

## Third Spaces within Tertiary Places: Indigenous Australian Studies

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### ABSTRACT

This paper explores the notion of decolonisation by outlining the way in which Indigenous Australians are creating space within tertiary institutions as part of a broader project of cultural renaissance. We explore what 'creating space' means in terms of de Certeau's distinction between place and space, and also Bhabha's notion of 'the third space'. We examine two instances of creating space. Firstly, we outline the general way in which Indigenist intellectuals have opened up space within the western domain of academia in Australia. Secondly, we refer to a specific Indigenous studies programme as a constructivist, process-oriented approach to teaching and learning at Curtin University of Technology in Western Australia. While little direct reference is made to psychology in this paper, we suggest that third spaces are created as ways of thinking and doing, as social and psychological, connected to individual agency and political action as part of making space within everyday institutional life. Copyright © 2006 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

*Key words:* Indigenous Australians; the third space; cultural renaissance; Indigenous studies

### INTRODUCTION

This paper draws on the work of two influential cultural studies theorists, Homi Bhabha and Michel de Certeau, to examine how space is being opened up for meaningful engagement with Indigenous Australian culture in tertiary institutions. Universities, whilst often using the rhetoric of being spaces for critical thinking and freedom of thought, in many ways continue to be places of western cultural hegemony. For Indigenous academics working within these institutions there are both opportunities and restrictions but, overall, decolonisation is an ongoing struggle. We look more generally at the way Indigenous intellectuals have created space within academia, and more specifically, we outline how The Centre for Aboriginal Studies at Curtin University has been engaged in the struggle to create space for 30 years.

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## INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIAN INTELLECTUALS CREATING SPACE

Totally excluded from academia until the 1960s for the most part, Indigenous Australians have been positioned as intellectual fringe dwellers. Hence, Indigenous groundbreakers, the likes of Kevin Gilbert, Kath Walker, Jack Davis, Pat Dodson, Gary Foley, Marcia Langton, have had to struggle to gain institutional recognition as thinkers, writers, intellectuals and scholars—all too often being narrowly defined as activists and agitators. Segregationist thinking and practices predominated in Australia for the most part of the 20th century, and the policies set up to assimilate Indigenous Australians in the guise of care and virtue primarily functioned as strategies of genocide and ethnocide. Within this context of neo-colonial control, many authors suggest that the colonial/anti-colonial binary has remained firmly in place.

This explains why a critical understanding of colonisation is central to any discussion about Aboriginality. Many adult Indigenous people have had to learn this different history of colonisation during their later years, for they were educated in systems that ignored Indigenous presence in telling the history of this country. In fact, both Indigenous people and their culture were either invisible or denigrated in the society we grew up in. Hence, to understand contemporary times and make space within official 'History', a re-telling of this history from an Indigenous perspective, or at least a perspective that acknowledges Indigenous interests, is mandatory.

It is important to acknowledge all forms of colonisation, where the cultural, religious, political and economic values of Europe have shaped the postcolonial world. Moreton-Robinson (2004) reminds us to consider how:

...whiteness has assumed the status of an epistemological *a priori* in the development of knowledge in modernity by universalising humanness. Whiteness as an epistemological *a priori* provides for a way of knowing and being that is predicated on superiority, which becomes normalised and forms part of one's taken for granted knowledge. (pp. 75–76)

Smith (1999), like other authors' from marginalised groups, states that colonisation is a process of imperialism, which has different expressions that go beyond material exploitation and includes subjugation of the colonised, and an ideologically constructed discursive field of knowledge. For Indigenous peoples, a critical perspective is required as an intervention that represents their own realities in order to participate in a decolonising process. 'Coming to know the past has been part of the critical pedagogy of decolonizing. To hold alternative histories is to hold alternative knowledges. The pedagogical implication of this access to alternative knowledges is that they form the basis of alternative ways of doing things' (Smith 1999, p. 34).

An anti-colonial standpoint over the past 30–40 years, as part of the 'radical re-education of Aboriginal' people that Gilbert (1977) writes about, has been a necessary critical response to dominant racist discourses. This has meant writing from a position that acknowledges the process and impacts of colonisation, that acknowledges the oppressive practices within this, and the need for resistance. Sometimes this meant taking a binary position: white was the oppressor, and black the oppressed. A critical response towards writing that was not written by Indigenous authors, or did not acknowledge Indigenous standpoints, both was and remains well overdue.

It is common knowledge for Indigenous educators in the academy that most Indigenous students will be critical readers—even if this is simply a reactionary response rather than critically reflective. We have had to, and need to continue to be, because so much has been

written about Indigenous people and culture that is demeaning or fallacious. When reading, Indigenous people look for the messages inscribed in the words, always subjecting the text to critical analysis. Colonisation was not only about the invasion and subjugation of Indigenous lands and people; colonisation took away Indigenous Australians' right to name their realities and determine who they were. Therefore, to consciously engage in the struggle for equality and the right to self-define and self-represent and to acknowledge the deep, devastating and continuing impact of colonisation, is anti-colonial. To critically interpret the field, challenging dominant beliefs and the institutions and discourses that reproduce them, framing relations within the structures of political and cultural oppression, means the conscious adoption of an anti-colonial standpoint. As Huygens (this issue) points out, social change is complex and incremental:

[E]xchange of dialogue about institutional change has led to . . . considering questions not only of the institutional, but of the constitutional relationship between Maori and Pakeha in Aotearoa New Zealand. Such critical awareness may be understood in a liberatory framework, where, as action transforms a material situation, further conscientisation is possible.

Social change and personal transformation are in this sense closely connected.

An anti-colonial standpoint, then, involves revealing the structures of oppression, particularly in terms of the subjective and lived experience of Indigenous Australians. Emancipatory principles underpin this approach, and it is concerned with engaging oppressed groups in theorising experiences of oppression and seeking strategies for empowerment, both at individual and group levels. Anti-colonialism is based on the resistance to colonisation that accompanied the take-over of lands. In a whole range of ways, the colonised resisted invasion and subjugation throughout the processes of colonisation. However, this resistance has not been acknowledged until recent times, for part of the colonising project has been to write the official histories from the conqueror's perspective.

Making space in this phase has necessarily involved 'answering back' and re-writing processes. Resistance, at times, has needed to be extreme, but there has always been an acknowledgement of the complexities of colonial power relations and intersubjectivity, for as Gilbert (1977) pointed out:

. . . together with many sympathetic whites, they [Indigenous Australians] embrace and propagate a number of myths about themselves: that Aboriginals share freely; that they have a strong feeling of community; that they don't care about money and lack the materialism of white society; that they care more deeply about their children than do white parents; and so on. (p. 1)

Gilbert goes on to talk about the all too often grim reality of community life, but in full recognition that this is ultimately the product of colonisation—not due to the racist assumption that Aboriginal people have some inherent racial predisposition to 'self-destruct'.

Again, it is white myths of progress and development that need to be confronted and/or resisted, for although modernity may have been beneficial to western society, it has gone hand-in-hand with repression and exploitation. This repression has been especially savage on colonised groups as enlightenment philosophy embraced ideologies that justified processes of colonisation and assimilation. The colonising project was seen as 'right and just' as it brought 'primitive' societies into a 'superior' civilisation. Western culture and the white race were placed in positions of power and assumed superiority, while other cultural groups were perceived as inferior, lower down 'the great chain of being'.

One of the significant outcomes in post-modern times has been the critique of knowledge and power. After WWII, intellectual life changed. Taken for granted knowledge was challenged. This impacted on all the disciplines, including psychology. Importantly, there was a growing insistence that members of the groups that were subjugated have a voice. In Australia, Indigenous authors like Gilbert (1977), Langton (1993), Dodson (1994), Rigney (1997), Moreton-Robinson (2000), Nakata (2002), and many others, have challenged naturalised assumptions, along with progressive non-Indigenous people. Importantly, these intellectuals, and others, have gradually created spaces for Indigenous people to engage in discourses about themselves and their reality within tertiary institutions. However, the spaces are fragile, and the university remains a difficult place to exist within, dominated by western practices and principles. Given this recognition of the anti-colonial struggle, there is perhaps a glimpse of an emergent 'third space'. It is worth exploring the nature of this 'space' in terms of some influential cultural theorists.

## PLACE AND SPACE

The concept of 'space' has become a very popular term to signify something that is opened up within or outside of more grounded, material and specified 'places'. In this sense, space is characterised by its more temporal, impermanent nature. de Certeau (1984), in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, has set up one of the most influential frameworks to explain this distinction, and this may assist in explaining Bhabha's (1993) complex notion of 'the third space'.

In de Certeau's conceptual framework 'place' is connected with those who have the power to own, manage and police space. He 'postulates a place that can be delimited as its own and serves as the base from which relations with an exteriority composed of targets or threats (customers or competitors, enemies, the country surrounding the city, objectives and objects of research, etc.) can be managed' (de Certeau 1984, p. 36). Places are managed and controlled by 'strategies'.

In contradistinction 'space' is linked to the notion of 'tactics'. de Certeau (1984, pp. 36–37) explains that 'a tactic is a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus. . . . The space of a tactic is the space of the other' Tactics are used within the places owned by others,

. . . on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power. . . . [Tactics involve] . . . vigilantly mak[ing] use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers. It poaches in them. It creates surprises in them. (de Certeau, 1984, p. 37)

This distinction of space/tactics and place/strategies translates well into the colonial context—where the dispossessed have no choice other than making some 'space' in a 'place' now owned and controlled by the colonisers. Colonisers use military, economic, cultural and social strategies to establish an imperial order that is managed and maintained. The idea of emphasising the oppositional power and agency of the relatively powerless highlights how survival, making do, invisibility, secrecy, passive resistance, and so on, function tactically as ways of making space within this imposed order. Whereas strategies are able to take and hold ground, and define their own place, tactics are opportunistic and momentary, and isolated actions or events.

Relatively powerless groups have to operate tactically to simply survive and ‘make do’. This occurs at both an individual and collective level. de Certeau’s work, whilst based on a Foucauldian understanding of institutionalised subjectivity, draws attention to the individual and micro forms of everyday resistance that is both a way of thinking and doing. Spaces and places, in this sense, are as much about individual agency and ways of thinking, as they are about collective social and political action.

### **BHABHA’S ‘THIRD SPACE’**

Using de Certeau’s conceptual framework helps to explain why Bhabha’s (1993) notion of the ‘third space’ is so confounding (aside from the theoretically complex way it is explained). While de Certeau’s focus is ‘everyday life’, Bhabha’s focus is the more amorphous domain of the theory of communication and culture. Bhabha challenges the imperialist desire for cultural purity—a wholly white, civilised ideal. But he also disallows the possibility of a pure oppositional cultural space. The third space, in essence, is the fissure in between ostensibly seamless and stable places. It is a space that can be opened up, but the impulse to pin down, close, or paste over is strong. There is no pure, homogeneous cultural place for Bhabha. Everything happens in between.

The notion of the third space tries to break the simplistic logic where the dominant group tends to justify its ascendancy and the minority group uses liberationist and utopian rhetoric to construct itself as pure, innocent and incapable of ever operating in the same way as the dominant group. So, although Bhabha (1993) challenges the dominant group’s claims of cultural authority and superiority, he also challenges counter-claims of the minority’s inherent cultural purity.

It is only when we understand that all statements and systems are constructed in this contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation that we begin to understand why hierarchical claims to inherent originality or ‘purity’ of cultures are untenable, even before we resort to empirical historical instances that demonstrate their hybridity. (Bhabha, 1993, p. 37)

Bhabha’s point about enunciation and social construction can be understood in this way: Not only does a complex and incomplete process of translation occur between different cultures, but also this process is fundamental to all forms of communication. In other words, the fickle and piecemeal process of cultural translation inheres within cultures at every level of social exchange. Bhabha’s claim, then, is that there is no absolute ground for any appeal to cultural superiority.

Bhabha (1993) draws on Fanon’s (1967) notion of ‘culture-as-political-struggle’ and cultural uncertainty whereby ‘it is the zone of occult instability where people dwell that we must come . . . Cultures are never unitary in themselves, nor simply dualistic in the relation of Self to Other’ (p. 35). What Bhabha disallows is any utopian oppositionality in which some form of cultural or racial purity allows a transcendental position of truth or justification outside the messiness of specific social and historical struggles. He argues that ambivalence functions as a powerful mediating force that relativises the rhetoric of totalising polarities, as an irrepressible ‘third space’ that disrupts the polemic of simplistic inversion. Ambivalence, then, in Bhabha’s work, operates as a deconstructionist theoretical and political strategy that points to the fictional construction of absolutised truths—truths are always strategic:

The 'true' is always marked and informed by the ambivalence of the process of emergence itself, the productivity of meanings that construct counter-knowledges *in medias res*, in the very act of agonism, within the terms of a negotiation (rather than a negation) of oppositional and antagonistic elements. (Bhabha 1993, p. 22)

Bhabha is very clear about the third space being one that involves struggle. The third space is not some safe and secure position that ensures formulaic political correctness. The third space represents a radically hybrid space—unstable, changing, tenuous, neither here nor there. The third space is not just something in-between two distinct cultures: for Bhabha, there is no pure, homogeneous cultural space—even within an ostensibly unitary and coherent culture. Communication always takes place (or, more precisely, makes space) in-between.

... we should remember that it is the 'inter' - the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *in-between* space - that carries the burden of the meaning of culture. It makes it possible to begin envisaging national, anti-nationalist histories of the 'people'. And by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves. (Bhabha 1993, p. 35)

Bhabha makes this claim primarily to challenge the imperialist desire for a space of cultural purity—an imaginary white, civilised space. But, as we have already suggested, Bhabha makes it clear that this social and cultural awareness also challenges the desire for a pure cultural otherness as the radical inversion of prevailing power relations.

Bhabha has been criticised by Parry (1987) and JanMohamed (1985) for his less binary analysis of the colonial struggle and its effect in aiding and abetting the hegemony of colonial rule—an apologetics for western theory. Parry suggests that the deconstructive approach of the likes of Bhabha 'deny to the native the ground from which to utter a reply to imperialism's aggression or to enunciate a different self' (p. 36). JanMohamed criticises the watering down of the Manichean nature of the material practices of colonialism. While these critics raise some valid concerns, the clear objective of Bhabha is to unsettle the narratives that inform the deployment of imperial forces and problematise simplistic inversionary approaches to resistance.

## IDENTITY FORMATION

In a number of places Bhabha reiterates his advocacy of ambivalence, hybridity and liminality. He seeks to shift ambivalence away from a narrowly subjective notion of the term:

What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself. (Bhabha 1993 pp. 1–2)

The 'in-between spaces' relate to hybridity, for the 'interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy' (Bhabha 1993, p. 4). Hence, Bhabha argues, 'The contingent and the liminal become the times and the spaces for the historical representation of the subjects of cultural difference in a postcolonial criticism' (p. 179).

This emphasis on the ambivalent, the liminal, the hybrid, helps to explain Bhabha's impulse to shift away from simplistic dualism and binarism: 'A contingent, borderline experience opens up *in-between* coloniser and colonised. This is the space of cultural and



interpretative undecidability produced in the ‘present’ of the colonial moment’ (Bhabha 1993, p. 206). Such a theoretical shift involves the bold acceptance of the ambivalence and uncertainty that is generally disavowed, denied or downplayed within the logic of modernity and colonialism. Within this logic, the focus is on obscuring ‘the anxiety of the irresolvable, borderline culture of hybridity that articulates its problems of identification and its diasporic aesthetic in an uncanny, disjunctive temporality that is, at once, the *time* of cultural displacement, and the *space* of the untranslatable’ (Bhabha 1993 p. 225, *his emphasis*).

## ESSENTIALISM AND ANTI-ESSENTIALISM

Bhabha’s (1993) challenge to colonialist assumptions about cultural purity and superiority is a distinct anti-essentialist approach to identity formation. Essentialism is an ideology that assumes groups of people or ‘races’ have fixed, given, essential qualities, properties, or aspects that are seen as not influenced by cultural, political, social and historical differences. Much of the 19th and 20th century racial theory is based on this idea and considerable effort was made to scientifically validate racial difference in favour of dominant western groups. These dominant groups deploy essentialism as a universalising and homogenising concept that constructs ‘Others’ as inferior and deficient in every way. Anderson (2005) provides a comprehensive overview of this tendency in Australia.

Contemporary thinkers have challenged essentialist views as oppressive and racist. McKinnon (2002) explores this in terms of debates about feminism and suggests that avoiding ‘essentialism’ has become desirable and serves as a political and intellectual pretext to dismiss and ignore the realities of sexual politics and oppression. ‘One deep project of anti-“essentialism” appears to be to undercut resistance to sexual oppression’ McKinnon (2002, p. 74).

There are some problematic consequences of anti-essentialism however—especially when the effects of domination affirmative action programmes have been disbanded as the diversity within disadvantaged groups is so wide that differences between groups becomes insignificant (Matsuda, 2002).

Part of oppressed people’s struggle for empowerment has involved using strategies of building pride in belonging to a cultural group in opposition to the dominant other. This has led to reversing the binary and celebrating indigeneity. Essentialism, then, functions as a useful notion for oppressed groups to deploy. Spivak’s (1990) conception of ‘strategic essentialism’ foregrounds the politics of cultural identity, difference and the valuing of distinct cultural attributes. The key issue here is that the group defines the differences, and the essential attributes are recognised as constructions. Hence attributes are evoked when it is politically useful for the group in question. Essentialism has predominantly been harnessed by colonisers, who posit differences that are absolute; strategic essentialism involves the oppressed group setting up absolute differences between the self and the dominant other as a tactic of resistance (Kelly, 1999).

## CULTURAL RENAISSANCE

Mohanram (1999) describes how, as a decolonisation process, strategic essentialism has served to unify Indians: the oppressed creates the West and themselves in opposition:

In seeking to unify identity in the face of colonial rule, Indian nationalism posits a 'post-' to the colonialism and to the binary gridlock of oppressed/oppressor. The rhetoric of Indian nationalism must emerge as difference from this polarity . . . This act of homogenisation re-encodes within itself the preoccupation of colonial binaries. The rhetoric of national unity and difference are predicated on the original binary. (p. 88)

Moreton-Robinson (2003), an Indigenous Australian intellectual, has stated that Australia is distinctly different to other postcolonial contexts where independence has been gained: 'I argue that it is not postcolonial in the same way as India, Malaysia and Algeria can said to be. These nations do not have a dominant white settler population. In Australia, the colonials did not go home and 'postcolonial' remains based on whiteness' (p. 30). Further, while for the majority of population of Australian, belonging is linked to dispossession and migration, Indigenous people have an ontological relationship with the land and position all others as migrants and diasporic.

Ontological belonging means that Indigenous people have a spiritual sense of belonging to land/country. Colonisation has not destroyed this relationship. Moreton-Robinson (2003) dismisses anti-essentialist concerns by proposing that such arguments is still premised upon western constructions and are applied as universal despite epistemological recognition of difference.

It may be argued that to suggest an ontological relationship to describe Indigenous belonging is essentialist or is a form of strategic essentialism because I am imputing an essence of belonging. From an Indigenous epistemology, what is essentialist is the premise upon which such criticism depends: the Western definition of the self as not unitary nor fixed. This is a form of strategic essentialism that can silence and dismiss non-western constructions, which do not define the self in the same way. (Moreton-Robinson, 2003, p. 32)

Hall (1991) suggests that there are two ways of perceiving cultural identity. The first as a collective notion where a people share a common history and ancestry; there the same historical experiences and shared cultural codes provide members with reference and meaning and it is characterised by seemingly stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning. This 'oneness', underlying all other differences, is perceived to be the truth; the essence of our identity that we need to rediscover, excavate, bring to light and express in public domains. Hall states that while this thinking had an important place/role in the postcolonial struggles of marginalised groups, it is not a reality *per se* but is imagined, is a re-telling of the past. He asks: 'Is it only a matter of unearthing that which the colonial experience buried and overlaid, bringing to light the hidden continuities it suppressed? Or is quite a different practice entailed—not the rediscovery but the *production* of identity. Not an identity grounded in the archaeology, but in the *re-telling* of the past?' (p. 224).

The second position of viewing cultural identity recognises the similarities but also the critical points of difference. For Australian Indigenous people this would be the recognition of our 'within' or internal group diversity. This enables the acknowledging of the experiences of ruptures and discontinuities within the group.

Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. Far from being eternally grounded in a mere 'recovery' of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the



names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within the narratives of the past. (Hall, 1991, p. 225)

Many Indigenous people recognise and articulate a specific Indigenous spiritual relationship with the land. This has not been so much a production as a re-prioritisation. Indigenous authors such as Moreton-Robinson (2004) are concerned that this spiritual belonging to the land is not diminished in contemporary discourse on identity and culture.

For Australian Indigenous people, cultural survival, reclamation and identity have become a priority. This could be viewed as a cultural renaissance. The term cultural renaissance is used in many discussions of Indigenous cultural identity (e.g. Oxenham et al., 1999; Sissons, 2005). This refers a period of time, commencing around the 1970s to 1980s, in the Indigenous political and social movements, where concerns were about not only claiming equal rights, but also of reclaiming culture difference and having that acknowledged and respected. Cultural identity itself has become significant; it is a complex discursive negotiation and contestation on many different levels both within Indigenous groups and with dominant society in defining Indigeneity. Within the groups, this is part of a decolonising process and involves reconceptualising, rewriting and rethinking what our culture means, how it is expressed, and who has right in determining what Indigenous culture is.

Sissons (2005) observes that Indigenous cultures are not disappearing as predicted, nor have they been assimilated into a new international order, and the diversity has not reduced. Many Indigenous people have become stronger and their spokespeople are envisaging alternative futures and have appropriated global resources for their own cultural specific ends. Further:

It is now clear that the numerous cultural renaissances that occurred throughout the indigenous world in the second half of the twentieth century were more than brief or passing events. Instead, their momentum has been maintained into the new millennium, while the challenges they pose to settler states and their bureaucracies have become increasingly urgent. Those who interpreted indigenous cultural 'revivals' as simply unconventional strategies in the pursuit of conventional economic and political objectives were wrong. What they failed to recognise was that cultural objectives were radically distinct ends in themselves. (Sissons, 2005, p. 13)

Such forms of cultural renaissance align with the cultural and political changes that Bhabha (1993) writes about. In analysing cultural change and transformation, Bhabha proposes that cultural difference and diversity within a population should be understood as being constructed from a range of different interests, different cultural histories, different postcolonial lineages, and different sexual orientations. Differences of cultures cannot be accommodated in a universalist framework. Culture and identities are in a constant state of change. Bhabha shifts away from conceptualising cultures as binary or dualistic and he is interested in what is created in between the coloniser and the colonised. Hybridity is a concept that is premised on difference and translation of cultures; hybridity is the third space that enables a new position or expression to emerge: 'This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom' (Bhabha 1990, p. 211).

Indeed, one of his most important concepts is hybridity, which refers to the creation of new cultural expressions in the 'third space'. Peoples cannot be addressed as:

... colossal, undifferentiated collectivities of class, race, gender or nation. The concept of a people is not 'given' as an essential, class-determined, unitary, homogeneous part of a society *prior to a politics*; 'the people' are there as a process of political articulation and political negotiation across

a whole range of contradictory social sites. 'The people' always exist as a multiple form of identification, waiting to be created and constructed.' (Bhabha, 1990, p. 220)

It is in this third space, the 'in between spaces', that new signs of identity, innovative collaborations (between cultures) and contestations emerge. In a sense, cultural renaissances are productions or reconstructions. In Indigenous Australia, however, cultural renaissance involves deploying essentialism as a positive tactical response to colonialism that is a necessary part of the decolonising process: to revalue that which has been so profoundly and systematically devalued. In de Certeau's terms, this is an instance of creating space in places controlled by the powerful.

## INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIAN CULTURAL STUDIES

Bhabha's complex theorisation of third spaces should not remain simply as an intellectual exercise. There is value in understanding what he proposes, and his ideas can inform practice. It is vital to struggle to open up and celebrate third spaces in our everyday lives within institutions. Earlier we referred to the struggle to open up space within academia by groundbreaking Indigenous intellectuals as part of cultural renaissance in Australia. We will now look more specifically at one of many instances in which Indigenous Australian Studies have been established within tertiary studies.

The Indigenous Australian Cultural Studies Program at Curtin University of Technology in Western Australia focuses on the process of teaching and learning about Indigenous culture in the academy. For many years, the Centre for Aboriginal Studies had delivered tertiary education programmes specifically for Indigenous Australian students. However, there was an increasing need for non-Indigenous students to be better-prepared as teachers, social workers, and so on, in professions that had a high level of interaction with Indigenous people. This was a significant challenge, for there had been considerable resistance to such initiatives.

The danger of simply relying on cutting-edge curriculum and the very best readings and content is that this can end up being just 'information-giving' and 'packaging knowledge'. A great unit 'reader' in itself does not guarantee a meaningful learning experience. The Program works to ensure that the teaching-learning process does not remain surface-level or tokenistic. Rather, it is a significant integration of diverse and living cultural knowledge into the educational experience. The Program seeks to actively enact these principles, so that they do not exist as marketing gloss or empty rhetoric.

Process more than content has been the focus of the Program, for this approach creates the possibility for genuine cultural exchange, critical self-reflection and 'informed respect' (Curtin 2000–2005 Strategic Plan). It is not that content and structure are not important, but more a recognition that cultural knowledge and awareness cannot be imposed, for the process of thinking differently or attitudinal change is delicate, piecemeal, and formative. Rather than trying to 'inject' knowledge, the idea is to open a space for shared learning with, as much as possible, Indigenous lecturers.

The key principles and objectives of the Indigenous Australian Cultural Studies Program highlight the way Indigenist Australian cultural ways and knowledges drive the learning:

- Indigenous Australian control and delivery: culturally diverse Indigenous teaching staff, working in partnership with non-Indigenous staff, to ensure the cultural and academic integrity of the programme.

- Community in the classroom: representation and participation of the local Indigenous community in delivery of the Course; and, curriculum development and learning processes informed by community experiences and perspectives (community-based workshops).
- Privileging Indigenous Australian knowledge: Foregrounding the lived knowledge, experience, and perspectives of Indigenous Australians in academic contexts.

These principles are enacted by the Aboriginalisation staffing policy at the Centre for Aboriginal Studies, which ensures Indigenous lecturers, in most instances, teach on this programme. Aboriginal elders, leaders and professionals are, as much as possible, invited to share their lived experience and knowledge in classes, and the emergence of the flourishing of Indigenous writing and research now offers a wide range of Indigenist material.

A constructivist approach to education used in the Indigenous Studies Program foregrounds the diverse, complex and 'hybrid' subject positions of the students enrolled in these classes, enabling a point of departure for students that validates their particular lived experience and socialisation. At the same time, critically reflective teaching and learning strategies are used to enable space for change and transformation. Thus, class discussion, reflective journaling, storytelling and cooperative learning are prominent features of the Program.

Delivering to a disparate student group—Indigenous students, study abroad students (mainly from the USA, but also from all over the world), white Australian students, and a range of other Australian ethnic groups—has been a major challenge. By using this constructivist approach to learning that values the students' existing knowledge and cultural positionality, there is a great deal of scope for dialogue and openness, and a greater likelihood of genuine attitudinal change and acquisition of knowledge than more conventional teaching strategies. The aim is to as much as possible accommodate the different social and cultural subjectivities of students doing these units, rather than ignoring the students as active agents in their own education.

Drawing on Indigenous community members means that Aboriginal Australian knowledge formations are integrated into the learning process so that western academic terms of reference and standards do not solely determine what constitutes knowledge, learning and outcomes. In this sense, the process of inter-cultural learning, communication and negotiation inform the whole systematic approach to the Indigenous Australian Cultural Studies Program.

The Program used the notion of the 'third space' in the context of the classroom in terms of opening up a space in-between the coloniser and the colonised. Bhabha describes this space as, ideally, a hybrid space. The idea is to open up a learning environment that sets up the scope for students to critically self reflect on their social and cultural identities. Inter-cultural learning is promoted, creating frameworks (ways of seeing, doing, analysing, critiquing) that cross cultural borders, and focusing on the development of knowledge, understandings and skills that enable learners to cross and broker cultural borders. Holistic learning is integral to the teaching and learning process—combining social, cultural, spiritual, emotional, behavioural, political, economic and historical factors; providing a framework that validates and contextualises cultural and regional diversity (remote, rural and urban); and providing frameworks that contextualise and bring together the past, present and future.

Exploring how third spaces can be opened up has been a very powerful way of working through the development and 'delivery' of the Program. The third space requires the spirit of generosity and trust: it cannot be manufactured in a formulaic way. It probably can be faked and romanticised, but then there is no risk, no productive tension, and no change. The third space unsettles. To use Bhabha's (1993) terms, it is 'neither one nor the other'.

There is not a single third space—they are many and varied, they shift, they are spaces rather than places. They're often risky, unsettling spaces—where the security and familiarity of our own place of belonging has to be left behind. We have to be prepared to shift, to be open, to listen, to change. Powerful individuals and groups tend not to want to even acknowledge that there are other legitimate places—so little or no space is given.

Students as part of the process do undertake a learning journey, a journey that really only commences within a unit. As educators, social workers, prospective professionals and so on, their learning will continue outside of their formal studies and into their working and everyday lives. The idea of the third space in this learning context is a kind of unsettling meeting place in-between the safety and security of normative social subject positions.

The Program relies heavily on having the appropriately trained lecturers on the team who have the ability to model this shifting outside of one's own cultural comfort-zone. Listening to, validating and engaging with each other's personal narrative is one way of opening up the third space. Resistance, conflict, emotion, and other difficult responses are to be expected as part of this process. If this does not exist at some level, then the participants are probably remaining within their safe positions. The process can only be an invitation within the liberal and formal classroom context, and students must have the right to regulate their own level of engagement.

All students in these units face some level of risk. This is carefully and sensitively managed by teaching staff. Non-Indigenous students are challenged to shift away from self-justification and reactionary responses. Indigenous students in these classes often struggle with their dual role of learning as students, and sometimes functioning as cultural teachers.

Risk, danger and indeterminable outcomes are not always the kind of packages that universities want, but it is crucial that 'curriculum packages' can actually be translated into a meaningful experience of cultural engagement and genuine exchange. The space of translation in between curriculum documents and the classroom learning experience is in itself a kind of third space where 'community in the classroom' can either be mere rhetoric or something meaningful and authentic. So much depends on the lecturing team's ability and commitment to making the curriculum come alive in these interstitial spaces.

## CONCLUSION

The ongoing struggle for Indigenous intellectuals to create spaces within tertiary places that represent, to some degree, a distinctively Indigenist (Rigney, 1997) educational experience remains an ongoing challenge. The institution, the structures, the practices are predominantly western and white, so within this 'place', any spaces opened up will be difficult to secure and maintain. That tenuous space in between 'black' and 'white' is premised on the ideal of genuine culture exchange—not lip service. Staying in our 'own corners' may be safe, but leaves little scope for learning and changes nothing. Myths of fixed identity and essentialised otherness are unsettling, and can often be recuperated by

dominant discourses—but it is in the process of struggling to decolonise and move beyond entrenched power relations that make the quest for the third space worth pursuing.

The focus of this paper has not been directly on psychology, but the liminality and intersubjectivity of third spaces clearly connects with the way critical and community psychology has challenged dominant assumptions in psychology (Dudgeon & Pickett, 2000; Fox & Prilleltensky, 1997; Howitt & Owusu-Bempah, 1994; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005 and Parker, 1989;). Awareness of the capacity to create space in everyday life is an antidote to the distorted versions of Foucault that paralyse the subject within institutions, discourse and disciplinary power.

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