

One of my first calls in Sydney was to the NSW Institute of Architects (NSW AIA).

I spoke to a mentor and asked him the process of developing sites in Sydney.

"WHAT PROCESS!? HERE IT'S JUST GREED, CORRUPT POLITIANS. IT'S AMBITION. IT'S TRITE!"

Had I heard of Barangaroo? Crown Casino? The Obied family?

They're familiar sentiments expressed by many within and outside the architectural community.

When did we let buildings become objects ruled by capital, instead of settings for human life?

When did we sell out our ideas of robust public space for local communities? What role do architectural institutions have for protecting public space in the built environment?

SHANNON FOSTER is a D'harawal Saltwater Knowledge Keeper based in Sydney

“Dudbaya’ora: The Hidden Ones (Bodkin, 2013 p2) Our Narinya (Living Dreaming) and Garuwanga (Ancestral Dreaming) stories have survived. But is anyone listening? So many decisions are made, projects developed and Country cleared that it appears to local Aboriginal people that, no, no-one is listening.”

shannon foster

FROM: FOSTER, KINNIBURGH & WANN COUNTRY, 'THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE (WITHOUT) COUNTRY'; 2019:4

Uncle Dennis Foley and I spoke in the later moments of this project. He has been active in the public realm and I had come across his work and words in various exhibitions and writings over the years. Hearing his experiences of growing up in northern Sydney in a recent exhibition by Jonathan Jones called ‘Sydney Elders’ had been a moment for me. Having also grown up in northern Sydney and frequented places he spoke of was a reminder of how personal the content of this project is.

It can be easy to lose sight of humanness when discussing institutionalised racism. Reading through policy documents and legislation fueled anger in me.

How can we pass over First Peoples so easily? How can we be so silent? How can we continue to forget the sovereignty of First People? How can we continue to blunder on without reflection?

Uncle Dennis candidly shared his frustrations at the corruption and mismanagement of government institutions that continue to dictate how First Nations sovereignty is expressed.

From his experience, proper and meaningful engagement with First Peoples produced the best outcomes. It was a reminder again and again of the need for non-Indigenous peoples to listen and engage with First Peoples.

UNCLE DENNIS FOLEY is a Gai-mariagal man from northern Sydney

“the key aspect is collaboration, and Indigenous trained professionals in the industry using Indigenous knowledge in design with the best of the west...a two way input, no one dominant party, mutual respect and including each others’ thought.”

uncle dennis foley

EMAIL CORRESPONDENCE, 07.05.20

S is a Dharawal man.

THE THING IS, "ARCHITECT" AND "ARCHITECTURE" ARE LEGALLY PROTECTED TERMS. THEY'RE NOT BASED ON SKILL OR QUALITY.

I DIDN'T WANT TO CONTRIBUTE TO THAT MEDIOCRITY."

CONVERSATION ON DHARAWAL COUNTRY, 08.03.20

Speaking with █████ felt like speaking with a co-conspirator. He smiled cheekily as he spoke, and yet what he was saying was heartbreaking.

The stories he told spoke to the ego and arrogance of our architectural community, who valued prestige and position over caring and listening.

Mediocrity and complacency had infiltrated our schools and our Institute. Along with others, he had confronted and challenged those in positions of power. He poked at them and provoked them.

But in an industry overwhelmed by ego and complacency, not much changed.

So not wanting to contribute to the mediocrity and complicity so common within our industry, he left.

Other avenues were more productive to change.

Together with Auntie Fran, they carved out space for protecting and celebrating the cultures and lands of First Peoples.

A repeated pattern of slowness, complicity and unwilling to change is demonstrated by the architectural community and is embedded in our schools and institutions.

Although writing about planning in Australia, Porter’s words are just as true within the architectural community.

WE HAVE "NEVER ACKNOWLEDGED THAT IT CO-EXISTS WITH ANOTHER SYSTEM OF PLACE-MAKING AND PLACE-GOVERNANCE, NOR HAS MUCH EFFORT BEEN GIVEN TO RE-THINKING PLANNING FROM THE DEPARTURE POINT OF SHARED CO-EXISTENCE... THE OVERWHELMING SITUATION IS ONE OF SILENCE, CREATING A PERSISTENT COMPLICITY WITH THE COLONIALIST WORK OF DISPOSSESSION, MARGINALISATION AND OPPRESSION."

libby porter

FROM: PORTER, 'INDIGENOUS PEOPLE AND THE MISERABLE FAILURE OF AUSTRALIAN PLANNING'; 2017:5

ESSAY 1:

Architecture As An Institution

compiled by alicia bell

CONVERSATIONS WITH:

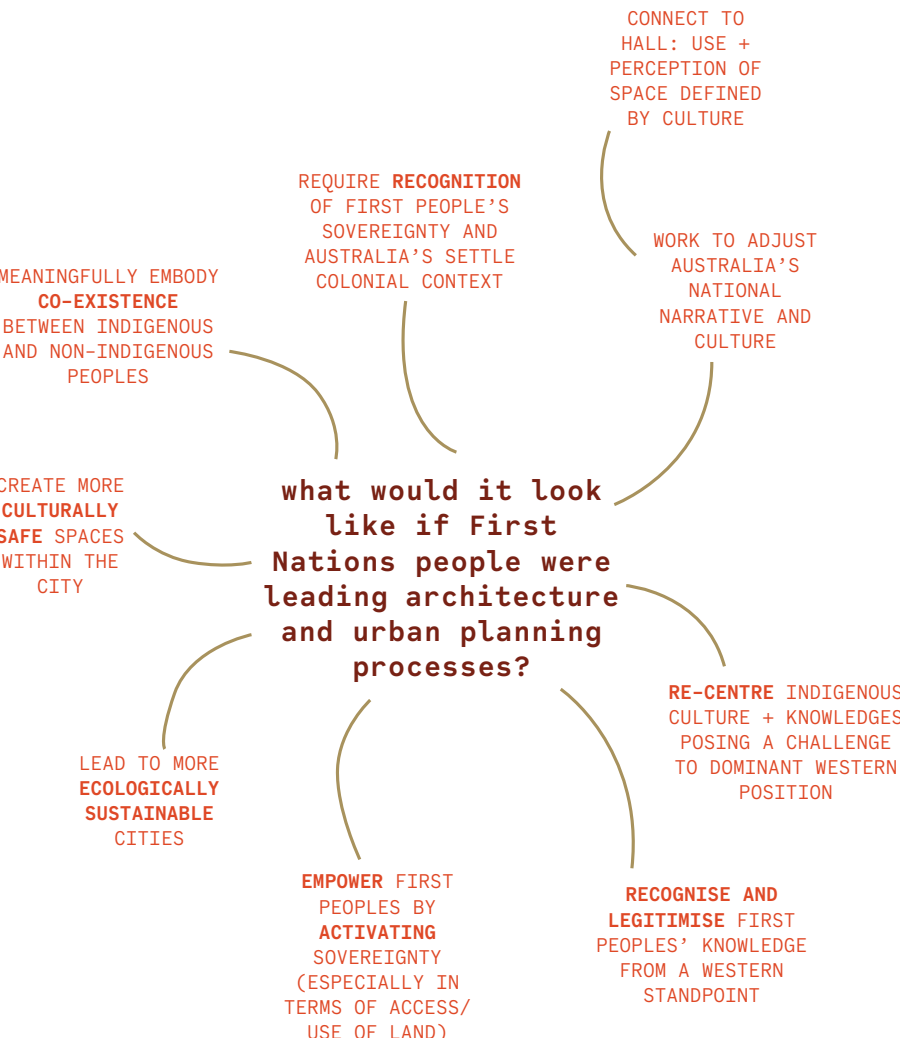
DAVID SPRINGER

SHANNON FOSTER
GLEN IRWIN
MICHAEL MOSSMAN
RODERICK SIMPSON
DANIÈLE HROMEK
DILLON KOMBUMERRI
UNCLE DENNIS FOLEY

Within these institutions, there are increasing working groups, movements and actions taking place which are led by First Peoples.

Policy, planning documents and university courses are reflecting these changes. Terms like ‘ochre grid’ and ‘caring for Country’, acknowledgments of Elders, Country, Sovereignty and expressions of the need to engage Indigenous communities and protect heritage are increasingly appearing within these insitutions.

However, language like this is limited and must be followed by tangible action.



danièle hromek

CONVERSATION ON GADIGAL COUNTRY, 26.02.20

DILLION KOMBUMERRI is a Yugembir man from Minjerribá and the Gold Coast, Queensland

"IF WE SUPPORT WHAT BRUCE PASCOE IS SUGGESTING, THEN AS ARCHITECTS, PLANNERS, AND INTERESTED COMMUNITY MEMBERS, WE NEED TO DO MORE THAN SEE - WE NEED TO THINK. AND BY ASSOCIATION SPEAK DIFFERENTLY. THIS IS POSSIBLE BECAUSE WE HAVE THE IMAGINATIVE AND CREATIVE POWER TO DO SO.

dillion kombumerri

FROM: PLANNING CONNECTS: DESIGNING WITH COUNTRY WEBINAR, 2019



Each of these policy documents requires architects to make connections with local Aboriginal Elders and communities to translate words to practice, and physically manifest change in space. Using these policy documents can assist architects in defining their roles and responsibilities, and creates spaces in budgets for engaging with First People as consultants and co-designers.

see: ‘Essay 2: Collaboration and humility in being led by First Peoples’ to explore how non-Indigenous designers can reflect on their processes and collaborations.