ULTRA

Positions and Polarities Beyond Crisis

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On a Field: Undoing Polarities between Indigenous and Non-indigenous Design Knowledges

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Abstract

This paper discusses how architectural practices can engage with and be inspired by a culture that is more than 60.000 years old. How can architects learn from situated and embodied Indigenous knowledge systems in the Australian context? How can an ethical engagement with indigenous histories and practices inspire the development of future architectural practices? This paper proposes that a better understanding of indigenous relationships to land and our environment can inspire us as a society and as architects to imagine new ways of thinking and practising. Considering our numerous contemporary crises, such as climate change, species extinction, food insecurity, we might need to begin to challenge and question western European norms and frameworks. The persistence of colonial thinking, operating within a capitalist system, has been the root cause of most of our contemporary crises. To attempt to undo the polarities that persist between indigenous and non-indigenous knowledge and thinking, we might learn new ways of storytelling as a means of envisioning an alternative future.

This paper understands the theme of the 'ultra' as that position that keeps us apart and stops us from sharing stories that might lead to alternative ways of speculating on shared spatial futures. To situate this discussion, we present a collaborative and pedagogical design experiment undertaken on the lands of the Dja Dja Wurrung. On this Country, tentative attempts to learn with the environment and its associated stories were ventured on a small field and storytelling was used to shift our understanding of country and architecture.

Introduction

In Australia, Western thinking, processes, and frameworks generally drive architectural practice. This thinking is expressed as wealth and power accumulation, emphasising ownership of property and housing. Rather than homes, property is increasingly assumed in the first instance to operate as a real estate investment, while commodities and objects are assessed by potential growth and increasing yields.[1] 'Location' is a real estate slogan, and a consideration of the best neighbourhood returns both the greatest yield and prestige on investment. This worldview locates the individual at the centre, and the selfish pursuit of one's own gain is expressed through the ownership of a plot of land. Fulfilling the Australian dream comes via the creation of the homeowner's own universe of value on their plot. Backyards are populated with swimming pools and patches of buffalo grass—driven by luxurious, human-centred lifestyle choices. Spatial relationships to one's neighbours are defined according to oversight rules and fences that demarcate property boundaries and block the view into any surrounding landscape. This fixation on regulating against oversight of one property into the next is an issue of great fascination, where even the gaze comes to be regulated. Prevailing attitudes to land, ownership, and relationships with one's neighbours are just some of the challenges should a shift of attitude to environmental relations be sought in the Australian context of settler-colonial traditions.

As has been remarked with more and more frequency since the early 2000s, we live in a new geological era, the Anthropocene; under the dim light of a climate emergency, amid the planet's sixth mass extinction event,[2] and surrounded by unimaginable environmental catastrophes. Climate change is not something in the future, it is happening to us now globally.[3] Hence one could argue that we should be responding to an existential climate crisis. A crisis in which we experience severe droughts and bushfires, during which we start wearing masks and are asked to stay inside because of smoke travelling across continents.[4] A crisis in which mega-storms cause loss of life in ever greater numbers and with more frequency.[5] Moreover, a crisis where safe habitation of the earth is threatened for a large portion of organisms, including humans.[6]

In July 2021 fires in Canada and the West of the USA caused the air quality in Manhattan, approximately 5000 km east, to surpass the maximum value considered safe for human life. Manhattan's air quality index (AQI) value reached 157;[7] any index above 100 is considered unhealthy for the elderly and people with existing conditions, and any value above 150 is considered unhealthy to anyone. Meteorologists in the US have issued health warnings stemming from the fires for more than 40 million Americans.[8] In June and July the West of Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands, was hit with deadly flash flooding , possibly caused by a climate change-induced weather stall event. These events split jet streams, causing atmospheric blockages that trap static air and cause extreme rain and heat events, sometimes simultaneously in entirely different parts of the planet.[9] In Australia, heavy storms and associated wave activity caused by a changing climate have led to the erosion of coastlines[10] in Sydney, with many houses evacuated. These are but a few examples of the climate crisis presenting itself. These phenomena are now being witnessed constantly and becoming part of

1. Li, T. M. "What is land? Assembling a resource for global investment." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, 39*(4), (2014) pg 589-602.

2. Ceballosa, Gerardo, Paul R. Ehrlichb, and Rodolfo Dirzo, "Biological annihilation via the ongoing sixth mass extinction signaled by vertebrate population losses and declines", *PNAS* 114, No.30 (July, 2017): E6089–E6096, https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1704949114.

3. Clare Watson, "Someone Leaked The Next IPCC Report. Here's How Experts Are Reacting", Science Alert, Published June 25, 2021, https://www.sciencealert.com/someone-leaked-the-next-ipcc-report-here-s-how-experts-are-reacting

4. "Air Quality: What You Need To Know", Climate Council, Published January 2020 https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/resources/air-quality/

5. Sandra Banholzer, James Kossin, and Simon Donner, "The Impact of Climate Change on Natural Disasters" In *Reducing Disaster: Early Warning Systems For Climate Change*, (Dordrecht: Springer, 2014), 21-49.

6. Will Steffenan, et al. Trajectories of the Earth System in the Anthropocene, *PNAS* 115, No.33 (August 2018): 8252–8259,

7. "Local Particulate Air Pollution (PM2.5): Manhattan, New York, United States", Berkley Earth, accessed July 2021, http://berkeleyearth.org/air-quality/local/United_States/New_York/Manhattan/.

8. Christiane Heil, "Notstand im Westen", Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, accessed July 2021, https://www.faz.net/aktuell/gesellschaft/ungluecke/waldbraende-in-kanada-und-usa-notstand-im-westen-17449156.

9. Paul Voosen, "Why does the weather stall? New theories explain enigmatic 'blocks' in the jet stream", Science, Published March 2020, https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2020/03/why-does-weather-stall-new-theories-explain-enigmatic-blocks-jet-stream

10. Mitchell D. Harley, et al., "Extreme coastal erosion enhanced by anomalous extratropical storm wave direction", *Nature.com.au Scientific Reports* 7: 6033 , (July 20, 2017), DOI:10.1038/s41598-017-05792.

daily life. Research by the Pentagon warned in 2019 that climate change will become a threat to national security: increasing terrorism, global poverty, and food shortage, as well as increasing infectious diseases spread by warm climate insects.[11]

In this context, one needs to reflect upon how an architectural practice and how we as architects contribute to these conditions. While we have figures from the building and construction industry showing that the '… building industry and construction account for more than 35% of global final energy use and nearly 40% of energy-related CO2 emissions…'[12] , Australia is one of the least efficient users of energy, producing 540gram of CO2 perkWh. To stay below a 2ºC temperature rise as per the Paris agreement would require a maximum of 72 gram of CO2 per kWh, 13% or less of Australia's current energy efficiency and pollution levels.[13] We can argue that there is not much we can do as a single practice or architect, and that it is difficult to change a large system. It is also challenging to rethink current practices deeply embedded within the resource-hungry system.

However, solutions are offered. In many discussions around climate change, technology and development are posited as our hope, like shifting from fossil fuels to solar and making buildings more energy-efficient and sustainable over their lifetime. Real estate agencies advertise new developments with keywords like 'Fossil Fuel Free' because gas appliances won't be installed, or 'Solar Powered' because the communal areas will be lit by power achieved with a few solar panels. We need to be honest and admit that the discussions cannot just focus on the sustainability of operating buildings but also on the sustainability of the construction processes and the materials used. While it is an achievement to discuss NatHERS Star Ratings, the Nationwide House Energy Rating Scheme, developed to 'make Australian homes more comfortable for their inhabitants and also help residents to save on energy bills through smarter design choices' and[14] give developments 6 or 7.5 star energy ratings, this rating system is embedded with its own assumptions. It has ownership and cost concerns at the centre of its equation and looks very much like greenwashing as the constructions themselves remain unsustainable, using concrete and steel as the primary construction material.

Will any of these meagre changes be enough to address climate change? Especially where habits of consumption and assumptions about one's right to own property are maintained. Aren't we still thinking in terms of benefits for some, referring to costs and returns, relying on constant growth, with a human-centric perspective, and the hope that further growth is possible by just applying or inventing the right technological solutions? Can architects and clients work together to find the best means of caring for environments, constructed and natural? Is architecture capable of finding new ways of multiplying its effects as an art of living amidst planetary damage?

In this context, what is there left for architects to do? Should we start asking whether we can reduce the number of new buildings and the dimension of built envelopes, avoiding more consumption of farmland and natural ecologies? Could we rethink the size, ownership, investment return and status of our dwellings? Furthermore, could

11. Colonel Max Brosig, et al., "Implications of Climate Change for the U.S. Army", *United States Army War College* (2019) https://climateandsecurity.files.wordpress.com/2019/07/implications-of-climate-change-for-us-army_army-war-college_2019.pdf.

12. Towards a zero-emission, efficient, and resilient buildings and construction sector, UN Environment and International Energy Agency, Global Status Report (2017): p 14.

13. Ibid p 17.

14. "Nationwide House Energy Rating Scheme (NatHERS)", accessed July 2021, Nathers.gov.au

regulatory change encourage recycling and repair? Maybe even making it mandatory, rather than encouraging a process where the complete demolition of existing buildings and starting anew is more 'efficient'. Rather than sending building materials to landfills, can we learn to deconstruct and carefully reconstruct buildings with the least use of material resources possible? In this context, one would expect, or at least hope, that architects and designers could lead the profession out of wasteful and unsustainable practices. As a design system, architecture has the tools to move the building industry in a radically different direction—rethinking old habits of extraction and production, right down to the detail of the material choices we make.

Where Can We Turn for Alternatives?

Architects and designers cannot continue with business as usual; they must change their attitude and get involved by rejecting the traditional frameworks in the profession and on the building site. They, we, can't hope for excuses to be accepted any longer. Everyone needs to develop, offer, ask for, advocate for, and apply alternatives. The profession needs to mobilise socially and politically to imagine a new and better world. We must question our whole world thinking and accept that the core problem lies in the Western paradigm of a frontier mentality that focuses on individual benefit. However, if we question our capitalist thinking and framework, where is there left to turn? Maybe we need to imagine a world where ask not how much, but how little we can build. A world where architecture and design do whatever they can to contribute to change but do not assume that a new building or a new design object is the best answer to any design problem. Reflecting on what role architecture and design could play today, while working within a capitalist system that seems not to allow for operating outside of the flows of goods and finance, can we find value and solutions in turning to Indigenous thinking?

This paper argues that architects in Australia and our societal stakeholders could learn alternative approaches from the wealth of knowledge held within the more than 60,000-year-old Indigenous culture. We have applied a Western perspective of continuous growth for too long—treating land as a commodity, an ongoing expression of a colonial attitude towards our environment. As we experience the impact of climate change on a larger scale, there needs to be a different philosophy and relationship to Country and non-human species. To start learning, we need to start listening and understanding. Tyson Yunkaporta writes in his book 'Sand Talk', that 'the only sustainable way to store data long term is within relationships—deep connections between generations of people in custodial relation to a sentient landscape, all grounded in a vibrant oral tradition'.[15] Architects and designers must listen to and learn from both Indigenous knowledge and Country, and in doing so, form meaningful relationships with both. We must learn to think about and see the world from an Indigenous perspective.

We must clarify that this paper and the discussion on how we could undo polarities between Western and Indigenous knowledge systems is from our perspective, starting to engage with Indigenous Aboriginal Corporations in the context of a Master design studio. Since then, we

15. Tyson Yunkaporta, *Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save The World*, (Melbourne: The Text Publishing Company, 2019), p 167.

have been eager to expand our understanding of how architecture and architects can learn and engage with the longest living culture in the world. We are not scholars with knowledge of anthropology or social science or even expert environmentalists. However, we hope that by integrating this learning within a design studio, raising these questions will encourage students, our future architects, to start asking questions of the current professional paradigm. Furthermore, we hope it begins a lifetime of listening, learning and relating to Indigenous knowledge, Culture and Country.

As architects, we understand that places and buildings are complex systems, informed and influenced by politics and histories, heritage and stories, shifting programs, and use and meaning. For Indigenous First Nations' people, this understanding extends to any site or locale. As Yunkaporta writes, 'oral cultures are known as high-context or field-dependent reasoning cultures. They have no isolated variables: all thinking is dependent on the field or context'.[16] This field of context extends across all space and time in a non-linear way—from cities and towns to fields and forests. A Western eye perceives a duality between untouched nature and designed environments. We construct boundaries through time and space, particularly regarding historical periodisation, which could be considered an us–and–them approach. This approach contrasts the a-temporal nature of indigenous Australian concepts of place and story; the colonial and capitalist concept of 'land' and its reduction to a transactionally derived thing called 'property'. Indigenous thinking sees no boundary. The western historiographical approach allocates indigenous culture as a time period and polarises it in contrast to the western worldview. However, both cultures are now co-evolving and co-existing. Yunkaporta writes about Creation Time 'Nothing is created or destroyed; it just moves and changes, and this is the First Law. Creation is in a constant state of motion'.[17] The colonial heritage that decimated First Nations people and Country now forms an ongoing part of Country. This co-existence raises the question of how historians can recognise different cultural systems without applying their own assessment and referential system to another cultural framework; such an act is colonial in its own right.

From the Indigenous viewpoint, what a Western eye sees as untouched nature may be a carefully managed, cultivated and abundant commons with complex relationships to past, present and future living patterns of all organisms. Remnant areas of indigenous land management tell of this more respectful mode of occupation in need of no signed agreement, nor acts of oppression and denigration.[18, 19] In settler-colonial Australian history, the Western logic of property rights determines that a deed or title can secure land and its resources. As a result of colonisation, Indigenous land was cleared, walls raised, and fences constructed:[20] 'A fence defines a land claim, saying "…mine and not yours."'[21]

We need to learn a more holistic and respectful understanding, reading, and engagement with the built and natural environment based on respect and caretaking. Moreover, this holistic understanding may even break down the dualistic barrier between the built environment and 'nature'. This holistic and respectful understanding is needed if we hope to protect and preserve Country and its natural-cultural conditions, respecting its histories and stories, for future generations.[22]

16. Tyson Yunkaporta, *Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save The World*, (Melbourne: The Text Publishing Company, 2019), p 172.

17. Ibid, p45.

18. Paul Memmot, "Aboriginal Signs and Architectural Meanings Part 2", *ATR* (*Architectural Theory Review*), 1997, p38-64.

19. Bill Gammage, *The Biggest Estate on Earth: How Aborigines made Australia*, (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2011).

20. Paul Memmott, "Aboriginal Signs and Architectural Meanings Part 1", *ATR* (*Architectural Theory Review*), 1996, p79-100.

21. Hélène Frichot and Rochus Hinkel, *Voices of Country,* (Ars Electronica, 2020), https://ars.electronica.art/keplersgardens/files/2020/08/Utopia-Voices_of_Country-Essay.pdf (accessed 7th June 2021).

22. "Giyakiki: Our story", Djaara Balaki Wuka, accessed July 2020, https://djadjawurrung.com.au/giyakiki-our-story/.

We began to explore these questions in a Master Design Studio, Studio 40, at the graduate school in the Melbourne School of Design (MSD), University of Melbourne. We attempted to develop creative and utopian proposals that address the numerous environmental challenges we face. We explored different ways of thinking, working and relating to the world by expanding our perspective beyond the built towards the living and the lived. Throughout the semester, we learnt by reading authors such as Paul Memmott and Bruce Pascoe. Moreover, we orally engaged with Indigenous knowledge by listening to Rodney Carter, the CEO of the Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation. We acknowledged that looking at former farmland in regional Victoria as our investigation site removed us from the more challenging questions related to the colonisation of Country through architecture and city-building. As much as architecture is a manifestation of civilisation, it is at the same time the construction of a colonial system. Even with the greek polis, anyone outside was deemed a barbarian.[23] The larger question, which would need to be addressed in another paper, would be how urban agglomerations are becoming part of an Indigenous understanding of Country—they are not other to Country. Something that has been explored through the ARC grant 'Re-Making Indigenous Place in Melbourne' at the Melbourne School of Design before.

One of the challenges we faced was our doubt about whether we were competent enough to engage with questions of Country. Would our expressed interest be seen as yet another attempt of colonisation? We discussed our concerns with our colleague Jefa Greenaway, who has developed a training module for staff at the Melbourne School of Design on Indigenous cultural competencies. Greenaway reassured us that the attempt to start listening and learning is worthwhile; we should feel uncomfortable, but by remaining respectful and learning from mistakes, we could take positive steps forward. While it's only possible to learn a little within the duration of a single design studio, it at least begins a conversation with students and colleagues that will, at least for some, remain ongoing. The studio allowed students and teachers alike to question our Western bias, seeking to acknowledge other points of view instead.

The studio was another step forwards in the short history of pedagogical engagement with Indigenous Knowledge. Earlier engagement includes 'SuperStudio', a twenty-four-hour design competition run by SONA. Devised by four Indigenous architects and artists in 2013, the brief, 'Refuge of Discomfort', challenged students to consider a 'design solution that provides comfort and refuge while acknowledging a history of tension and injustice towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples'.[24,25] At the Melbourne School of Design, The University of Melbourne Bower Studio is a series of 'consult, design and build' projects that 'involve students working alongside indigenous groups in remote locations in Australia, Thailand and Papua New Guinea to improve their built environments[26]. In 2021 one of the authors co-hosted with Peter Raisbeck a panel discussion on Indigenous knowledge systems during the Melbourne Design Week, as part of a series of conversations under the framing title: Politics and Utopia in Architecture.[27] The panel included Leonard Clarke (Uncle Lenny), a Kirrae Whurrong Elder from the Western District of Victoria, and Dr Christine Phillips, who collaborated in a design studio at RMIT

23. Anthony Preus, *Historical Dictionary Of Ancient Greek Philosophy* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman et Littlefield, 2015). P 348.

24. Architectureau, '*SuperStudio 2013: winners announced*', Architectureau, Published August 2013, https://architectureau.com/articles/superstudio-2013/.

25. Nicole Henderson, Emily Palmer & Jordan Simcock, '*Confronting Boundaries*', Confronting Boundaries Blog, September 2013, https://confrontingboundaries.wordpress.com/.

26. Studio Bower, "*About Bower*", Bower Studio, Accessed 08 November 2021, https://bowerstudio.msd.unimelb.edu.au/about/about-bower.

27. Rochus Hinkel & Dr Peter Raisbeck, '*Politics and Utopia in Architecture: Indigenous Knowledge Systems*', MSD at HOME, 29 March 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1TuhMCdH59g&t=11s.

University. Dr Hannah Robertson from the Melbourne School of Design also participated. Robertson has worked on building and design projects in collaboration with Indigenous communities in Cape York and Arnhem Land.[28] Professor Barbara Glowczewski also participated, a researcher at the National Scientific Research Center (CNRS) and member of the Laboratory of Social Anthropology (CNRS/EHESS/Collège de France). Glowczewski is an anthropologist specialising in Australian Indigenous issues, recognition strategies, Indigenous networks, and alternative collectives for social and environmental justice against ecocide. These are but a few examples of attempts to include Indigenous knowledge into pedagogy.

In Studio 40 our discussion led to questioning architectural expression, composition, aesthetics, and even technology. Instead, an appreciation of the impact of reducing the footprint of buildings was considered when we asked each other: how much do we really need to build? We shifted our focus away from constructions that last to materials and constructions that could be built by laypersons—structures that might primarily offer shelter and become signifiers of places and spaces for cultural production, exchange and food production. The projects in Studio 40 ranged from fire towers (figure 1) that celebrate and observe controlled burnings to aviaries (figure 2) that focus on endangered species, thereby displacing the exceptionalism of humans.

Figure 1 : Firetower, Maria Bulmaga, Studio 40, 2020.

Figure 2: Aviary, Dylan Newell, Studio 40, 2020.

28. Robertson, Hannah, Debbie Ross-Symonds, &, Pippa Connolly, 'Designing the Olkola Cultural Knowledge Centre: A Traditional Owner-Led Integrated Research and Education Process', *Proceedings of the 54th International Conference of the Architectural Science Association (ANZAScA) 2020* (November 2020), The Architectural Science Association, pp.375-384.

In Studio 40 we learned about the representation and communication of architecture itself, whilst aiming to understand buildings, not as objects, but as part of a larger spatial system: a living system that changes over time. We explored how we could learn from storytelling and tell new stories ourselves. Moreover, we tried to eliminate unnecessary architectural gestures, focusing on working with existing stories of Country rather than reinventing the story from a western viewpoint. We aimed to build as little as possible and consider human needs alongside non-human needs. These discussions alone challenged our relationship to architecture and how we discussed its aims and roles—and we weren't always successful; our cultural habits can run deep, but we began a learning process.

We held several open discussions with guests too. We talked with Michael Fragstein, Digital Story Telling, from Buro Achter April, in Germany about the potential of using immersive digital technologies for storytelling. We listened to Brett Leavy talk about his project of reconstructing the landscapes of major settlements in Australia prior to the arrival of Western settlers. Brett's Aboriginal owned and operated digital studio, Virtual Songlines, uses gaming engines to create interactive pre-colonial landscapes one can wander through with an avatar, observing and participating in traditional cultural tasks such as gathering and hunting for food, ceremonies and fire-making. We invited Hélène Frichot, Professor of Architecture and Philosophy, MSD, to discuss feminist thinking, creative ecologies, and alternative concepts aimed at shifting orthodox perspectives. We learned from Professor Alex Felson, an ecologist and the Elisabeth Murdoch Chair of Landscape Architecture at MSD about integrated landscape systems with dispersed patch ecologies and why connectivity and smaller, nested systems play vital roles in larger systems. Moreover, we explored the history of the landscape. In this regard, students and tutors had to take a critical view of an ordinarily celebrated history, given that our site is a post gold rush volcanic landscape stripped of topsoil. The profit of the gold rush created regional cities that we celebrate for their architectural heritage, while the scars left on Country by the gold diggers have become less visible. In this context it is essential to recognise that architecture is often a manifestation of colonialism.

Students developed a 'program' or 'function' for the site, which often led to discussions about alternative socio-political systems and frameworks. Some proposals established a co-ownership site similar to the counterculture approach of the 1970s. Alternative models for society, construction and maintenance, and care for the site and its program often relied on volunteers by establishing a system outside of the economic logics of payment and salaries. Some designs focused on providing temporary accommodation for people in need, while others centered around facilities for food production, harvesting, and processing, or even included research laboratories for indigenous plants and seed production. Architecture was imagined as changing over time and developing slowly based on local material availability and production, holding onto a concern for environmental impact.

This approached faced us with the challenge of representing minor interventions; small architectural gestures that might have been read more as part of the landscape rather than as a mark of human

occupation on Country. Proposals were heavily influenced by our understanding of Indigenous relationships to Country—the impression this care and management leaves on Western eyes is often that of minimal intervention. In fact, the intervention might not be that minimal, but it comes with a greater respect to what exists already in the place. Within a pedagogical system that regularly rewards overt gestures, learning to make and represent subtle acts can be difficult—students and teachers alike can fall into the trap of equating more with better, when in reality, doing less requires as much, if not more creative thought.

This is seen in scar trees, such as Yingabeal at Heide (figure 3). The minor act of removing a portion of bark from a tree recognises natural patterns (figure 4) and works within this context. It is an act of harvesting that interfaces with a living system while maintaining balance. It is an act of reciprocity that recognises how much can be used, turning the tree into a 'marker tree'[29] while also creating opportunities for other organisms, such as insects and fungi, without killing the tree. It is no accident that western eyes don't often notice these subtle scars—we are attuned to more prominent semiotic acts of destruction and domination. We, as architects, can learn to develop similar approaches for the building and construction industry.

29. Carly Grace, et al., "*Yingabeal: The Wurundjeri scarred tree at Heide Museum of Modern Art*", (Melbourne, Australia: Heide Museum of Modern Art, 2016), https://vimeo.com/174616022.

Figure 3: Yingabeal, the scar tree located at Heide Museum of Modern Art, Photo: Dylan Newell.

Figure 4: A naturally scared tree in Royal Park, Melbourne, Photo: Dylan Newell.

As a response to these challenges of representing minor interventions or design acts we explored the use of storytelling in architectural discussions and as a mode of representation and communication, asking students to represent their proposals to reflect changes, adjustments of use and shifts of expression and experience over time. This representation would sometimes include visualising a proposal by considering the shift of daylight or changing seasons and weather. Moreover, representing change helped shift students' perception from a focus on architecture as an object and formal expression to a reading of space and time. It enabled students to relate better to place over time, acknowledging changing conditions and shifting uses.

The biggest challenge was and is how, as teachers and students, we can build relationships and establish a foundation of trust with the local First Nations people. How much are we superimposing our own views and research interests, for instance, the concept of the Anthropocene, onto our indigenous contacts? The struggle we face is making sure such pedagogical projects and their relation to ongoing research are relevant to and driven by Aborigines and not only by our own perceptions and ideas. While the studio is an opportunity and entry point to rethink pre-existing design knowledge paradigms, we need to acknowledge that we are also on a learning journey. Admitting one's own limitations is a primary step. There will be ongoing learning and failures, admiration paired with frustration and worries that one might fall into the same trap as early colonial settlers—underestimating Indigenous competencies only to push one's own agenda.