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Reflections on Camps – Space, Agency, Materiality

edited by

Antje Senarclens de Grancy and Heidrun Zettelbauer

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Different Housing Spaces – Space, Function, and Use of Barrack-Huts in World War I
Refugee Camps

Ulrike Krause

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Editorial

Camps – considered to be (more or less) enclosed and temporary environments and to be flexible tools for the (voluntary or forced) isolation of specific socially, politically or ethnically defined groups – are a global and ubiquitous mass phenomenon of the present. The growing body of scholarly literature on camps and their comprehensive dimensions indicates the significance this issue is assuming in the contemporary world and reflects its importance in current policies and societal debates. In the fields of Philosophy, Political and Cultural Theory, camps are currently understood as prototypical cultural sites of the Modern, referring to Zygmunt Bauman’s fundamental suggestion to look at the 20th century as the “century of the camps”. Such an approach also relates to Giorgio Agamben’s reflection on “the camp” – implicitly identified as the concentration camp – as a site where a fundamental relationship between the law and the absence of law is established, and the state of exception turns into the rule.¹ Such an approach can be correlated with perspectives taken by Contemporary History researchers on camps, which still focus on concentration and extermination camps in the context of the National Socialist regime or the Soviet gulags. As sites of excessive violence, terror and murder, such camps are discussed by historians as radical archetypes of the modern camp history and its ‘final point’. Since the 1990s in particular, many studies have opened up a broad range of questions about the Nazi concentration camp system, and recent publications have enabled new and concise overviews to be made in this context.²

In public history debates, NS-camps still appear to represent the ‘normative model’ of the camp, whereas scholars have been continuously shifting towards a more extensive historical, transnational and global understanding of the phenomenon over the past decade. Authors of recent studies have highlighted the

1 Zygmunt Bauman, “A Century of Camps?,” in: *The Bauman Reader*, edited by Peter Beilharz (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 266–280; Giorgio Agamben, *Means without End: Notes on Politics, Theory out of Bounds* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 37–45.

2 Nikolaus Wachsmann, *KL: A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps* (New York: Macmillan, 2015).

lines of historical continuity, tracing the camp phenomenon back to pre-modern times (e. g. by referring to ‘total institutions’ such as workhouses for the poor or traditions of military culture).³ They have revealed possible connections between colonial camps formed around 1900⁴ and the subsequent camp systems. For instance, the issue of civilian internment is now integrated in the core of World War I and Empire Studies⁵ and is investigated in the context of World War II. Currently, different attempts are being undertaken to write a concise global history of the concentration camp since the end of the 19th century up to the present.⁶ The principal concept of camps grounded on educational or hygienic discourse or its explicit or implicit technologies indicates that the camp is a crucial tool that can be used for modern biopolitics, crisis management or warfare. Subsequently, the physical, material and architectural dimensions have become the focus of a large variety of theoretical and empiric studies.

In addition to such transnational pre- and post-histories of the concentration camp – including politics of memory – authors of other camp studies have focused on different camp types, ranging from highly institutionalised to loosely informal structures.⁷ The many purposes of camps as a major element of 20th- and 21st-century history can be loosely grouped together, but they are often closely intertwined: They range from being sites that enable individual development and autonomy (e. g. holiday, peace or protest camps) to spaces for control and discipline (e. g. civilian internment, POW or concentration camps) and on to locations that are intended to meet urgent needs (e. g. humanitarian refugee, post-disaster or homeless camps).⁸

Currently, researcher in the fields of Philosophy, Political Theory, Architectural History as well as those who adopt the interdisciplinary perspectives of Urban or Gender Studies discuss camps as specific, modern spaces that represent sites with the highest possible functionality. A deeper understanding of con-

3 Christoph Jahr and Jens Thiel (eds.), *Lager vor Auschwitz. Gewalt und Integration im 20. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Metropol Verlag, 2013); Bettina Greiner and Alan Kramer (eds.), *Welt der Lager. Zur “Erfolgsgeschichte” einer Institution* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition HIS Verlagsges., 2013).

4 Aidan Forth, *Barbed-Wire Imperialism. Britain’s Empire of Camps, 1876–1903* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017); Jonas Kreienbaum, “Ein trauriges Fiasko”. *Koloniale Konzentrationslager im südlichen Afrika 1900–1908* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition HIS Verlagsges., 2015).

5 Stefan Manz et al. (eds.), *Internment during the First World War: a mass global phenomenon* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018).

6 Dan Stone, *The concentration Camp. A Short History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Andrea Pitzer, *One Long Night. A Global History of Concentration Camp* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2017).

7 Irit Katz et al. (eds.), *Camps Revisited. Multifaceted Spatialities of a Modern Political Technology* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018).

8 Charlie Hailey, *Camps: A Guide to 21st-Century Space* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009).

temporary camps as social, cultural and urban spaces has been particularly derived by researchers pursuing Migration and Refugee Studies, who approach camps from an interdisciplinary and multi-methodological perspective, as well as those conducting architectural research. Trained architects working with an extended concept of architecture are investigating the spatial aspects of institutional refugee camps, which have often been in continuous existence for many decades.⁹ In the past few years, the shapes and functions of informal and makeshift encampments such as the “Calais Jungle” in France are of equal interest to spatial theorists, sociologists and urban designers. The analyses of Calais and comparable examples indicate that a paradigm change is taking place, insofar as such studies illuminate not only the fears and imagined scenarios of menace that exist within present European society, but also serve as research fields for the development of new urban and cohabitation concepts.¹⁰

Keeping these perspectives in mind, the authors of this special volume explore camps as (cultural) spaces in a broad sense and deal with their complex and paradoxical dimensions as modern sites. As editors, we do not intend to outline a consistent concept in topics, theory or methodology, but instead to open up a wide range of approaches in order to underline the potential of this field of research. Against this backdrop, the contributors define space as a socio-cultural and tangible analytical category, focusing on camps with their specific rules, logistics, and materialisations. They investigate them as physical and social products that have been conceived and created by camp designers and inhabitants, as mental factors for socialisation and self-discipline, as expressions of cultural representation, and/or as constitutive elements of memory.

The authors of this special volume examine the space of the camp in general as a subject, which affects social configuration together with the camp’s physical and architectural qualities and symbolic functions. They are interested in the processes that occur when allegedly rational decisions are made or heteronomous acts take place as part of the daily camp routines; they examine how these processes and structures oscillate in their cultural meanings. They study how different subjects can lend new interpretations to seemingly fixed acts of significance by taking possession of space or vice versa how the existing scopes of action shift into spaces of control and discipline. Overall, the contributors intend to comprehend the ambivalent, ambiguous, inconsistent and paradoxical aspects of camp spaces.

The case studies assembled in the volume all reflect an interest in specific

9 Manuel Herz (ed.), *From Camp to City. Refugee Camps of the Western Sahara* (Zurich: Lars Müller Publishers, 2013).

10 Fiona Meadows (ed.), *Habiter le campement. Nomades, voyageurs, contestataires, conquérants, infortunés, exilés* (Arles: Actes Sud, 2016).

institutional and highly formal camp structures as well as share aspects of their symbolic representation. In particular, the authors focus on the following specific camp types: refugee camps during World War I and in the present (Antje Senarclens de Grancy and Ulrike Krause), inclusion camps of the National Socialist *Reichsarbeitsdienst* and labour service camps in the U.S. (Robert Jan van Pelt and Heidrun Zettelbauer), and extermination camps (Annika Wienert). The articles are positioned within different disciplinary contexts (Contemporary History, Visual Studies, Architectural History, Refugee and Gender Studies) and present a wide range of understandings, definitions and approaches to space and the complex relations between governance and agency. The authors stress the entanglement of social structures, cultural discourse, institutionalisation, individual perception and appropriation. Key aspects that are presented are the coincidence of proximity and distance, control and intimacy, disciplinary action and self-organisation, internment and scopes of (re)action or protection and surveillance. The mutually linked topics and the common points of reference in the assembled articles show the manner in which the camp issue can serve as cross-sectional matter in the current approaches being taken in the fields of Cultural Theory and Contemporary History.

Artikel

Different Housing Spaces – Space, Function, and Use of Barrack-Huts in World War I Refugee Camps

Introduction

In his 1939 lecture “Education of the Architect” in Mexico, Hannes Meyer, Swiss architect and former director of the Bauhaus in Dessau, referred to the social function of architecture. In a terse sentence he pointed to a fundamental discrepancy that seems to lie in the nature of architecture, using the example of a modern building type: “The standardised barrack-huts of the Mexican railway worker as an element of a progressive, democratic state represents a higher form of housing than the barrack-huts in a labor camp in present-day Germany, although they are both exactly the same in construction and appearance!”¹ Meyer is known as one of the most emphatic representatives of the rationalist and functionalist *Neues Bauen*. However, in this quote he states that one and the same object, a simple accommodation without any comfort, can become something *fundamentally different* through different uses – in opposition to the dictum “form follows function.”

Guiding Question²

In its use as a camp barrack, the standardised and primarily use-neutral barrack-hut – as argued below and shown by the example of refugee camps of World War I – is a different housing space, ‘different’ in relation to other uses, in the sense of Meyer’s statement. This means that the very essence of this building, its ex-

1 Hannes Meyer, “Erziehung zum Architekten” [1939], in: Hannes Meyer, *Bauen und Gesellschaft. Schriften, Briefe, Projekte*, ed. Lena Meyer-Bergner (Dresden 1980), 204–213, esp. 206. From 1939 on, Meyer was the director of the newly founded Institute of Planning and Urbanism of the Instituto Politécnico Nacional in Mexico City.

2 This article has been developed as part of an ongoing research project on the relational history between camps and modern architecture using the example of refugee camps in the Habsburg Monarchy in World War I.

istence, changes in each case when used for a particular purpose.³ The camp barrack is not only a simple temporary dormitory for specific inhabitants, but a complex spatial structure. It is not solely generated by factors such as architectural design, space distribution, construction or equipment, as well as material and symbolic functions,⁴ but also – and in particular – by its use. According to Henri Lefebvre, this space is at the same time the precondition and the result of social practice.⁵ Finally, it only becomes apparent through the *use* of the barrack-hut as to whether that, what was intended by the decision-makers and conceived in the administrative offices and on the drawing boards, was actually achieved.

Different types of exclusion or inclusion camps in the “century of camps”⁶ as well as the respective historical contexts have to be precisely differentiated.⁷ However, what they have generally in common is that standardised camp barracks are the result of top-down generated concepts. This means that their planning or selection takes place without involving the future residents. In this regard, they are comparable to the settlements of modern social housing. If, in the following, not only the objective-oriented *planning* but also the *use* of camp barrack-huts is to be discussed, we can benefit from the findings of architectural-historical research, which since the 1990s has increasingly investigated the use and the user perspective of modern architecture.⁸ In this understanding, architecture is constituted not only by the architect’s design intention, but also by the use and appropriation of the building as an object. Contrary to this view, the players of modern architecture have drawn their attention since the 1920s to the

3 In addition to the fundamental process of changing spaces through use, the refugee camps and their barrack-huts can also be described as heterotopic spaces in the sense of Foucault’s “other spaces,” “in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality.” Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces” [1967], in: *Diacritics* 16/1 (1986): 22–27.

4 Regarding the semantic field of architectonic functions, see Adrian Forty, *Words and Buildings. A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000); Ute Poerschke, *Funktionen und Formen. Architekturtheorie der Moderne* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2014).

5 See Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Malden, Oxford et al.: Blackwell, 1991 [1974]).

6 Zygmunt Bauman, “A Century of Camps?”, in: *The Bauman Reader*, edited by Peter Beilharz (Oxford, 2001), 266–280.

7 See Bettina Greiner and Alan Kramer (eds.), *Welt der Lager. Zur “Erfolgsgeschichte” einer Institution* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2013); Christoph Jahr and Jens Thiel (eds.), *Lager vor Auschwitz. Gewalt und Integration im 20. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Metropol-Verlag, 2013); Irit Katz et al. (eds.), *Camps Revisited. Multifaceted Spatialities of a Modern Political Technology* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018).

8 See recent examples: Kenny Cupers (ed.), *Use matters: an alternative history of architecture* (New York: Routledge, 2013); Kirsten Wagner, “Hermeneutiken des Architekturgebrauchs. Zur Sichtbarkeit des Lebens”, in: *Theorie der Architektur. Zeitgenössische Positionen*, edited by Sebastian Feldhusen and Ute Poerschke (Gütersloh–Berlin: Bauverlag and Basel: Birkhäuser, 2017), 410–435.

users of their buildings, but as a rule imagining them as abstract, universal beings whose needs could be met by normalised planning and construction.⁹ From an inscribed authoritarian point of view, individual appropriations or changes were understood as a disruptive factor that should be purified by education and training.¹⁰

Recent architectural historiography often refers to Philippe Boudon's case study published in 1969 about the workers' housing estate Pessac in Bordeaux from 1924 by Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, which was produced serially, cost-effectively and according to hygienic standards.¹¹ In his empirical study Boudon shows in which way the inhabitants continued to develop "architecture as the seemingly finished"¹² and shaped the space through their everyday actions. In the preface to this study, Henri Lefebvre names three distinct levels presented by Boudon: the theoretical level (the architects' conception and planning), the level of architectural practice, where ideological considerations are supplemented by factors like the needs of the future occupants, and finally the level of the reality of the city and the effects of a living mode.¹³ According to Lefebvre, in the reality of living in a house as an activity, "the collective and individual social work" proves to be more outstanding and more complex than the "abstract rationality" of the architects.

If the focus is now not on the use of a modern housing estate, but that of camp barrack-huts as architectural-spatial works, central distinguishing features must be added: The line between public and private space is drawn differently in the camp context than in that of housing complexes. In the case of certain camp types, private space (in the sense of a "loophole"¹⁴ denying access to social control) is kept to a minimum or completely non-existent for most occupants.¹⁵ When it comes to the use of accommodation buildings in camps, *use* means not

9 See Paul Emmons and Andreea Mihalache, Architectural handbooks and the user experience, in: *Use matters*, edited by Cupers, 35–50; Walter Prigge (ed.), *Ernst Neufert. Normierte Baukultur im 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt/M.–New York: Campus, 1999).

10 See Sabine Kraft, "Eingeübtes Wohnen", in: *arch+ 176/177* (2006): 48–50; Theres Sophie Rohde, *Die Bau-Ausstellung zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts oder "Die Schwierigkeit zu wohnen"*, unpublished PhD. Thesis, Bauhaus University Weimar, 2014.

11 Philippe Boudon, *Lived-In Architecture. Le Corbusiers Pessac Revisited* [1969] (Cambridge/Mass.: MIT Press, 1972).

12 Wagner, "Hermeneutiken des Architekturgebrauchs", 413.

13 Henri Lefebvre, "Preface", in: Boudon, *Lived-In Architecture*, no pagination.

14 Michelle Perrot, "Introduction", in: *A History of Private Life*, vol. IV: *From the Fires of Revolution to the Great War*, edited by Philippe Ariès and Georges Duby (Cambridge/Mass. and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1990), 9–12, esp. 9.

15 However, regarding the existing degree of privacy we must also differentiate within the camps, such as in the case of smaller and more comfortable "luxury" or "intelligentsia barracks" for socially higher standing people in refugee camps in World War I or the officers' barracks in prisoner of war camps.