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# *Integrating Transactional People- Environment Studies into Architectural Anthropology*

*A Case for Useful Theory Building*

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*This paper outlines a transdisciplinary theoretical framework for what could be termed a transactional theory of architectural anthropology that has evolved over 40 years with particular application in Indigenous Australia. One platform component is the general theoretical frame of culture taken from anthropology including constructs of enculturation, acculturation, cultural change process, cultural identity, theory of person, material culture, social behavior and control. To this framework is joined the model of transactional people-environment relations, explaining the continuous stream of mutually adaptive interactions that people have with their surroundings at the sensory, perceptual, cognitive and behavioural levels. The integrated theory has provided a potential for addressing a range of Indigenous social problems, including housing design and management, crowding, homelessness, and effective service delivery.*

## **Introduction to the Theoretical Framework**

This paper is premised on the proposition that one hundred years of intermittent interest in house-people relations (from c1880) by anthropologists has not only developed into a sub-discipline of anthropology called “architectural anthropology” but has also seeded a theoretical and methodological convergence with architectural theory and history that came to maturity through the period from the late 1960s to the present time, and that has a wider significance of addressing social problems in Indigenous



Australia.<sup>1</sup> Overall this paper makes a contribution to addressing the question of how there can be a social science of architecture in Australia and New Zealand, a question that has not received comprehensive analysis in SAHANZ conferences to date.

Most areas of government policy and program in Indigenous Affairs continue to be controversial in Australia, with daily media scrutiny on their extensive social and health problems, and widespread failure to achieve quality of life and wellbeing for much of the Indigenous population. Whether it be housing, crowding, street violence, family dysfunction, high adoption rates, high incarceration rates or suicides, the problems surface in the media with startling frequency across all states. The aim of this paper is to introduce an Australian version of architectural anthropology developed at the Aboriginal Environments Research Centre (AERC), or what I also call Indigenous people-environment theory, and to briefly sketch out some of the applications of this theoretical framework to the contemporary social problems of Indigenous people in Australia, as well as potentially to other parts of the world.

I commenced building this theoretical frame in the 1970s with the fusion of social anthropology, architectural anthropology and "people-environment studies" (which was variously termed "man-environment systems," and "architectural psychology," the latter transforming to "environmental psychology"). At that time research on Australian Aboriginal people had been largely carried out by social anthropologists and it was effective to build upon that discipline's constructs of culture, material culture, social behaviour, enculturation, acculturation, cultural identity formation, cultural change processes, power and control, and most importantly construct of "person" or "self." Using these tools, a lens of "culture" is placed over the top of research projects to differentiate lifeways and world-views, and to establish the extent of the congruency or "fit" between culturally distinct behaviours, and values and forms of service delivery policy and style. Environmental psychology (and its predecessor disciplines) brought the transactional model of people-environment relations that allowed for such relations to be viewed as a dynamic two-way process. This approach gives equal emphasis to how people use and find meaning in their environments (including as consumers), and to how people encode meaning into their environment via personalization, creative design, construction and management processes, as well as drawing from a structuralist approach that incorporates

the transformations of properties of people-environment units or settings, the regulation of these units or systems and their temporal properties.

Key elements in this theoretical frame are thus the transactional people-environment relationship model, constructs of culture, intercultural and relational personhood, cultural relativism, the practice concept of the “recognition space” and the indigenous “service setting” (all explained herein).<sup>2</sup> This Indigenous people-environment theory has demonstrated a heuristic power to address widespread environmental and social problems of housing design, settlement design, housing management, service delivery, crowding, homelessness and effective service delivery. People’s intentions, needs and social capital can be better understood and contextualized in terms of their enculturated identity, social values, group relationships and field of service engagement, all embedded in past environmental behaviours, and adapted within processes of directed and reactive cultural change in the colonial and post colonial eras. Nevertheless, a premise is that certain customary practices and meanings remain persistent even in urban and metropolitan settings, despite cultural change. The aim herein will be to outline the framework and introduce its significance and applied research capacity.

### Architectural Anthropology

Architectural anthropology began in the 1880s and 1890s with the ethnographic pioneering work on house architectures by Lewis Morgan, Walter Roth and others, then theorized in the mid twentieth century by scholars such as Claude Lévi-Strauss and Donald Thomson.<sup>3</sup> With the exception of a few early ethnographers, international architectural anthropology (in Europe and USA) largely bypassed Australian social anthropology. This was partly because traditional Aboriginal people were commonly portrayed as using minimal shelter and being nomadic with little use of sedentary settlements, and because anthropologists had been preoccupied by their theoretical interests in kinship, social organisation, religion and linguistics. An exception was Amos Rapoport of the Department of Architecture, University of Sydney, who published a landmark paper on the Aboriginal attachment to place and use of space.<sup>4</sup> Much primary research has since occurred on the traditional settlements of the world and their processes of cultural change under the impacts of colonialism and globaliza-

2. Also see Paul Memmott, “Aboriginal People-Environment Research: A Brief Overview of the Last 25 Years,” *People and Physical Environment Research (PaPER)* 55-56 (2000): 87-115; Paul Memmott & James Davidson “Exploring a Cross-Cultural theory of Architecture,” *Traditional Dwelling and Settlements Review* 19, no. 11 (2008): 51-68.

3. Lewis H. Morgan, *Houses and House-Life of the American Indians* (1881, Chicago: Phoenix Books and University of Chicago Press, 1965); Walter E. Roth, “Bulletin No. 16. Huts and Shelters,” *Australian Museum Records* 8, no. 1(1910): 55-66; Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1973); Donald, F. Thomson, “The Seasonal Factor in Human Culture: Illustrated from the Life of a Contemporary Nomadic Group,” *Proceedings of the Pre-historical Society of London* (1939): 209-21.

4. Amos Rapoport, “Australian Aborigines and the Definition of Place,” in *Environmental Design: Research and Practice, Proceedings of the 3<sup>rd</sup> EDRA Conference*, ed. William J. Mitchell, vol. 1 (1972), 3.3-1 to 3.3-14.



tion.<sup>5</sup> The theory of architectural anthropology has branched and merged into such study fields as Vernacular Architecture Studies (VAS), Environment Behaviour Studies (EBS), Ethnoarchitecture (EA) and Space Syntax Settlement Theory; and is regularly showcased at international conferences such as IASTE (International Association for the Study of Traditional Environments), SVS (Seminar on Vernacular Settlements), IAPS (International Association for People and Their Surroundings), and EDRA (Environmental Design Research Association). The contemporary revitalization of architectural anthropology theory in the USA persists in juxtaposing architectural anthropology (Nold Egenter) and Environment Behaviour Studies (EBS) (Amos Rapoport) as competing paradigms.<sup>6</sup> One of the unique contributions of the AERC is to have integrated these two paradigms for application to complex Aboriginal social problems. Thus by starting with a place and space approach to domiciliary, family and group settings in Aboriginal Australia,<sup>7</sup> our innovative path draws first upon spatial behaviour influences from the 1960s (such as ethology, proxemics and territoriality), and is then conjoined with ethnography and social anthropology. The people-environment model is a most potent tool for analysing indigenous issues because Aboriginal religious-based beliefs are founded in the environment, which in turn shape behavioural values and practices in the environment.

### Construct of “Person,” Religious Beliefs and the Environment

The construct of person enables us to understand that the “self” has developed in different ways amongst different cultural groups compared to that of Anglo-Australians. Since the definitive early work of Mauss, theoreticians of personhood or self-hood have explored the dichotomy of “relational” personhood (also referred to as “dividual” personhood), as a characteristic of indigenous societies and totemic religious traditions, versus “individualistic” personhood or “possessive” personhood, characteristic of Western societies (e.g. Greek and Christian traditions), which emphasises individual ownership of goods and property rather than collective sharing rights, also referred to as “possessive individualism.”<sup>8</sup> In traditional indigenous societies where relational identities receive greater value than individualistic identities, the concept of possessiveness is not as strongly evident from an individualistic point of view. Nor are forms of individual private behaviour, whereas public socio-spatial behaviours are common. This struck me forcefully when I visited Warlpiri people in Central Australia for the first

5. See Lindsay Asquith and Marcel Vellinga, *Vernacular Architecture in the Twenty-First Century: Theory, Education and Practice* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2006).

6. Nold Egenter, “The Deep Structure of Architecture: Constructivity and Human Evolution,” in *Architectural Anthropology*, ed. Mari-Jose Amerlinck (Westport, Conn.: Bergin & Garvey, 2001), 43-81; Amos Rapoport, “Architectural Anthropology or Environment-Behaviour Studies?” in *Architectural Anthropology*.

7. Paul Memmott, “Lardil Properties of Place: An Ethnological Study in Man-Environment Systems,” PhD diss., University of Queensland, 1979.

8. Marcel Mauss, “A Category of the Human Mind: The Notion of the Person, the Notion of ‘Self,’” in *Sociology and Psychology Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (1938, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), part 3, 57-94; Karl Smith, “From Dividual and Individual Selves to Porous Subjects,” *Australian Journal of Anthropology* 23 (2012): 50-64; Karen M. Sykes, “Interrogating Individuals: The Theory of Possessive Individualism in the Western Pacific,” *Anthropological Forum* 17, no. 3 (2007): 213-24.

time in 1975 and was introduced to everyone in small groups by their social class names (the eight “skins” or subsections) without any differentiation of individuals by personal naming. In researching on Aboriginal housing (for the RAIAs Aboriginal Housing Panel) at that time I reflected on how people could “own” or rent houses and be held responsible for them through contractual or tenancy agreements when there was a prevalence of group identity and demand sharing behaviour. A major gap in Aboriginal housing research has been the failure to apply this theory to housing management practices (as well as other complex social problems) especially in remote communities where language group, totemic and/or “skin” identity traditions are strong, but also in regional city and metropolitan contexts where relational traditions may continue to exist at some level despite processes of cultural change.

This is not to say that individual possessiveness does not exist amongst traditionally oriented Indigenous peoples, but a dialectic tension may prevail between autonomy (individual will) and social relatedness; and the negotiations of the meaning of ownership rights move within this dialectic.<sup>9</sup> Sharing possessions such as housing, clothing, food, weapons, even cars, is to create and extend identity, knowing that once social networks are being maintained, there are opportunities through sharing practice to gain back similar commodities. Assured social identity thus becomes the most valued commodity;<sup>10</sup> and its most valued aspect is identity with sacred sites, which brings associated rights, ritual power and knowledge acquired through stages of initiation during one’s life. Place-based identities are thus reproduced through time by being transmitted, like objects, down through generations in the social reproduction of persons. An essential aspect of the Aboriginal construct of person is the religious belief system of the Dreaming and “the Law” (the latter having been established within the Dreaming), that defines the authority for both the environment and humans as being embedded in a distant past epoch, but one which continues to maintain its potent controls and energies in the contemporary era, explaining the nature of much people-environment interaction in the Aboriginal world. In the traditional belief system, the “ontological priority of the Dreaming”<sup>11</sup> ensures ultimate authority for daily events is largely placed beyond human control, although there are codes of behaviour and ceremonial obligations for humans in maintaining “the Law.”

In the mid twentieth century some anthropologists were of the view that traditional Aboriginal religion and kinship could not

9. David F. Martin, “Autonomy and Relatedness: An Ethnography of Wik People of Aurukun, Western Cape York Peninsula,” PhD diss., Australian National University, 1993, iv.

10. Fred Myers, “Burning the Truck and Holding the Country: Pintupi Forms of Property and Identity,” in *We Are Here: Politics of Aboriginal Land Tenure*, ed. Edwin N. Wilmsen (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 15-42.

11. Myers, “Burning the Truck,” 28, 34.



mix with the new community authority, governance and economy because the latter could not be logically predicated on the former. Professor Bill Stanner<sup>12</sup> famously stated “there is a sense in which The Dreaming and The Market are mutually exclusive.” The white world has certainly interfered with and disrupted the social reproduction of the old black world, but many anthropologists have sought to protect traditional culture. Decades later, anthropologist-linguist Peter Sutton, in his widely read book *The Politics of Suffering* carried out a strong critique of “cultural relativism,” attacking scholars and professionals from the 1970s who had uncritically defended traditional Aboriginal culture, particularly those in the law reform movement who promoted the recognition of customary law and sought to integrate it with Anglo-Australian law. Sutton bravely compiled a list of the types of traditional values and behavioural practices that he considered could negate the attainment of quality of life or well-being in a changing modern world: the traditional power structure (local sovereign autonomy), primary loyalty to one’s kin above community good (nepotism), traditional medical beliefs valued over Western medical practices, demand sharing over accumulation of possessions, recourse to physical self-redress to right a grievance, and the attitude of indifferent assent to the tragic terms of human life coupled with the belief that the order of things was meant to be, thus mitigating against a desire for change. Unfortunately Sutton did not prescribe any clear way forward in his book.<sup>13</sup>

The eminent Aboriginal intellectual Noel Pearson also joined the debate on sharing and “relational identity,” arguing that despite the passing of the “traditional mode of life” . . . “demand sharing remains a strong feature of Indigenous kinship and identity” and “whether in traditional remote areas or in the more settled areas of the country, the power of this culture is compelling”; none are exempt. He asserted that this behavioural circumstance underlay the Aboriginal problems of social alcohol consumption, which not only leads to alcohol abuse but also results in intoxicated persons demanding accommodation, food, money, transport and other commodities from close kin, and threatening and enacting violence (often suicidal violence) if such things are denied. However Pearson was very clear that “generosity and reciprocity are admirable, and indeed beautiful, features of our culture,” and he clearly did not want these traits abandoned.<sup>14</sup> A gap in the Australian Government policy to date is thus the failure to systematically apply the relational person construct to analyzing and addressing contemporary social problems in Aboriginal communities.

12. William Stanner, “Continuity and Change among the Aborigines,” in *White Man Got No Dreaming: Essays 1938-1973* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1979), 58.

13. Peter Sutton, *The Politics of Suffering, Indigenous Australia and the End of the Liberal Consensus* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 2009), 84, 85, 198.

14. Noel Pearson, “Shared Descent into the Maelstrom of Addiction,” *Weekend Australian*, October 13-14, 2012, 21.

15. Anne Salmond, "Ontological Quarrels: Indignity, Exclusion and Citizenship in a Relational World." *Anthropological Theory* 12, no. 2 (2012): 115-41.

16. Melinda Hickson and Benjamin Smith, "Introduction: Conceptual Moves towards an Intercultural Analysis," *Oceania* 75, no. 3(2005): 157-66; Mark Moran, "The Intercultural Practice of Local Governance in an Aboriginal Settlement in Australia," *Human Organization* 69, no. 1 (2010): 65-74; Paul Memmott, "Racism, Anti-Discrimination and Government Service Delivery in Aboriginal New South Wales," discussion paper for the Anti-Discrimination Board, Attorney General's Department, New South Wales, 1990; Noel Pearson, "White Guilt, Victimhood and the Quest for the Radical Centre," *Griffith Review* 16 (2007).

17. Vivienne Milligan, Rhonda Phillips, Hazel Easthope, et al., *Urban Social Housing for Aboriginal People and Torres Strait Islanders: Respecting culture and adapting services*, Final Report No. 172 (Melbourne: AHURI, 2007).

A similar type of debate and analysis has been occurring with respect to Maori. For example, Anne Salmond demonstrates how the relational and objective (or individualistic) styles of thinking both persist in cross-cultural debate and that mutual mis-readings continue to create obstacles to resolving conflict. However, Salmond also notes that "ontologies based on reciprocity are not the exclusive preserve of particular groups of people, and 'Westerners' also operate relationally, at least some of the time [and similarly] . . . many Māori proceed on the basis of modernist [Western] assumptions, although not necessarily all of the time."<sup>15</sup> She thus opens up her analysis to the domain of what Australian anthropologists now term the "intercultural."

### The Concept of the "Intercultural"

The concept of the "intercultural" pertains to the idea that within processes of cultural change, Aboriginal people are taking on identities that move between both the relational and the possessive constructs of self and synthesize them in particular contexts. Intercultural analysis also provides a constructive way to negotiate and operationalise service delivery between non-Indigenous and Indigenous peoples from a viewpoint of mutual respect and recognition; such a position has also been referred to as "culturally sensitive mainstreaming" and the "radical centre" of cultural relativism.<sup>16</sup> Indigenous service delivery informed by an intercultural view can accommodate a mix of bi-cultural, mainstream and culturally specific service elements working in unison, supported by flexible policies and practices that are culturally respectful, yet apply conditionality (welfare rules) in ways that strengthen social capital.<sup>17</sup>

### The Concept of the "Recognition Space"

A related concept (or principle) that has been adopted into the theoretical framework is that of the "recognition space" in service delivery which prescribes that governments, Indigenous individuals and their community-based organizations recognize and appreciate their respective cultural positions, empathizing with the inter-cultural differences and similarities (as well as potentials) and seeking to find a mutually acceptable common ground in fulfilling their different sets of responsibilities. The implemen-

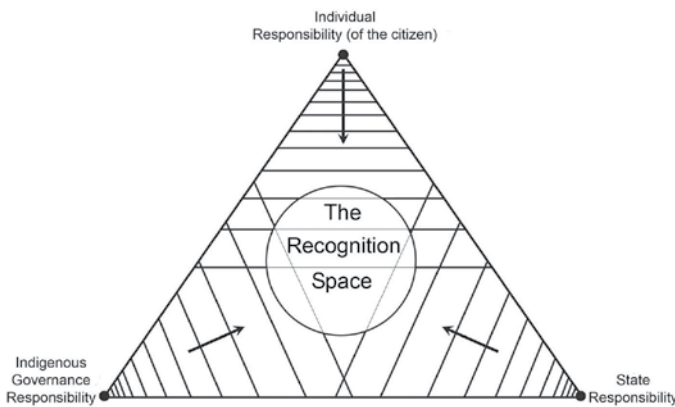




tation of Indigenous policy can be conceptualized as involving a tension between these three competing loci of responsibility and agency, as illustrated below.

Each tends to aggressively assert its demands politically, played out through national media outlets, with little consideration of the context and constraints faced by the others. The notion of a recognition space existing between these three polarised political extremes, refers to the creation of a productive framework for practice where Indigenous citizens, leaders, government officials, service providers and developed workers can form the necessary trust and knowledge exchange to work through the complexity involved [and] seek shared understandings...and to negotiate timelines, processes and sustainable outcomes satisfactory to these competing interests.<sup>18</sup>

18. Paul Memmott, Chris Birdsall-Jones, Rhonda Phillips, et al., "Aboriginal Lifeworlds, Conditionality and Outcomes," Grant Application to AHURI for Indigenous Multi-Year Project, Aboriginal Environments Research Centre, University of Queensland, 2011.



### Indigenous Governance and Service Delivery

The notions of the “inter-cultural” and the “recognition space” at the settlement or regional scale of service delivery to Indigenous population groups necessitate another critical area of modelling and analysis, that of local governance involving potentially multiple agencies of local, state and federal government departments, NGOs and in particular Indigenous units or organizations whether within or outside of government. The role of “agency” in Indigenous Affairs can be applied and elaborated from Bourdieu’s theory of cultural practice, which broadly accounted for the relation between production and consumption, including in relation to the provision of services. His analytic method prescribes that an understanding of the issues of the control of production,

necessitates a contextualization within the wider field of power and politics, and that the actions of individual agents (who are nevertheless enculturated agents) need to be analysed in relation to transactions of both economic capital (goods, money, services) and symbolic capital (or valued meanings, status, fashions).<sup>19</sup>

19. Helena Webster, *Bourdieu for Architects* (London: Routledge, 2011).

Many structural permutations have existed in the post-1970 history of governance in Aboriginal Affairs culminating in the most recent era with a neo-liberal swing to mainstreaming and dismantling of many Indigenous organizations. Recurring top-down linear service delivery planned by government to Aboriginal communities has been fraught with failure and there has been a search as to how demand-driven service delivery can be introduced into Indigenous Australia as well as modelling of the complexities of how governance actually works at the local level. In remote settings, governance can be characterized as a complex system usually involving multiple agencies and conditionalities with little ability to control or predict outcomes, whether there be government or Indigenous dominance in the local sector.<sup>20</sup>

20. Mark Moran, "Demand Responsive Services: An Analytical Framework for Improved Administrative Practice in Indigenous Settlements," *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 67 (2008): 186-99; Mark Moran and Ruth Elvin, "Coping with Complexity: Adaptive Governance in Desert Australia," *Geojournal* 74 (2009): 415-28.

### **The Application of the Theoretical Frame to Aboriginal Housing**

The problems of providing appropriate housing have exacerbated under consecutive governments since the mid-1960s and still manifest today reflecting a lack of well being amongst many Aboriginal Australians.<sup>21</sup> Aboriginal use of domiciliary place has been one of my career research themes, including the painstaking documentation of the traditional use of Aboriginal camps, houses and settlements across Australia. I eventually revised the definition of "architecture" to emphasize the complexity of cross-cultural people-environment relationships in place-making; recognizing that the physical component of architectural structures, irrespective of how temporary or minimal, are only one element in an architectural experiential process. Architecture is thus,

21. Paul Memmott, "Delivering Culturally Appropriate Aboriginal Housing," *Architecture Australia* 97, no. 5 (September/October 2008): 61-64.

a selected, arranged and constructed configuration of environmental properties, both natural and artificial, in and around one or more activity spaces or behavioral settings, all within a cultural landscape, and combine with patterns of behavioral rules and meanings as well as incorporating cultural constructs of space and time, to result in human comfort and quality of lifestyle.<sup>22</sup>

22. Paul Memmott, *Gunyah, Goondie and Wurley, The Aboriginal Architecture of Australia* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2007), 320.



This definition, based on a transactional people-environment model, facilitates understandings of both the physical environment, the human behaviours within it and their interplay, and allows for better clarity of analysis of domiciliary spaces and housing needs for Aboriginal people. One key reason why the transactional people-environment model is most potent for analysing indigenous issues is because of underlying religious-based beliefs in the role of environmental sites, territories and spiritual entities in shaping individual and group identities and constructs of self (or person), which in turn shape behavioural values and practices, as well as systems of social capital that are potentially usable (and useful) for addressing social problems. Past policy makers have failed to understand that Aboriginal domiciliary patterns are based on customary kinship and governance, and culturally distinct constructs of person and emotional value systems that imbue different personal and social properties to material possessions.

### Concept of the “Behaviour Setting” and the Aboriginal Service Setting

I have also drawn on “behaviour setting” theory from environmental psychology as a powerful and useful theoretical construct. Certain attributes of people-environment interaction, such as territoriality, boundaries, ecological structure, and time properties can be observed to combine in a complex way to form a recurring class of places known as “behaviour settings.”<sup>23</sup> A corollary concept to differentiate the cultural character and quality of service delivery in Indigenous Australia is that of an “Aboriginal service setting,” as opposed to a government service setting or a commercial or retail service setting which often fails to engage with Aboriginal consumers’ needs. An Aboriginal service setting can be defined as one that is largely controlled by Aboriginal people and is designed to be “comfortable” for Aboriginal consumers, achieved through a congruent combination of managed behavioural patterns, environmental and artifactual features and physical setting controls which are relatively predictable, secure and conducive for Aboriginal people to use. There is also a sense of identity with and even ownership of such a setting by Aboriginal people when the service is being delivered in an effective way; setting maintenance is thus enabled by Aboriginal social capital.<sup>24</sup>

23. Amos Rapoport, “Systems of Activities and Systems of Settings,” in *Domestic Architecture and the Use of Space: An Interdisciplinary Cross-Cultural Study*, ed. Susan Kent (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

24. Paul Memmott, “Processes of Modern Vernacular Architecture in Aboriginal Australia,” in *Proceedings of the 6<sup>th</sup> International Seminar on Vernacular Settlements, Contemporary Vernaculars: Places, Processes and Manifestations* (Gazimagusa, North Cyprus: Eastern Mediterranean University, 2012).

## The Application of the Theoretical Frame to Homelessness

The construct of person and the transactional people-environment frame become particularly salient when considering the nature of Indigenous homelessness. In this field I have revised the main-stream categories of primary, secondary and tertiary homelessness to a set of categories developed from my empirical research (Alice Springs, Darwin, Sydney) to better suit the Indigenous reality of homelessness. These categories are (i) public-place dwelling, (ii) housed but at-risk of homelessness (both of these categories have four sub-categories), and (iii) spiritual homelessness.<sup>25</sup> One of my most recently completed, team-led projects has been on a sub-category of type (ii), household crowding. AERC-affiliated researchers have shown that in sampled regional cities (Mt Isa, Carnarvon) and metropolitan settings (Inala, Swan), a distinctively different Aboriginal construct of crowding from that of mainstream applies; we found that high densities in houses are often tolerated and even welcomed, being expressions of relational values (and the Aboriginal construct of person) and that a state of crowding (employing the social science definition of such) involves further circumstances that are perceived as stressful.<sup>26</sup>

“Spiritual homelessness” requires in-depth empirical research in Indigenous Australia. I have recently provided a working definition of this phenomenon which draws on the transactional people-environment model, the ontology of the Dreamtime religion and the construct of person:

a state arising from [involuntary] separation from traditional land, and from family and kinship networks, and involving a crisis of personal identity wherein a person’s understanding or knowledge of how they relate to country, family and Aboriginal identity systems is confused or lacking. Such feelings add to the already depressed emotional state in which Aboriginal people, either public place dwellers or those at risk of homelessness, often find themselves . . . [and] can have serious effects on their mental health, sometimes resulting in self-injury or suicide.<sup>27</sup>

This construct of “spiritual homelessness” is of growing cross-cultural interest with other Indigenous homelessness researchers; the concept corresponds in part to the term “rootlessness” in the Canadian literature, and the term *mate* (dispossession, illness, failure) in the Maori literature.<sup>28</sup>

25. Paul Memmott and Catherine Chambers, “Homeless People: Indigenous/Aboriginal,” in *International Encyclopedia of Housing and Home*, ed. Susan J. Smith, Marja Elsinga, Lorna Fox O’Mahony, et al. (Oxford: Elsevier, 2012), vol. 3, 97-103.

26. Paul Memmott, Chris Birdsall-Jones and Kelly Greenop, *Australian Indigenous House Crowding*, Final Report 194 (Melbourne: AHURI, 2012); Robert Gifford, *Environmental Psychology: Principles and Practices*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Victoria, BC: Optimal Books, 2007).

27. Paul Memmott, Chris Birdsall-Jones and Kelly Greenop, “Why are Special Services Needed to Address Indigenous Homelessness?” Department of FaCHSIA, 2012.

28. Julia B. Christensen, “Homeless in a Homeland: Housing (In)Security and Homelessness in Inuvik and Yellowknife, Northwest Territories,” PhD diss., McGill University, 2011; Shiloh Groot, Darrin Hodgetts, Linda W. Nikora and Moi Rua, “Maori and Homelessness,” in *Maori and Social Issues*, ed. Tracy McIntosh, & Malcolm Mulholland (Wellington: Huia Publishers, 2011).



## Conclusion

This transactional theoretical frame allows us to consider how people encode meanings into environments and decode meanings from environments in their day-to-day lifeways and to examine a wide set of Indigenous behaviours that pertain to a variety of environmental units and scales within the one field of analysis: objects and places, secular and sacred sites, cultural landscapes, shelters and houses, institutional settings (prisons, schools, hospitals, courts), service delivery settings (shops, job centres, beer canteens), rural towns or remote settlements, suburbs or town parks. Through a combination of observational and interviewing techniques, the objectivism of behaviour and tradition can thus be combined with the subjectivity of individual and group perspectives; or what people do in their environments (the taken-for-granted) can be studied alongside what they say they do and why they do it. The transactional world-view simultaneously accommodates social and psychological properties in places and objects as well as environmental properties in consciousness and identity.<sup>29</sup>

Ongoing research needs to evaluate this analytic frame in several ways: firstly, describing and evaluating case studies of existing service delivery programs with the theory, particularly good practice examples that provide useful models for national and international providers; and secondly, assisting service providers (including indigenous agencies) to plan and guide new programs using the theoretical frame when opportunities arise, and including a process of program evaluation. Findings will, in turn, lead to refinements in the theoretical frame and will increasingly facilitate the operationalisation of the frame for applications. Its potential also needs to be assessed in other countries with similar colonial and post-colonial histories, such as New Zealand and Canada.

Ongoing research must aim to better understand the circumstances by which successful engagement occurs between the mutually contrasting systems of traditional Aboriginal culture and mainstream Australian culture when indeed both are themselves undergoing transformations with many elements inter-mixing and syncretizing. It is in those social fields where indigenous customs are breaking down or malfunctioning that research attention needs to be focused. Better models are needed of social problems and associated processes of cultural change as well as strategic approaches that simultaneously address the problems, seeking shared recognition spaces, but also support the positive aspects

29. Carol M. Werner, Barbara Brown and Irwin Altman (eds.), "Transactionally Oriented Research: Examples and Strategies," in *Handbook of Environmental Psychology*, ed. Robert B. Bechtel and Arza Churchman (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2002), 203-21; Angela Kreutz, "A Transactional Approach to the Affordance Analysis of Children's Environments within an Indigenous Context and the Implementation of Appropriate Methods," *EDRA Conference Proceedings 41* (Washington DC, 2010).

of Indigenous cultural identity, social capital, social cohesion and leadership. This transdisciplinary theoretical framework and its constituent elements are thus potent tools for addressing a constellation of social problems in the day-to-day reality of Indigenous peoples.

