



**Cornelius Figure.** Ruike Liu, Indigenous mapping, Opaskwyak Cree Nation, Canada. Yale School of Architecture, Indigenous Housing Studio, Instructor: Chris Cornelius, 2021.

practices to be clear that they were creating architecture for Indigenous people. More than half the studio approached their projects from a lens of Indigenous storytelling and the projects were better for it. Some created very tangible, thoughtful, and poetic housing solutions for the community that could be easily deployed.

We should be teaching Indigenous knowledge as part of our core architectural curricula in schools in the US and Canada. If we are going to intervene in this built environment, we ought to know the policies that lead us to this point in history. I believe every architecture student that holds an accredited degree should have had some Indigenous content in their education at some point. Indigenous knowledge is not just for Indigenous people; it has very specific cultural

resonance with us, but it is intended for all living things to be better relatives.

True decolonization is giving land back to the Indigenous people of the US and Canada who have been systematically dispossessed of those lands through genocidal means. The active project of decolonization is something we have to vigorously work on and continually develop pedagogical tools to enable our students to better understand the lasting affects of colonization and how we, as designers, can counteract it.

**Chris Cornelius** is a citizen of the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin and chair of the Department of Architecture at the University of New Mexico. He is the founding principal of studio:indigenous. Cornelius was a collaborating designer with Antoine Predock on the Indian Community School of Milwaukee. He is the recipient of numerous awards and honors, including the inaugural Miller Prize

from Exhibit Columbus, a 2018 *Architect's Newspaper* Best of Design Award, and an artist residency from the National Museum of the American Indian. He participated in the 2018 Venice Architecture Biennale and served as the 2021 Louis I. Kahn visiting assistant professor at Yale University.

## Site-Writing as Holding

**Jane Rendell**

The Bartlett School of Architecture

*The term “holding” is used here to denote not only the actual physical holding of the infant, but also the total environmental provision prior to the concept of living with. In other words, it refers to a three-dimensional or space relationship with time gradually added.<sup>1</sup>*

In early March when COVID-19 arrived in the UK, I was on strike,

as part of the University Colleges Union, our third strike in [redacted] years. This one, called For [redacted] Rights, directly addressed the key issues impacting academic workers as a result of the marketization of the university sector, including pay, workload, equality, and casualization.<sup>2</sup> On the eleventh day of the strike, Thursday the 12th of March 2020, I read an “Open Letter to the Trade Union Movement” from *Labour Transformed*. This encouraged us to close our picket at the Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL, as an act of social solidarity with the UK’s National Health Service, to help to “flatten the peak” of the COVID-19 pandemic. Over that weekend, we (Polly Gould, David Roberts, and I) transformed the pedagogy of our site-writing MA module from picket line teachouts to teaching on Zoom. These Zoom site-writing sessions produced what I have come to call “holding environments.” In the Zoom grid we found ourselves next to each other in new ways, different each time. Despite the physical distance, this process of reconfiguring our relations spatially created new proximities between us, transitional spaces that allowed our writing to flow in fresh patterns.<sup>3</sup>

I had first initiated “site-writing” in 2001, as a seminar class for architecture students, encouraging participants to use their design skills to create spatial ways of writing and in so doing to facilitate a transitional space between studio “practice or making” and seminar “theory or thinking.” This pedagogical approach has run in parallel with my own practice of site-writing, which draws attention to the situatedness of writing—from the sites through which a writer encounters their subject matter—emotionally, intellectually, materially, politically—to the spatial proximities between a writer and the ways in which words are crafted, on and off the page—in relation to the verbal, the visual and the sonic—to how texts perform and meet their readers.<sup>4</sup>

David Cross argues in “Get Better Soon: Planetary Health and Climate Emergency,” that COVID-19 is a symptom of the ecological crisis.<sup>5</sup> Cross points to the importance of Katy Raworth’s “doughnut,” for constituting, as she describes it, “an environmentally safe and socially just space in which humanity can thrive.” Raworth’s “doughnut” is a spatial concept which positions the Stockholm Resilience Institute’s “nine planetary boundaries in the earth’s system”<sup>6</sup> as an “environmental ceiling,” and the “twelve dimensions of the social foundation ... derived from internationally agreed minimum social standards, as identified by the world’s governments in the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015,” as a ground.<sup>7</sup> In my view, this “environmentally safe and socially just space” constitutes “a holding.”

For the psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott, whose work relates to the caring environment that a parent creates for a child, or a therapist for a client,<sup>8</sup> a holding environment insulates the baby/client from stress, but also allows moments of frustration to enter. Gradually adjusting to the withdrawal of care a holding environment allows a baby/client to develop creatively and to become self-sustaining. This transitional space—between parent and child, therapist and client—exists as a resting place for the individual engaged in keeping inner and outer reality separate yet interrelated.<sup>9</sup>

And yet while “holding” can be associated with care, integral to her exploration of “the wake” as a form of black consciousness,<sup>10</sup> Christine Sharpe writes of “the hold” as a place of no return.<sup>11</sup> Interested in the temporality of the wake and in “hold time,”<sup>12</sup> Sharpe employs the verb “holding on” as “something like care as a way to feel and to feel for and with, a way to tend to the living and the dying.”<sup>13</sup>

Donna Haraway also uses the term, when she asks what it means to live in these times, to inhabit “the layered complexities of living

in times of extinction, extermination, and partial recuperation,” to “hold open space with others?”<sup>14</sup> Adopting the term “sympoiesis” from M. Beth Dempster, Haraway argues that this epoch, in which the human and nonhuman are inextricably linked, is sympoietic: that mortal worlds “do not make themselves,”<sup>15</sup> but rather require a form of poiesis that “thinks-with, makes-with and becomes-with.”<sup>16</sup>

Engaging with “holding” as a way of “living-with,” site-writing pedagogies aim to create ways of holding in which participants are invited to write their relations to others.<sup>17</sup>

**Jane Rendell** is professor of critical spatial practice at the Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL. She introduces the concepts of ‘critical spatial practice’ and ‘site-writing’ through her authored books: *The Architecture of Psychoanalysis* (2017), *Silver* (2016), *Site-Writing* (2010), *Art and Architecture* (2006), and *The Pursuit of Pleasure* (2002). Her coedited collections include *Reactivating the Social Condenser* (2017), *Critical Architecture* (2007), *Spatial Imagination* (2005), *The Unknown City* (2001), *Intersections* (2000), *Gender, Space, Architecture* (1999), and *Strangely Familiar* (1995). From 2015 to 2022 she led Bartlett’s Ethics Commission (with Dr. David Roberts), and The Ethics of Research Practice, KNOW (Knowledge in Action for Urban Equality) (with Dr. Yael Padan).

## Notes

- 1 D. W. Winnicott, “The Theory of the Parent-Infant Relationship,” in *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment: Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development*, The International Psycho-Analytical Library (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1965), 37–55, 43–44.
- 2 <https://www.s-t-r-i-k-e.org/>. See also “After the Strike? Part 1: The Transitional Space of the Picket Line,” and “After the Strike? Part 2: Solidarity In and Out,” in “Space to Think: The Contested Architectures of Higher Education,” eds. Igea Troiani and Claudia Dutton, special issue, *Architecture and Culture* 9:1 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1080/20507828.2021.1827481>

- 3 See for example, the work of the 2020 site-writing module here: <https://refracted-sites2020.cargo.site/>. See also Jane Rendell, "Selvedges," in *Slow Spatial Research: Chronicles of Radical Affection*, ed. Carolyn Strauss, (Valiz, 2021), which features the voices of many of the 2020 participants.
- 4 See Jane Rendell, *Site-Writing: The Architecture of Art Criticism* (London: IB Tauris, 2010). See also Jane Rendell, "Sites, Situations, and Other Kinds of Situatedness," in "Expanded Modes of Practice," ed. Bryony Roberts, special issue, *Log 48* (2020); Jane Rendell, *The Architecture of Psychoanalysis: Spaces of Transition* (London: IB Tauris, 2017); and Jane Rendell, "Marginal Modes: Positions of Architecture Writing," *The Architectural Review* (2020), <https://www.architectural-review.com/essays/marginal-modes-positions-of-architecture-writing>.
- 5 <https://vimeo.com/418970216>.
- 6 J. Rockström, W. Steffen, K. Noone, et al., "A Safe Operating Space for Humanity," *Nature* 461 (2009): 472–75, <https://doi.org/10.1038/461472a>
- 7 <https://www.kateraworth.com/doughnut/>.
- 8 Winnicott, "The Theory," 37–55.
- 9 D. W. Winnicott, "Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena—A Study of the First Not-Me Possession," *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 34 (1953): 89–97.
- 10 Christine Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016), 16.
- 11 Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 19.
- 12 Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 21.
- 13 Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 139n28.
- 14 Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016), 38.
- 15 Haraway, *Staying*, 33.
- 16 Haraway, *Staying*, 2.
- 17 For examples of site-writing work see <https://site-writing.co.uk/>.

---

## (Un)broken Pedagogies for (Un)broken Worlds

Nicholas Brown  
Northeastern University

In October 2021, the Association of Indigenous Anthropologists (AIA) called for a moratorium on land acknowledgements within the discipline citing a variety of harms perpetuated by this increasingly common performance.<sup>1</sup> Of particular concern to AIA are acknowledgements that misrecognize Indigenous peoples, fail to advance Indigenous sovereignty, and fail to advocate for concrete anticolonial actions, including the

return of stolen land and water. Land acknowledgements are broken.

In contrast to anthropology, land acknowledgements within architectural education, particularly in the US, are still rare. More importantly, awareness of the Indigenous presence they ideally name is woefully lacking. There is a need, in other words, for basic recognition within architectural education. And obviously there is a need to move beyond acknowledgement and to grapple with the myriad implications of enduring Indigenous sovereignty and jurisdiction.

An understanding of settler colonialism and the ways it intersects with other systems of oppression to shape the built environment is also missing from architectural education. Importantly, this absence is productive in that it enables settler colonialism to thrive. "Indeed, in its hegemonic professional and pedagogic forms, architecture was and remains a product, instrument, and memorial of settler colonialism," argue Andrew Herscher and Ana María León, cofounders of the Settler Colonial City Project.<sup>2</sup> Clearly, there is much work to be done within architectural education, not to decolonize—that will happen *outside* of architecture—but simply to reduce harm.

Although broken, land acknowledgements as institutional performance and pedagogical process are not one and the same. And the brokenness of acknowledgement, I suggest, is precisely where the pedagogical value lies. Acknowledgement is an ongoing and uncomfortable process. Working through the process recalibrates our understanding of brokenness. It requires learning what is actually broken and what remains unbroken. Working through the process within architectural education requires we train students (and ourselves) to answer questions like those posed by Pierre Bélanger and Open Systems: "Whose lands are you on? Which territorial treaties are they part of? Who are you accountable to? Whose

stories and histories are privileged? Who are your collaborators?"<sup>3</sup> Easy answers found in studio briefs and on apps like Native Land Digital are always incomplete, often misleading, and occasionally wrong. Difficult answers fundamentally unsettle the practice of architecture.

This is Indigenous land! Land Back! You are on Indigenous land! Land Back! These statements and demands are loud, unequivocal, and growing. The power of the demand—a return of stolen land—derives partly from its clarity. Yet the meaning of Land Back, as I have argued elsewhere, is multiple as well: "And yet to say Land Back is unambiguous—which it definitely is—is not to say it lacks complexity or nuance. Land Back means many things, including land relations back, and land relations never lost."<sup>4</sup> Land Back thus speaks simultaneously of broken and unbroken worlds. In so doing, it inverts the terms of brokenness, with unbroken Indigenous land relations eclipsing broken settler colonial ones. The clarity and urgency of the growing Land Back movement shapes my consideration of the most consequential aspects of brokenness.

What happens "when we stop assuming that dispossession was successful and instead start from the conviction that settler colonialism is, in part, a failed project?"<sup>5</sup> This question has framed my research, teaching, and practice for much of the past decade. It builds on the work of Indigenous critical theorists such as Glen Coulthard, Aileen Moreton-Robinson, and Audra Simpson, who call attention to a fundamental paradox, whereby violence has not ended, yet invasion has not succeeded. This question, moreover, transforms our understanding of brokenness. From this perspective, settler colonialism itself, as a structure and process, is broken—the goal of Indigenous elimination has never been achieved. In contrast, contemporary Indigenous resurgence and the persistence of Indigenous lifeworlds signal unbrokenness.