounded by locally sourced materials – brickwork from Northcote and timber from the nearby Otway Forest – which completed the then new warehouse. As such, they would remain hidden from the public in the basement, until 1997, when they were revealed as part of a transformative project of adaptive reuse.

technological advancements, the backbreaking and dangerous labour of the steel workers, and the environment and culture of the factory complexes and communities where they were situated. In turn, these origin narratives sit within broader contexts of global commerce and economic expansionism, distribution through transnational networks of rail and shipping, and the universally transformative impact of steel as a commercially available material from the late 19th century onwards.<sup>5</sup> These narratives are overlooked within the current and traditional understanding of the Waterfront Campus as a place of heritage;<sup>6</sup> an understanding that focuses on the precinct's role in the wool industry in Geelong in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Engagement with the history of the building derives from the way that traditional heritage practice and the 1997 adaptive reuse project – an awarded architectural project that transformed the original industrial complex to its present use – re-packaged the history and legacy of those original buildings. Through processes of homogenisation and heritagisation, this creates architectural experiences set against a scenography of curated heritage elements, and obscures

1.

Robert Duncan, *Steelopolis: The Making of Motherwell c.1750–1939* (Motherwell District Council, Dept. of Leisure Services, 1991).

2.

Robert Duncan, *Sons of Vulcan: Ironworkers and Steelmen in Scotland* (Birlinn, 2009)

3.

Records of the Carnegie Steel Corporation 1853–1912 (bulk 1869–1890), MSS# 315, Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania.

4.

Geelong Regional Commission, "Former Dalgety Woolstore, Geelong: Conservation Study," 1988.

5.

Tony Fry and Anne-Marie Willis, *Steel: A Design, Cultural and Ecological History* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 15–94.

6.

Laurajane Smith and Emma Waterton, "Constrained by Commonsense: The Authorized Heritage Discourse in Contemporary Debates," in *The Oxford Handbook of Public Archaeology*, ed. Robin Skeates et al, 2012 (online edition: Oxford Academic, September 18, 2012): <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199237821.013.0009>.

the full historical and industrial legacy of the precinct.

This paper argues that the narratives of the steel's provenance are intrinsic parts of the history and industrial heritage of the Deakin University campus. It also argues that within their current context, as iconic architectural features of a major public space within the campus, their materiality and sense of latent history contribute to the unique spatial atmosphere and identity of that place. In this context, the notion of latent history can be understood as the embedded but unarticulated historical and technological narratives that inform the agency of the columns and girders, and their ability to impact corporeal and embodied experience of the space where they are situated. The paper unpacks this understanding, explaining the evolution of the concept of latent history from the gap identified at the interface between heritage framing in adaptive reuse projects (such as the Waterfront Campus in Geelong), and historical legacy and the embedded narratives of those places.

### Methodology

The research employs both qualitative and quantitative methodologies in response

to the diverse nature of the material being studied, which includes drawings, photographs, artworks, and written material and records. Data has been collected through literature review and archival research. Critical analysis of the material gathered is carried out through a framework, based on themes developed from key concepts of "latent history" and "affective heritagisation."<sup>7</sup> Key texts are used to explain and to frame arguments.

7.

Divya P. Tolia-Kelly, Emma Waterton, Steve Watson, eds., *Heritage, Affect and Emotion: Politics, Practices and Infrastructures* (Routledge, 2016), 1–11.