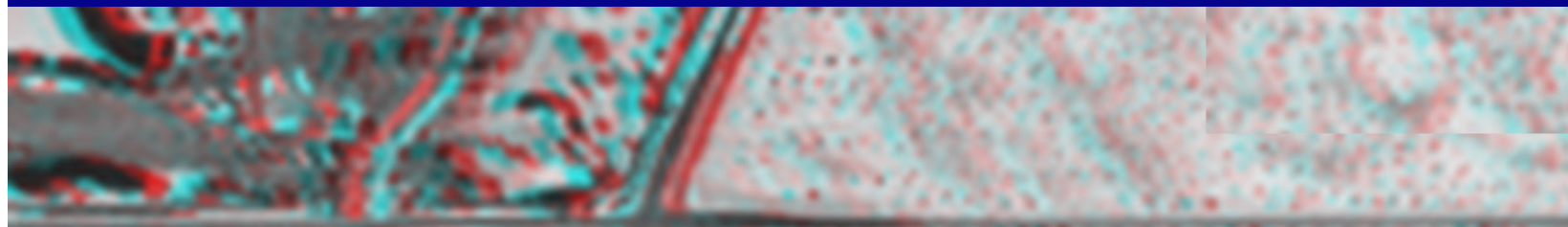# TECHNOLOGIES OF MAPPING

DECOLONIZING ARCHITECTURAL DISCOURSE
GENEVIEVE MURRAY, JOEL SPRING

SAFE THEORIZING DECOLONIAL MODERNITY:
TOWARDS AN ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY OF JURISDICTIONAL TECHNICS
DIANA CRISTOBAL OLAVE

Future Method Studio

Directed by Wiradjuri (Australian first nation) interdisciplinary artist **Joel Sherwood-Spring** and white settler **Genevieve Zoe Murray**, Future Method Studio works collaboratively on projects that sit outside established notions of contemporary art & architecture attempting to transfigure spatial dynamics of power through discourse, political activism, pedagogies, art, design and architectural practice. The studio is focused on examining the contested narratives of Australia's urban cultural and indigenous history in the face of ongoing colonization.

Future Method have had works commissioned by the Biennale of Sydney, Newcastle City Council, the Museum of Contemporary Art Sydney, the NGV's Melbourne Design Week, Molonglo's MG Projects, RMIT Design Hub, Sydney Architecture Festival, Venice Architecture Biennale, the New Landscapes Institute, The Unconformity Festival, and has worked collaboratively with Nat Randall & Anna Breckon on **The Second Woman**, Dutch Design Group FOUNDation Projects on **Streetcamp**, with Alvaro Carrillo and Carmen Blanco on **Watertopia**, with Wiradjuri elders Lyn Syme and Kevin Williams on **Future Acts** for the Cementa Festival.2

DECOLONIZING ARCHITECTURAL DISCOURSE

GENEVIEVE MURRAY, JOEL SPRING

WARRANJAMORA[1]

We, an architectural practice of both Wiradjuri (Australian First Nation) and white settler origin, write from the unceded lands of the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, the Boorooberongal people of the Dharug Nation, the Bidiagal people and the Gamaygal people who have practiced their sovereignty and law/lore on this land, Warrang, commonly known as Sydney, since the first

sunrise. We acknowledge their endless and continuous care for Country, Country we were born on and call home. In doing so, we acknowledge their struggles through frontier wars and pay our respects to them, the Gadigal people, their Elders past, present and future. It is upon their land that we undertake our work as architects and researchers; we acknowledge these are stolen lands for which a treaty or sovereign agreement has never been negotiated.

"Acknowledgements to Country:" phrases similar to these are now routinely delivered within our institutions and at public events. "Welcome to Country," an offering from the first peoples of the places we work, live, and meet to those of us who are not of that place are also commonplace and remain important protocols that recognise time-honoured traditions connected to these places. Within institutional settings, this important protocol is perceived as a formality, often rushed, and routinely delivered as a performative expression of political correctness with little or no relationship to the people of that place. When considered alongside the institution's pedagogies, course content, and representation of First Nation staff, they act as an embedded and institutionalized "move to innocence."[2] In this paper we explore how these acknowledgements and welcomes are operationalised as optics and as "move(s) to innocence" by the institution. We explore how they work to reinforce structural white supremacy within the settler colonial regulatory frameworks of institutions, and how the institutionalisation of these gestures, and the manner in which they are performed, speak to a deeper "ontological disturbance"[3] at the heart of these performative optics. We use our experience as outsiders, as sessional, contracted employees teaching a Masters of Architecture Design Studio and an elective in 2018, both exploring decolonizing architectural methodologies, to illustrate how we too were instrumentalized by the institution to perform optically for them, and how this works to extend the performativity of "acknowledgments" and "welcomes" into course content and discourse, while acting to further embed eurocentrism within the institution. We offer, in conclusion, how we see a way out of this performativity.

NGARRA[4]

Within Australian universities, a "Welcome to Country"[5] is understood as being the reserve of special occasions. Arranging a "welcome" requires time, foresight, scheduling, administration, and adequate remuneration, and often, given these structural logics, an "Acknowledgement of Country" is performed by a staff member in its place. In placing the responsibility on academic or senior staff, the observation of cultural protocols between sovereign bodies is opened up to subjective interpretation, even though the format

is often prescribed. In institutional spaces such as the University of Technology Sydney (UTS), the now-customary "Acknowledgement to Country" operates as a rehearsed formality read aloud at events and the commencement of studies. Staff are provided with a template by the University policy document *Guiding Principles for Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country*:

> I would like to acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation upon whose ancestral lands our City campus now stands. I would also like to pay respect to the Elders both past and present, acknowledging them as the traditional custodians of knowledge for this land.

The provision of this template is a ubiquitous gesture among the majority of tertiary institutions within Australia, and while being an important protocol to attend to, they are often a rational virtue-signaling exercise to avoid offending First Nations people. The "Acknowledgement" is generally followed by introductions and indications to the fire exits and toilets; is often rushed, and sometimes even avoided for fear of making mistakes, or from a fear of reducing the words to a mere platitude. When there is an absence of something as essential as a relationship to the people and the *country* you are acknowledging, when there is no wholehearted expression of connection and recognition, it becomes an awkward and often anxious attention to protocol. It becomes, in a sense, an expression of how the processes of institutionalisation render us isolated in place, and how these awkward performative gestures express a deeper "ontological disturbance." The absence of a meaningful relationship to Traditional Owners, to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, their struggle, their history, and their talents manifests publicly through this process.

Furthermore, the generosity contained within a "Welcome to Country," its offering of an opportunity for a respectful sovereign relationship, is rarely considered for its richness, and rarely taken as a springboard for a more genuine and meaningful relationship. In the School of Architecture, where an understanding of place, site, and context are foundational tenets of design practice, the selective neglect of this offering is at best a missed opportunity, and at worst one that
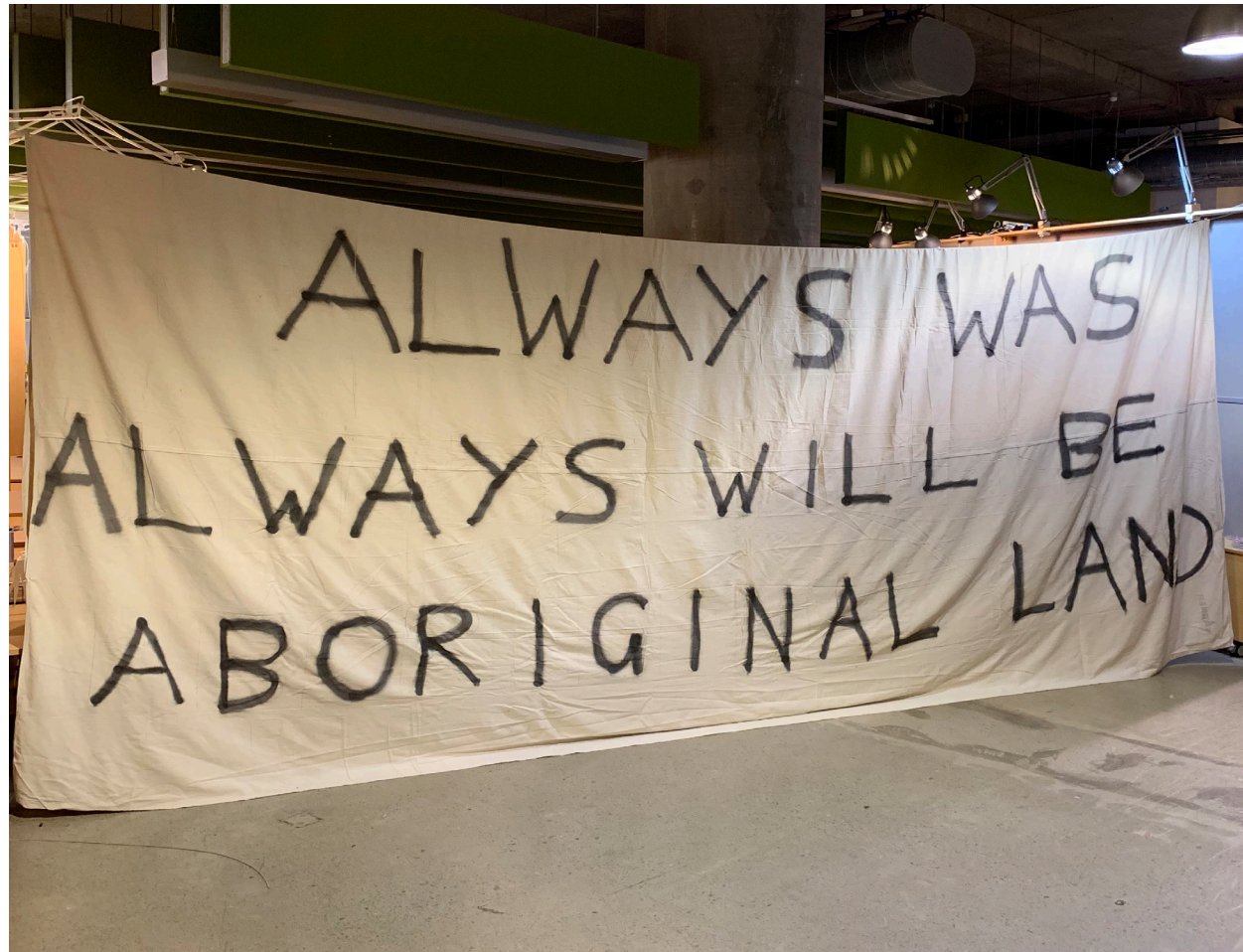
serves to reinforce the institution's role as a mechanism of the processes of ongoing settler colonialism.

We use the ceremonies and protocols of a "Welcome to Country" and an "Acknowledgement of Country" as a starting point to this conversation, as it seems to be foundational to the way in which Indigenous knowledge, those that have been historically othered, excluded, and systematically quashed, are now attempting to be included and embedded in the institution's learning outcomes and course content. It is the language of inclusion that suggests the preservation of primacy of western and institutional academic processes and pedagogies in this power dynamic—as if this inclusion were a privilege, as if the knowledge had just sat there waiting for someone to ask if they could have it; that it is not dependent on people and their connection to

their elders, on their connection to country, and to their community; and that it is able to be sustained despite the ongoing processes of settler colonialism that our built environment professionals are pivotal in.

That a "Welcome to Country" is never considered for the generous offering is symptomatic of this, and of the ongoing othering of Indigenous knowledge. There is no response to this generous offer. The question is not, in this dynamic, "How could our work be lawful on your country, in your eyes? What work might we have to do for this to be acceptable to you in the first instance?" It is, instead, "How can we use your knowledge and your generosity to progress our own work, our own expertise and service our own need?" It is the process through which the institution operationalises its "move to innocence."

NGARADIEMI[6]

As a way into understanding how this "move to innocence" manifests in the institution in other ways, and how people—predominantly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander guests, sessional, and visiting practitioners—are operationalised as optics for the institution, we will describe a sequence of events that individually do not represent much, but as a set of circumstances together form a symbolic picture of these processes and their power.

In 2018, in the Masters of Architecture program at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS), we were invited to teach a design studio. The invitation related quite directly to our emerging public presence at the time, one built through our political activism supporting public housing tenants in Redfern/Waterloo, an inner city suburb of Warrang/Sydney with an historically significant and politically active urban Aboriginal[7] community. As important context, this work had involved voluntarily running a community space called The Future Planning Centre,[8] in partnership with the Waterloo Public Housing Action Group headed by Aunty Jenny Munro and Richard Weeks on the Waterloo Estate. It was a space run independent of government that sought to centre Indigenous voices in the "master planning" process of what was the first significant sell-off of public land in an infrastructure-driven urban renewal corridor stretching from the Sydney CBD to Bankstown.[9]

The informality of the invitation to teach at UTS came about through a conversation at an exhibition opening that led to a few email conversations. This process, its informality, it being determined solely by the course convenor, and it occurring within cultural spaces that are very much in service to the cultural legitimacy of the institution, was to us, representative of the way in which privilege is operationalised through institutions. Within this process, we felt there were some consumptive urges being expressed. That we were relevant and necessary. That the nature of our practice, our politics, the intersection we represent was being seen as desirable, we were (and it is important to acknowledge, through our own proximity and through our access to the spaces and conversations born of a certain set of privileges) being given this opportunity

and being included in how the school wanted to position itself politically at the time.

This inclusion, we think, was due to two factors. First, it came from an ongoing desire to be culturally relevant and thus part of this emerging global discourse on decolonisation. A discourse that, up until this point, had been entirely absent from New South Wales architecture schools. It is an appetite for cultural relevance that is not grounded in any relationship with First Nation struggles, struggles that are on the doorstep, quite literally, of the institution, but merely a product of the consumptive nature of institutions. There is no relationship to the origins of the discourse; in fact, the distance of academic and subject or object is the fundamental precursor to this dynamic. The logics of the institution, and this historic ontological and epistemological position embedded in academia, could never have produced this progressive discourse; the frameworks that support knowledge production and dissemination in that context are not,

of course, where resistance, struggle, and opposition can emerge. What we witnessed in this instance was essentially how the precariousness of our work, how our stepping outside of the systems and frameworks of institutions of capitalism and the mainstream had created a unique discourse within architecture that they wanted to include for its favourable optics.

Second, with not one tenured First Nations academic staff member engaged in this as a research area (at the time of writing), and with not one core learning agenda at the intersection of First Nations struggles and settler colonialism, the only way it could be included within these spaces was through this co-option, through this inclusion of already existing discourses operating externally.

This lack of core learning at this intersection is embedded in the logics of the institution and the methods by which it "addresses" First Nation struggles. The institution leans upon its Reconciliation Action Plans (RAP)[10] to address this, and important things do come out of them that include: a necessity placed on "Acknowledgements of Country" being de rigeur at the commencement of lectures; on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and student representation being a priority; and on learning outcomes embedding Indigenous knowledge in course content being implemented. Ironically, through the instrument of the RAP there is now an imperative, across the faculty, to pay attention to include what has always been othered and excluded, but without any relationship to the community or knowledge of the people who carry this knowledge, those who struggle within the systems of oppression, and whose lives are impacted daily by it. There is no relationship to place and to the people who are spoken of so fondly in our acknowledgements of country, and there is certainly no conscientious exploration of what it might mean to live lawfully on country,[11] to respond wholeheartedly to the generous offer embedded in a "Welcome to Country." The logics of the institution and the institutionalisation of the Reconciliation Action Plans do not make a relationship seem necessary, or even relevant. The culture of the institution and the institutional mechanisms of Acknowledgement and RAPs are the barrier to a necessary relationship to people and place.

Before moving into a discussion about the ways in which we were personally operationalised as optics by the institution, it is important to first note that decolonisation discourses are not decolonisation, and they exist within institutions predominantly to service the white hegemony (in our experience); that at the time we were teaching at UTS, there were no First Nations staff in the faculty of Architecture; that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were often and are still often called upon to represent Aboriginality or an Aboriginal perspective; that there is no mandatory cultural competency training for staff; that there is no core course content that covers the role of architecture and the built environment in settler colonialism; and that no Aboriginal architectural history courses are available, despite there being significant scholarship on the topic.

The reason for these phenomena is the historic privileging of western ontologies that are incompatible with the potential processes of decolonisation within this context. That "legitimate" knowledge and the processes of its production are seen as the exclusive domain of the west, of European and North American scholarship, and that their dismissal of other ways of seeing and being in the world have rendered a culture of knowledge production embedded in the maintenance of its supremacy. The very processes of legitimising knowledge in this set of conditions works exclusively for a dominant western academic model.

The historic denial of other ways of "seeing and being in the world," with western discourse always "seeing itself as holding the knowledge production domain," is due to it being fundamentally in opposition to the very structures, power dynamics, politics, and impetus of the university and the architecture school. A decolonising discourse doesn't fit within the institutional logics of RAPs because of the necessity it demands of returning the gaze. It is not focussed on how First Nation people and their knowledge can be embraced and included in course content, it instead returns the gaze; it wants us to begin a process of challenging, dismantling, and dismembering the institution and its role in ongoing dispossession and settler colonial violence.

So in knowing all this, we felt some obligation to enter into this institutional context as an unsettling

force; what we didn't predict was how we would be operationalised to legitimise and service the processes by which the institution is co-opting First Nations' knowledge and bodies and struggles to service these processes of "move to innocence." How they are co-opting decolonising discourse to retain their cultural supremacy while doing nothing to enact a process of decolonisation or to educate a new generation in what this really means in this context.

That we ended up teaching a studio on Decolonising Architecture and an elective on Decolonising Discourse is a product of these collective logics that seemingly oppose each other, but somehow have become a necessity. The discomfort these conversations demand means that they exist only in electives and design studios, spaces within which they are optional and subject to the whims of the current course convenor and therefore included, but never as foundational

processes. This enables the white dominant culture and its pedagogies to remain intact and undisturbed by this gaze. The optics of inclusion rendered through the institutional logics of RAPs and learning outcomes work as a panacea to the discomfort rendered by the more political objections to the institution made through a decolonising discourse. Instead of addressing structural issues, they subcontract labour, both physical and mental, to optically address this. Educational institutions extract cultural capital from mostly sessional First Nations staff and people of colour, in the name of diversity and inclusion. While these people do, temporarily, benefit from being "invited" to participate in the institution, the university consumes visibility politics and the aesthetic economy of marginalised struggles, continuing to inevitably co-opt the knowledge economy around resistance history on multiple levels.
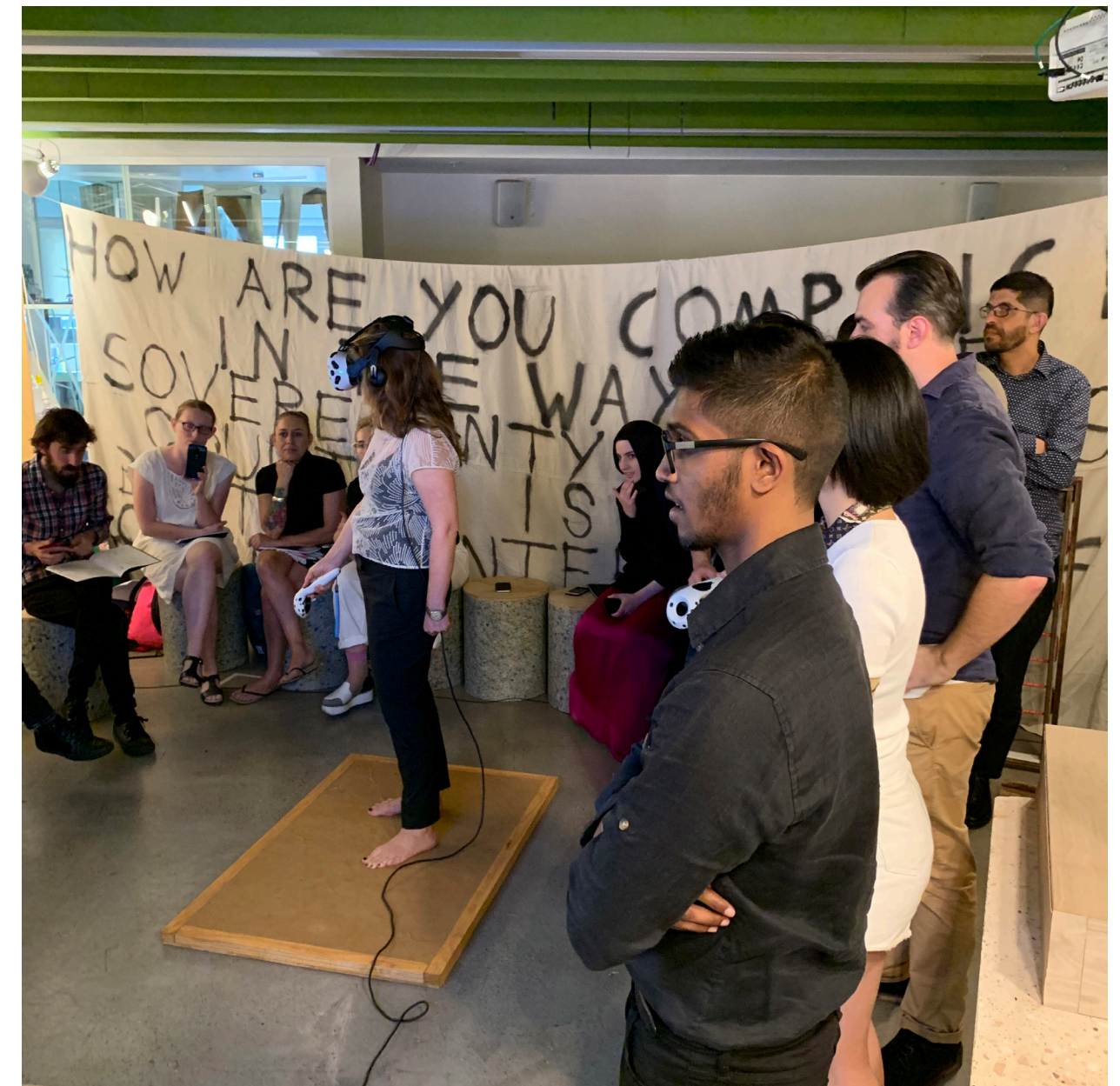
To help understand a little of how this process is operationalised, there are some key yet subtle instances that, for us, illuminate this dynamic very succinctly. The first was a lecture series we organised as part of our elective. We wanted a diversity of voices to speak on the topic, and from different and varying perspectives. We wanted a majority of First Nations perspectives, but we also felt it very necessary to introduce to the school the logics of settler colonialism so that students could better understand its processes, particularly the role the built environment professionals play in sustaining it: a necessary returning of the gaze. The lectures themselves were informal and done in a small space around a large table so that guests and speakers were in close proximity, and a conversational atmosphere was created. We intended this space to be welcoming and safe for the speakers, and one that gave students an experience of a different method of knowledge exchange. Although the lecture series was encouraged strongly by the course convenor and a modest budget allocated, there were some worrying indications to us that the series was somehow not significant to the school in the same way a visiting European or North American guest might be, and we could see how the minimal amount of advertising the series was given was enough to display optically the cultural relevance of the school, but without any real attention paid to making them well attended by staff or students or the general public.

The second instance came in the critique of our Masters Design studio from the course convenor at the end of the semester. We were working on a project with our students that sought to redirect student expertise and labour to a project for Grandmothers Against Removal (GMAR), an organisation run for and by Aboriginal women to support Aboriginal mothers whose children have been removed through government child protection policies and are often in very precarious circumstances. They wanted to create a healing centre for Aboriginal women that centred cultural healing and the needs of the women, and that would be safe and healing. Our students, having been at UTS in their undergraduate degree, had not once been introduced to the politics and history of colonial invasion in Australia, what that meant for us as architects in this context, and what the impacts of this had been on these women. We were essentially working with a completely blank slate, having to educate the students not only on the particulars of what a process of working with an Aboriginal organisation might look like, but also unpacking the ways in which they had been taught to work in their undergraduate degree. We chose not to focus on the outcome and instead on the process, on supporting the students to feel connected and empowered throughout the semester, giving them confidence in their instincts and decisions. We did not want the work to be focussed on performing in a particular way for the institution, but instead on the design processes and outcomes for GMAR.

The students worked collaboratively on the design with GMAR and built a VR model that put Aboriginal women in the driving seat, able to make decisions about the building while experiencing it in Virtual Reality. The outcome was less about the building and more about connection, relationships, empowerment, trust, and how our work could support GMAR in working towards their goals. The only feedback we got from the course convenor was that the building could have been better, with no comment or interest in the complex process and outcome that we and the students felt very proud of. The emphasis was on the object and not on the pedagogy; it was more concerned, it seemed to us, with our lack aesthetic fodder for the UTS Instagram page than it was in exploring our opposition to that as a measure of success.

These combined experiences painted a picture for us that was deeply problematic. We could see by the end how we had been instrumentalised by the institution so they could optically appear to be doing progressive and politically vibrant work, but their lack of understanding, and the degree to which they missed the point of our work was so profound we could see very clearly by the end of this how we were being consumed for the optics and how this functioned, alongside Reconciliation Action Plans, Acknowledgements, and the embedding of Indigenous knowledge in course content as "move(s) to innocence." In no way was the school interested in fundamental change, or in seeing their gaze returned.

processes for deciding who and what is taught, who and what is included, must be centred on and taken by traditional owners on whose country the institution is located. We must ask the questions: What should we be teaching our architecture students to make their work lawful on your country? What are the protocols we need to learn for this? What could we be teaching to make our courses more relevant and meaningful to your youth, your people, and your desires?

This process of course demands a necessary relationship with place, with its people, and with their struggle, one that is not about dominance but about listening, learning, and understanding the white possessive[13] tendencies embedded in inclusion logics. It is radical, but it is simple. Stop consuming, stop co-opting, and start listening. Radically rethink who is making the decisions about course content. Think about where these decisions are made, and by whom, and change that. Become responsible to place, become accountable to something other than the cultural hegemony that you sustain, and most importantly learn to listen. Hear, learn, listen. Radically restructure the power dynamics embedded in institutions to allow other ways of seeing and being to be centred, not marginalised. ▪

ENDNOTES

1.   Warranjamora is the Gadigal word meaning 'I am in Sydney Cove' taken from documented conversations between Gadigal woman Patyegarang and settler William Dawes in the 1790's. https://www.williamdawes.org

2.   Tuck, Eve, and K. Wayne Yang. "*Decolonization is not a metaphor.*" Decolonization: Indigeneity, education & society 1, no. 1 (2012).

3.   Aileen Moreton-Robinson, Philosophy in the wake of Empire part 5: Tracks of thought. An interview for ABC's Philosophers Zone, https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/philosopherszone/tracks-of-thought/11745888

4.   Ngarra is the Gadigal word meaning "Listen," taken from documented conversations between Gadigal woman Patyegarang and settler William Dawes in the 1790s on Gadigal land. https://www.williamdawes.org

5.   A Welcome to Country is an important cultural protocol in Australia. You can only be welcomed onto *country* by a Traditional Owner of that *country*. This important cultural ceremony takes many forms depending on the context, but they are mostly given by respected Elders.

6.   Gadigal word meaning "I will listen," taken from documented conversations

between Gadigal woman Patyegarang and settler William Dawes in the 1790s on Gadigal land. https://www.williamdawes.org/ms/msview.php?image=book-a-page-40 Andrea Mubi Brighenti, *Urban Interstices: The Aesthetics and the Politics of the In-between* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

7.   We use the term Aboriginal to describe a community of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Redfern living on Gadigal land, but connected to place through kinship ties. Even though they are living off 'country' due to colonization, they were not a diasporic community in that the Gadigal, Tharawal, Wiradjuri, Gomeroi, Kuring-Gai, Gundungarra and many more nations surrounding Gadigal land have had close relationships and connection through inter-marrying and trade since time immemorial.

8.   For more on this space please read The Spatial Dynamics of Resistance: http://runway.org.au/spatial-dynamics-of-resistance

9.   For more information on this, https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/Plans-for-your-area/Priority-Growth-Areas-and-Precincts/Sydenham-to-Bankstown-Urban-Renewal-Corridor

10.   https://gsu.uts.edu.au/policies/documents/reconciliation-statement.pdf

11.   Porter, Libby. "Learning to Live Lawfully on Country." In *Questioning Indigenous-Settler Relations*, pp. 137-146. Springer, Singapore, 2020.

12.   Yanga is the Gadigal word for "to do," taken from documented conversations between Gadigal woman Patyegarang and settler William Dawes in the 1790s on Gadigal land. https://www.williamdawes.org/ms/msview.php?image-id=book-a-page-40

13.   Moreton-Robinson, Aileen. *The white possessive: Property, power, and indigenous sovereignty.* U of Minnesota Press, 2015.

YÅNGA[12]

If there is to be any meaningful transformation within the architecture schools of NSW and perhaps Australia, the mindset must shift. Instead of focussing on inclusion and how Indigenous knowledge can be embedded in western knowledge systems, we must ask what we can do to respond to the generous offer in a "Welcome to Country." What work do we need to do for our willingness to accept the welcome not be a hollow gesture, and how might academic processes and our pedagogies transform for this? It is a shifting that is required, a shifting in what is centred and what is privileged, we believe. It is a dismantling of western, Eurocentric cultural dominance in the architecture schools of NSW that is required, and to do this the