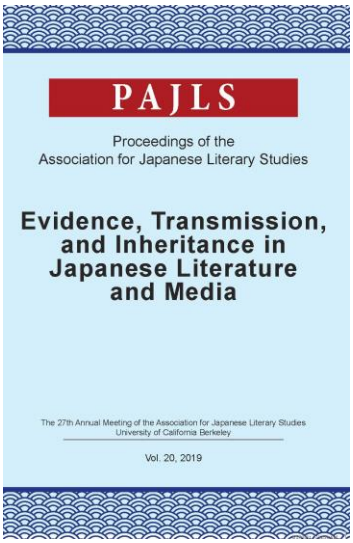
“Aerial Archives: American-Occupied Japan”

Etsuko Taketani

Proceedings of the Association for Japanese Literary Studies 20 (2019): 3–13.



PAJLS 20:
Evidence, Transmission, and Inheritance in Japanese Literature and Media.
Editor: Matthew Mewhinney
Managing Editor: Matthew Fraleigh

AERIAL ARCHIVES: AMERICAN-OCCUPIED JAPAN

Etsuko Taketani[1]
University of Tsukuba

The concept behind this keynote address arose from a simple, perhaps deceptively simple, question: why do we remember Japan's defeat and occupation by the United States (1945–1952) through photographs, often in black and white? An oblique shot of a burned-out Tokyo along the Sumida River. A vertical perspective of post-bomb Hiroshima showing no visible signs of life. The single powerful figure of General Douglas MacArthur, puffing on his trademark corn cob pipe and descending from his plane *Bataan* at Atsugi, a Japanese military airfield near Yokohama, to begin the United States' occupation of Japan. These and other similar photographs constitute our archives of memory.

Perhaps the most mundane (and the most likely) answer to this question is that "history is recorded by the victors." We witness and remember Japan's capitulation and the seven years of occupation to follow through an American camera lens. However, one remarkable fact that could easily escape our attention here is that these photographs capture images or narrate stories predominantly from an aerial perspective, which indicates the potential evidence of a spatial paradigm shift that occurred during the 1940s. Various historians have different names for the 1940s, such as "air-age globalism" (Alan Henrikson), or the post-Hiroshima "air-atomic age" (Edward Kaplan), but all remark on the significance of air space.[2]

I use these materials as a point of entry into what I term *aerial archives* due to the ways in which they operate as an archiving system, recording a shift in aerial seeing, knowing, picturing, thinking, and envisioning, or in what Jason Weems collectively terms "aeriality." In Weems's historical analysis, aeriality is one of the most defining perceptual and cognitive practices of the early twentieth century, which invented a regional sense of space and identity, in particular shaping the agrarian American Midwest landscape.[3] In her brilliant book *Flights of Imagination*, landscape histo-

[1] https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5140-3091
[2] Alan K. Henrikson, "The Map as an 'Idea': The Role of Cartographic Imagery during the Second World War," *American Cartographer* 2: 1 (April 1975): 19; Edward Kaplan, *To Kill Nations: American Strategy in the Air-Atomic Age and the Rise of Mutually Assured Destruction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015).
[3] Jason Weems, *Barnstorming the Prairies: How Aerial Vision Shaped the Midwest* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), xi.

rian Sonja Dümpelmann demonstrates that in the early twentieth century, the aerial vision "sustained a new epistemology" promoting "a new spatial imagination based on the unit of the region."[4] My interest in aeriality is not to pursue its long-term development, which had a bearing on landscape design, architecture, and planning, extending thousands of miles from the homeland to include occupied Japan. Instead, I pause to reflect on the paradigm shifts in aeriality witnessed during the war and postwar years and on the corollary shifting ground caused by aeriality.

I shall examine a diverse but select set of aerial archives—an undertaking that entails, if implicitly, the examination of a grounding in the fields of literary and race studies and, in particular, investments in the terrestrial divisions of the Earth during recent transatlantic (Paul Gilroy), hemispheric (Caroline F. Levander and Robert S. Levine), transpacific (Yuan Shu and Donald E. Pease), and archipelagic (Brian Russell Roberts and Michelle Ann Stephens) turns in American studies.[5] These are seemingly mutually conflicting turns; however, they all exemplify the recent turn to geography, or what Martin W. Lewis and Kären E. Wigen term "metageography,"[6] driven by an interest not only in decentering the United States' imperial nation-state within narratives of planet-spanning connections, but also in interrogating geographical or spatial forms such as continents, oceans, and archipelagoes as being "culturally contingent."[7] Such interrogations are important, especially given the shift in perspective that aeriality powered and propelled in the twentieth century. In 1952, the German-Jewish architect Erwin Anton Gutkind published *Our World from the Air*, the first book of its kind, with a selection of aerial photographs of the Earth's surface and of the human impact on the Earth's environment

[4] Sonja Dümpelmann, *Flights of Imagination: Aviation, Landscape, Design* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014), 75, 229.

[5] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Caroline F. Levander and Robert S. Levine, eds., *Hemispheric American Studies* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008); Yuan Shu and Donald E. Pease, eds., *American Studies as Transnational Practice: Turning toward the Transpacific* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2015); Brian Russell Roberts and Michelle Ann Stephens, eds., *Archipelagic American Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

[6] Martin W. Lewis and Kären E. Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), ix.

[7] Brian Russell Roberts and Michelle Ann Stephens, "Archipelagic American Studies: Decontinentalizing the Study of American Culture," in Roberts and Stephens, *Archipelagic American Studies*, 6–7.

and nonhuman nature.[8] I ponder a question in the spirit of *Our World from the Air*: what happens if we airlift our analysis against the gravitational pull of the containment of nation-states, colonies, cultural areas, continents, seas, or islands that have served and are serving as basic critical frames in literary and cultural studies? I use this simple question as a thematic motif to guide the reader through my discussions.

AERIALITY AND AMERICAN-OCCUPIED JAPAN

The central premises of this address are that air space is culturally contingent like all other spatial structures and that the connections between aeriality and Japan are a contested terrain. Historian Alan Henrikson argued that America's cartographic shift in perspective arose following the surprise Japanese air attack at Pearl Harbor as a "primal event" because Hawai'i was a target presumed to be impossible to attack due to its distance from Japan. The distance was conceptually even greater in the familiar old Mercator map of the world, representing two hemispheres and placing Hawai'i and Japan at the extremes of the left (west) and right (east) sides, respectively.[9] Mercator's maritime map soon rapidly lost its narrative power; instead, a cartography adopting an aerial perspective, popularized by *Fortune* magazine's graphic artist Richard Edes Harrison and his "One World, One War" map, represented the United States' fresh world outlook. The map was drawn in an azimuthal projection, within which any straight line from or across the center denotes a "great circle" route, i.e., the shortest distance that aviators can follow. Harrison's map ushered in air-age globalism and eventually was the inspiration for the motif for the official emblem of the United Nations.

Harrison's cartographic works, in particular his signature stratospheric perspective maps that resemble high-altitude aerial or satellite photographs drawn from an imaginary God's-eye view, comprised America's earliest aerial archives of Japan. They presented a new spatial vision, which evoked the mobility of imagination that helped to shape the conduct of the war in the Pacific theater. For instance, "Japan from the Solomons" shows Asia's relative propinquity to the Pacific islands, which are depicted in Mercator's map as being scattered across a vast expanse of water.[10] The United States' forces would use these and other islands for

---

[8] E. A. Gutkind, *Our World from the Air: An International Survey of Man and His Environment* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1952).
[9] Henrikson, "The Map as an 'Idea,'" 19–20.
[10] Richard Edes Harrison, *Look at the World: The* FORTUNE *Atlas for World Strategy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1944), 44–45; Susan Schulten, "Richard Edes Harrison and the Challenge to American Cartography," *Imago Mundi* 50

the military tactics of island hopping, building airstrips, and integrating their military operations using aircraft, thereby calling into question areas, regions, divisions, and borders.

The modern visual medium of aerial photography entered the aerial archives of Japan in this war context, with its ability to read the country from aloft objectively and clandestinely. A Fairchild Camera and Instrument Company advertisement in the March 1945 issue of *American Photography* portrays the bomber equipped with aerial cameras that made the first reconnaissance flight over Tokyo from Saipan in November 1944 to collect geospatial intelligence for planning sustained air raids. The plane was christened *Tokyo Rose* after a legendary Japanese radio personality. Its nose art depicted a woman speaking into a microphone, which epitomized the aerial war that the United States was waging—a war in which airpower, airwaves, and aerial photography decided the game. Another photograph in the ad was an image taken by a Fairchild aerial camera for damage assessment of an aircraft plant in Taiwan, then a Japanese colony, which was destroyed by B-29 Superfortress bombers. Overlaid on the image was an exclamatory phrase: "So Sorry!"[11] This dress rehearsal in Taiwan set the stage for the copious photographing of Japan from the air. From the historic Tokyo air raid in March to the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by atomic bombs in August 1945, which President Harry S. Truman called "a rain of ruin from the air," these photographs documented the advent of the air-atomic age as it changed the Earth's surface.

In spite of—or rather precisely because of—the ways in which they provide a counterpoint to American aeriality and render air space a contested terrain, some Japanese materials can be included in the aerial archives. For instance, consider a photography book entitled *Tokyo: Fall of 1945* by Kimura Ihee in collaboration with other photographers. A carefully curated collection of images of the fall of the rising sun, *Tokyo* contains several bird's-eye views or panorama photographs from bridges and from a burned department store. Presenting oblique horizontal views, they reveal rather than obscure the fact that the Japanese photographers were earthbound and denied access to an aerial vertical vantage point.

A foreword to the photography book begins with a description of an autumn skyscape over Tokyo, which is "four tiny streaks of vapor trails spiraling behind the high flying 'Superfortress [Boeing B-29].'" The B-29 was a four-engine heavy bomber that "changed the significance of the sky

(1998): 180.

[11] "Camera Target: TOKYO," *American Photography* (March 1945): 57.

… over-night." Using an organic (biological and environmental) analogy, the foreword tells of the fleshy materiality of the Japanese body politic that was burned and ulcerated, and of its slow healing that could only occur after surgery. In the spring of 1945, Tokyo was repeatedly firebombed and bled like "a specimen of a malignant ulcer." In the summer, United States occupation troops arrived and carried out "a surgical operation" on the body of the city. In the autumn, "'the Great Silvery Bird' … still continued to soar about," and the sky was "a blank space where a tiny speck possessing uncany [sic] powers would break out at any moment." However, the significance of the sky "had again changed" and "the people were released from their habitual uneasy glances skywards." None of the planes flying over Tokyo were marked with the rising sun. Japan lost the war and its territorial air space withal. "The scars of her surgical operation" could be seen on the ground and "the gut … used to stitch the wound [took] the form of English road signs."[12] An accompanying photograph shows roadside signs tied to a dead burned tree, which illustrates the iconography of an environment and ecosystem damaged by air raids. Thus, *Tokyo: Fall of 1945* is a part of, not apart from, the aerial archives of American-occupied Japan.

LITERARY ARCHIVES OF AERIALITY

This address suggests that aerial archives—despite their appeal to visualization—take on a range of forms that are not only visual and material, such as maps and photographs, but also literary, thereby posing a critical question of literariness. The address also contains an argument about the literary culture of American-occupied Japan. The standard history of American literature is one in which Japan under the United States military occupation does not readily find a place. I believe that a book must be written that addresses its absence and perhaps remaps the field, but that is not what this address is about. Rather, I show that examining occupied Japan offers a way, or sometimes a different way, to think through the aeriality implicated by the literary culture.

The writings of Beate Sirota Gordon—an Austrian-born Jewish American who wrote gender equality into the Japanese Constitution—provide a useful example of literary archives in which aeriality is not only historically located but also literarily imaginative. Gordon begins her memoir of occupied Japan, entitled *The Only Woman in the Room* (1997), by describing her views from a mobile aerial perspective on a propeller

[12] [Nakajima Kenzō], foreword to *Tokyo: Fall of 1945* (Tokyo: Bunka-sha, 1946), n.p.

plane on Christmas Eve in 1945. The sights of "charred ruins and solitary chimneys [standing] up from the bare red earth like nails" reveal a formerly lively civilization that was now destroyed. The achievements of the B-29s' bombardment were legible in an aerial vision of the ground that came into view at slow speeds: the total annihilation of the city, a vanquished civilization, and a landscape eradicated of people.[13] When viewed from the air, Japan did not look like the green Earth but resembled Mars.[14]

The plane "touched down with a bump" at Atsugi Airfield. The American immigration officer "stamped 'Occupied Japan'" in Gordon's passport.[15] In February 1946, Gordon was appointed to a top-secret project drafting articles for a new Japanese Constitution. She commandeered a jeep through the ruined city of Tokyo to search for any still-standing library buildings that were spared from being burned to the ground and collected a dozen books on constitutional law, including the constitutions of "the Weimar Republic" and "the Soviet Union."[16] Using these books as a reference, she wrote a clause that specifies "the essential equality of the sexes," which is a guarantee not explicitly found in the United States Constitution.[17] This was Gordon's gift to the female survivors in a defeated patriarchal country that had surrendered to the Americans' superior atomic airpower and accepted the Potsdam Declaration, whose unconditional surrender terms promised that the Japanese would not be "enslaved as a race."[18] The new (American-authored) Japanese Constitution was preceded by a preamble that articulated a commitment to "the banishment of tyranny and slavery … for all time from the earth." It also included a clause that echoes the thirteenth amendment to the United States Constitution that abolished African American slavery and a clause that guaranteed the right to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."[19]

Nothing seems to illustrate better the enthusiastic welcome that the vanquished afforded to a democratic revolution from above than a cartoon by Katō Etsurō, entitled "Gifts Falling from Heaven" (1946), which depicted the remnants of survivors including women on the burned earth

---

[13] Beate Sirota Gordon, *The Only Woman in the Room: A Memoir of Japan, Human Rights, and the Arts* (1997; repr., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 9–10.
[14] Beate Sirota Gordon, trans. Hiraoka Makiko, *1945-nen no kurisumasu* [Christmas in 1945] (1995; repr. Tokyo: Asahi Shinbun shuppan, 2016), 18.
[15] Gordon, *The Only Woman in the Room*, 10, 11.
[16] Ibid., 107.
[17] Ibid., 117, 125.
[18] "Potsdam Declaration," July 26, 1945, https://www.ndl.go.jp/constitution/e/etc/c06.html.
[19] Const. of Japan, art. 18; Const. of Japan, art. 13.

rushing forward and reaching out their arms to receive canisters labeled "democratic revolution" falling from the sky in lieu of "a heavy rain of bombs and incendiaries."[20] The giver (once an enemy) is outside the frame at high altitude, which is associated with sacrosanct authority (heaven). The central actors in this drama are in the foreground, i.e., the canisters-cum-gifts floating down on parachutes. They represent an aerial system of knowledge and power being transferred to women and other hitherto disadvantaged groups, which attests to the ways in which air space was reimagined. Katō's cartoon illustrates the United States' wartime and postwar aerial operations, including the mines dropped on parachutes to cut supply lines (Operation Starvation) and "relief bombing," delivering drums of food by parachute to Allied prisoners of war in camps. Taken together, Gordon's memoir and Katō's cartoon indicate the surprisingly rapid changes that occurred in the aerial imagination during the 1940s.

Working in Tokyo, Gordon's imagination went deeper than the Earth's surface to the underground life that her synoptic view from a propeller plane could not penetrate. Gordon perceived here and there a thin wisp of smoke curling out from under the ground in the burned-out city, which she read as a sign of life. The tendrils of smoke were indicators that Japanese "families"—here figured not as the white bourgeois nuclear family, but as a notion of the family marked by race and deficiency—were cooking their breakfasts in "air-raid shelters" that they used as "homes." Gordon spots "hungry children wrapped in futons poking their heads out of the shelters" like moles that occasionally peek out of the ground.[21] Her memoir thus engenders the underground life that exists as the constitutive outside to aeriality.

The vision of unseen "families" surviving underground takes hold during the week Gordon works on the Japanese Constitution. She drafts an article to grant both married and unmarried mothers the right to receive social welfare benefits and to equate the rights of children born outside of marriage with those born within marriage. Yet, as the memoir proceeds, the General Headquarters/Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers' top officials eliminated the clause from the Japanese Constitution.[22] Thereby, they implicitly and virtually eliminated a space for women and children to be viable as humans outside the patriarchal legal protection or possession

---

[20] Katō Etsurō, "Amoru okurimono" [Gifts falling from heaven], in *Okurareta kakumei* [The revolution that was given to us] (Tokyo: Kobaruto-sha, 1946), 3. The cartoon is reproduced in John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), 68.
[21] Gordon, *The Only Woman in the Room*, 103.
[22] Ibid., 111, 116–18.

by men, husbands, and fathers. This elimination from the Japanese Constitution would result in producing what it prohibits: i.e., a taboo underground embodied by dispensable *occupation babies* born to members of the United States occupying forces and Japanese girls, as we will see shortly.

In a broader literary context, Gordon's underground families are best read in light of the shifting ground of race, or rather of the human, in American-occupied Japan. Gordon's empathetic imagination depicts the underground families as cooking and eating breakfast, which is a marker of civilization, despite the fact that they have been driven underground to live (like cavemen) and reduced to a bare existence. One cannot read this humanization of the war victims and not think of other writers' depictions in which the Japanese as occupied subjects are dehumanized to the level of animals, vegetation, or aliens. For instance, a memoir of occupied Japan by Margery Finn Brown, *Over a Bamboo Fence* (1951), tells of an encounter with a filthy creature, its sex "obliterated" due to "disease and poverty," while walking in "Little America." A homeless Japanese had wandered into Little America, which was a few square miles in downtown Tokyo where the occupation forces had requisitioned office buildings, hotels, and theaters for their work, shopping, residences, or entertainment.[23]

Ethel L. Payne, an occupationaire from Chicago's South Side, was the first to write about the illegitimate occupation babies fathered by African American servicemen. Although an unlikely place for a black Chicagoan to become a journalist, Japan was where Payne—later known as "the First Lady of the Black Press"—began writing. Payne took a hostess job (she was later promoted to director) at a special service club, the Seaview Club, in the Tokyo Quartermaster Depot in 1948. Her first report from Japan, which was about occupation babies, appeared in two installments (November 18 and 25, 1950) in the *Chicago Defender*, a leading African American newspaper with a national circulation.

With a topic that was politically unspeakable in MacArthur's Japan, Payne's story of occupation babies in the *Chicago Defender* used a food metaphor to evoke the eating mouth in lieu of the speaking mouth. Whereas the white soldier on a jeep tossing out candy treats to children on the street who have learned to say in English, "give me chocolate," is a familiar image of the generosity, friendliness, and kindness of the

[23] Margery Finn Brown, *Over a Bamboo Fence: An American Looks at Japan* (New York: William Morrow, 1951), 15, 22.

American occupation in Japan's archives of memory,[24] the black soldier in Payne's writing is a deliciously edible black subject—"Chocolate Joe"—coveted by Japanese girls.[25] It is not only their skin color that makes the black GI Joe taste like "chocolate"; the Japanese girls' alimentary desires metaphorize him into food for sustenance, as a chocolate bar that is sweeter than a white GI. Payne writes, "the hungry, ragged populace found him [Chocolate Joe] a good deal more 'soft to the touch,' kinder and generous than his pale-faced fellow crusader in arms."[26]

Inseparable from the Japanese girls' alimentary desires is the black GI's delectable job of being an occupationaire. "Chocolate Joe," Payne recounts, has "a wide range of choice among the almond-eyed femmes," and hardly has to "soil his hands" because he has "so many 'boisans' (Japanese boys) to do the dirty work."[27] The sweet taste of freedom from want or fear that Japanese girls and black GIs experience in occupied Japan results in the production of "a crop of sloe-eyed curly topped brown babies."[28] Reduced to a barren Martian-like field, Japan proves to have fertile soil underneath. Neither black nor Asian, "a very different-looking class of people are springing up … and are now held" in the status of a stateless nonperson, as Frederick Douglass would have it.[29] The black soldiers' "carefully nurtured Paradise," however, vanishes with the outbreak of the Korean War (1950–1953)—the first proxy war of the Cold War in Asia—which Payne describes "as shattering in its impact as the explosion of the atom bomb at Hiroshima." Chocolate Joe is ordered to fight and Japanese girls lose a source of "a steady income."[30]

The fate of occupation babies born outside marriage was "abandonment," an inhumane treatment that points to something more than a mother's poverty. This abandonment reveals the political unconscious repressed in the (American-authored) liberal Japanese Constitution, whose guarantees of human rights never extend to girls and

---

[24] See, for instance, the photograph in Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 72.
[25] Ethel Payne, "Says Japanese Girls Playing GIs for Suckers: 'Chocolate Joe' Used, Amused, Confused," *Chicago Defender*, November 18, 1950, 1.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ethel Payne, "Says Japanese Girls Playing GIs for Suckers: Says Fate That Awaits War Babies Is Tragedy of Yank Oriental Unions," *Chicago Defender*, November 25, 1950, 12.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1960), 27.
[30] Payne, "Says Japanese Girls Playing GIs for Suckers: Says Fate That Awaits War Babies Is Tragedy of Yank Oriental Unions," 12.

women outside the protection or possession of their fathers or husbands, or to the offspring of unwed mothers. Payne's criticism is that "both the Japanese government and the Occupation authorities gingerly sidestep the problem" of brown babies, though their number "constitutes a major sociological, biological and psychological phenomena [sic]."[31] Following this exposé of MacArthur's Japan, Payne was dismissed from her position in the military.[32]

Payne's last report from occupied Japan, "The Last Time I Saw MacArthur," which appeared in the *Chicago Defender* (April 28, 1951), describes a nocturnal air-scape as seen from her departing plane. At midnight on a March evening at Haneda Army Air Base, she is seated as a passenger in a plane about to start "the 6,000 mile flight to San Francisco" to go home to Chicago. The plane defies the law of gravity and "lift[s] itself into the air." During the ascent, she sees from her window the pitch darkness of Tokyo city barely mitigated by the dim light from two sources: the moon and the airport. This aerial view leads her to ponder the two great suns that have risen and are setting in the land of the rising sun, Hirohito and MacArthur. The former is "an emperor in name only by the grace of" the latter, who, in turn, is to be removed by President Harry Truman, because General MacArthur—the Supreme Commander of the United Nations forces—publicly disagreed with him on the American war strategy in Korea. "Remove him [MacArthur]! Might as well take the sun out of the heavens, so great was his fixation and importance," Payne jibes.[33] When Payne landed back in her American homeland, she "discovered that black orphans in Chicago faced a dismal fate similar to that of the tan orphans of Japan."[34] Occupied Japan and Chicago's South Side were not different planets.

Four weeks after Payne's departure, MacArthur left Japan. MacArthur's memoir *Reminiscences* (1964) includes the last aerial view of occupied Japan that he took from his plane *Bataan*:

> We left for Atsugi Airfield at daybreak on the 16th. Two million Japanese lined the route from the embassy to Atsugi, waving and some weeping…. We took off as the sun rose with the breath of early spring in the air. Beneath us lay this land of the

[31] Ibid.
[32] James McGrath Morris, *Eye on the Struggle: Ethel Payne, the First Lady of the Black Press* (New York: Amistad, 2015), 76.
[33] Ethel Payne, "The Last Time I Saw MacArthur," *Chicago Defender*, April 28, 1951, 2.
[34] Morris, *Eye on the Struggle*, 93.

> chrysanthemum, with its deep shadows and brilliant hues, with its majestic peaks and low-lying valleys, its winding streams and inland seas, its cities and towns and rolling plateaus. We circled Fuji for a last look and then we were gone.
>
> But Japan did not forget.[35]

The aerial view prompts MacArthur's desire to describe his lost home ground as being in flux. The "land of the chrysanthemum" rebuilt under his guidance and tutelage is thus airlifted into an unremarkably nostalgic landscape. The material and social consequences of war and postwar occupation as a broken continuum recede into the distance, while the sounds and cries of occupation babies are inaudible from above.

Aerial archives can and must be constructed. As I have begun to demonstrate, aerial archives do not only make legible a new constellation of concerns that came to occupy the attention of authors in the past, but significantly problematize the frames of reference for an analysis in the present, which are often grounded in the ready-made insularity of area studies. Ultimately, aerial archives invite scholars to bring the mobility of imagination to bear on future humanities studies.

[35] Douglas MacArthur, *Reminiscences* (1964; repr., New York: Ishi Press, 2010), 399.