

Surface Memory:  
Understanding the Uncanny through the Use of Projection in Adrian Stimson's *Bison in the Bowl: This is Indian Land* (2005)

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## Abstract

This major research paper investigates the role of the uncanny in unsettling colonial knowledge through the use of projection in three site-specific installations created by Adrian Stimson, Julie Nagam, and Evann Siebens. Each of these artists create an intersection between the projected image, the site, and the spectator. The purpose of the works can be understood through the Freudian concept of the uncanny, in which a space that was once familiar is turned unfamiliar. These artists activate the uncanny to challenge colonial understandings of the landscape and to establish spaces of resistance. In this way, I argue that projection installations are uncanny in nature, as they attempt to rewrite the spectator's understanding of the spaces they are projected upon. I use Anne Friedberg's material analysis of the "screen," Eve Tuck and C. Ree's theory of decolonial "haunting," and Jacques Lacan's concept of the "mirror stage" to analyze the installations through the lens of psychoanalytic and decolonization theory. By harnessing the (im)material aspects of projection art, these artists create uncanny spaces that bring about a return of what has been repressed or strategically removed from the land. The sites become uncanny environments, each one respectively becoming haunted and unsettled, inviting the spectator to pause and question their own relationship to the space. The sites also put into question the selectivity of the institutional archive and of national cultural memory through the act of reminding the spectator of what has been erased from the land.

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## Introduction: Unveiling the Uncanny

Scholars in new media and cinema studies have often assumed that projected images will appear on a blank, white and supposedly neutral surface: the screen. This presumption also assumes an unmediated viewing experience, where the only content that is being observed and critiqued by the viewer is the images themselves. The addition of an intermediate material—a site, monument, or environment with its own pre-existing context and history—problematizes these assumptions about the projected image, as well as the position of the spectator. This research paper contributes to the field of new media art histories by offering an analysis of the function of projection installations that use sites of cultural and social significance as their surface. Focusing on one of the works in Adrian Stimson's 2005 master of fine arts (MFA) thesis exhibition, "Buffalo Boy's Heart On: Buffalo Boy's 100 Years of Wearing His Heart on His Sleeve," titled *Bison in the Bowl: This is Indian Land*, I analyze the role of projection in producing uncanny spectatorial experiences that might unsettle colonial knowledge.

Adrian Stimson's *Bison in the Bowl: This is Indian Land* was completed at the University of Saskatchewan. The installation was constructed in multiple parts and included a projection, cast on the University building (Figure 1), that used video and still images of bison alongside archival footage of contemporary Indigenous experiences of resistance to settler colonialism. Since I did not witness this work in person, and no video documentation exists of the temporary projected images, I have had to speculate about the content of the projected imagery, based on my email correspondence with the artist. This lack of documentation lead me to question what is repressed or missing from the university archive, an example being the documentation of Indigenous forms of cultural resistance. The contents of *Bison in the Bowl: This is Indian Land* projections, according to Stimson, include a "short

film called “Buffalo Boy’s North,” which is a video of bison in a field, in black and white, during a winter snow storm, [and] also some still images of bison. The purpose of this was to highlight the bison’s absence from this place, that they once roamed on this site at one time... in terms of other images... they were all related to issues that indigenous people face at this time, like resource extraction, political interactions, racism.”<sup>1</sup> Stimson’s family tipi (named “Buffalo Particles”) was placed in the University bowl as a space for healing; and, for three nights Stimson acted out a series of Happenings, which were staged with the intent that they would “celebrate the bison and aboriginal presence in the university.”<sup>2</sup> The projection also engages with different facets of the environment: with the university site (the university building itself as the screen), the university space (which can be understood as the area within the university bowl that each component of the installation was placed within), and the land (which is to say the greater surrounding area, which includes the university, but also the provincial land where the bison used to roam). Each of the elements of the installation are critical to the counter-narrative the work produces with the university space, as they operate together as a means to challenge the institution while simultaneously offering an open space for communal learning and settler conciliation.

The exhibition, as Stimson describes in his thesis paper, follows the four directions of the medicine wheel, with the intention that the art installations align with the teachings of physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual states in order to seek personal balance internally and externally.<sup>3</sup> *Bison in the Bowl: This is Indian Land* acts as the first direction, north, which presents the gifts of strength, wisdom, and endurance.<sup>4</sup> Recalling the mass slaughter of the bison that occurred across the Canadian plains at the hands of European colonists, which Stimson frames as an event that released energy from matter into space,

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<sup>1</sup> Adrian Stimson, email message to author, March 20, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Adrian Stimson, “Buffalo Boy’s Heart On: Buffalo Boy’s 100 Years of Wearing His Heart on His Sleeve” (master’s thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 2005), 14.

<sup>3</sup> Stimson, “Buffalo Boy,” 8.

<sup>4</sup> Stimson, “Buffalo Boy,” 12.



Stimson creates a work that re-presents this energy into a physical representation, taking over the site once more.<sup>5</sup> Stimson writes, “the historical slaughter of the bison was a time that released a great amount of energy; I believe that the matter of the bison became energy in the universe. I see that energy in and around us, attainable and transforming.”<sup>6</sup> The concept of energy is a critical point in understanding the uncanny presence that this installation activates, which otherwise lies dormant in the site. This embedded energy is visually manifested by Stimson’s projected installation, unveiling a repressed history of Indigenous resistance.

This study hopes to contribute a deeper understanding of site specific projection-based installations that function as a critique of the colonial project in Canada by providing an uncanny and unsettling experience for settler viewers. Using key concepts such as the uncanny, phantasmagoria, haunting, and the mirror stage, this paper investigates how projection art unsettles the screen upon which it is cast. Through this study, I argue that site specific projected installations establish an uncanny space in which the spectator becomes unfamiliar with their environment. Imagery of the murdered and repressed figures in the landscape has the potential to unsettle and terrify those who think about their settler relationship to the land, and the ongoing trauma that exists in that space. The uncanny invites an unsettling of histories that have been normalized by the colonial mindset. This challenging of the institutional site allows for acts of decolonization to occur, for the space then offers the ground to unlearn and question the viewer’s situatedness and relationship to the site.<sup>7</sup>

The uncanny is central to this study, and will be used to examine the material and conceptual content of Adrian Stimson’s projection. The uncanny is a complex idea, but for

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<sup>5</sup> Stimson, “Buffalo Boy,” 12.

<sup>6</sup> Stimson, “Buffalo Boy,” 12.

<sup>7</sup> Unlearn is a concept that I was introduced to when reading David Garneau’s text “Imaginary Spaces of Conciliation and Reconciliation: Art, Curation and Healing.” Garneau frames this as a practice of “unlearn[ing] the colonial attitude.” For Garneau, a truly conciliatory gesture was not to relearn, which implies that there is still a recognition of colonial history, but rather to ‘unlearn,’ which implies the active work of moving away from colonial histories towards Indigenous and sovereign knowledge. David Garneau, “Imaginary Spaces of Conciliation and Reconciliation: Art, Curation and Healing,” in *Arts of Engagement: Taking Aesthetic Action in and beyond The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, ed. Dylan Robinson and Keavy Martin, 1-27 (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2016), 5.

the sake of this study I define it as an affective response to the experience of seeing the familiar made unfamiliar.<sup>8</sup> Nicholas Royle defines the uncanny, or “unheimlich,” established by Sigmund Freud, as “a crisis of the proper: it entails a critical disturbance of what is proper, a disturbance of the very idea of personal or private property including the properness of proper names, one’s so-called ‘own’ name, but also the proper names of others, of places, institutions and events.”<sup>9</sup> The uncanny places our certainty in knowledge of things off kilter—it forces us to question what we once recognized as familiar, but have since been estranged from. Through this term, I hope to show that projection-based art installations function as a visualization of the uncanny. They make the familiar unfamiliar, and create a space that unsettles the site in which the art is situated, projected or presented. Looking at Stimson’s artwork, I analyze the ways the installation activates the uncanny by physically referencing the ghosts of the site and of national memory. Stimson’s work puts the spectator’s relationship to land and site under question in an effort to unsettle the settler spectator about repressed Indigenous histories. This unsettling of knowledge is produced through the experience of the uncanny, and is a process of unlearning the official state history of the university on Indigenous land.

The essay also considers the work of two artists who engage tactics of projection similar to Stimson, but who offer different perspectives on how sites evoke experiences of the uncanny: Evann Siebens’ *Orange Magpies* (2017) and Dr. Julie Nagam’s installation *singing our bones home* (2013). By incorporating other artists’ works alongside Stimson’s, I hope to reinforce my argument that projection-based art offers a way to visually alter a space to question and challenge the history of an institutional site that might otherwise be regarded as familiar. Since I have not witnessed Stimson’s, Siebens’s, or Nagam’s work in person, and

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<sup>8</sup> Sigmund Freud, “The ‘Uncanny’,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVII (1917-1919): An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works*, (London: Vintage, 1999), 220.

<sup>9</sup> Nicholas Royle, “The Uncanny: An Introduction,” in *The Uncanny*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 1.

am a settler on this land, my analysis and arguments will be positioned with care and consideration of the limitations of my knowledge. Projection-based installations within a historically loaded site create a space for the uncanny to be invoked, where concepts of identity and memory must be questioned by the settler spectator. The medium establishes this uncanny space in material and immaterial ways that challenge the meaning of the site, and imposes a critique of settler understandings of history, memory, and land.

The first section of this paper explores psychoanalytic readings of Stimson's projected imagery, reading its content as a means of interacting with, disrupting, and critically challenging the screen upon which it is cast. Through this psychoanalytic approach, I question the ways in which projection as an artistic medium frames images as un-living entities, which exist but at the same time do not exist. Through Roland Barthes's idea that the death of the subject resides in each photograph, and by extension, that the subject is present through their immortal image, as well as Adrian Stimson's belief "that objects hold energy... objects and ideas can speak to history, culture, genocide, absence, presence, and fragmentation,"<sup>10</sup> I will argue that the images act as a return of the dead, and are given this opportunity by being anchored to the site. Haunting operates within this work through the manifestation of energy, which is given form through the projected archival images. Throughout the essay, I return to the concept of time and history as they exist in projection-based art installations. To confront a present-day site with historical imagery stages a confrontation between past and present. In this space, past, present, and future are not presented linearly through projected imagery; instead, the images reflect the energy that was always already present in the land. The projection acts as an artistically-constructed ghost, made up of light and colour pigments, and exists not only upon the screen, but in the air that it is projected through. It visually manifests and gives shape to what Stimson refers to as

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<sup>10</sup> Adrian Stimson, "Used and Abused," *Humanities Research* XV, no. 3 (2009): 71-80. 75.

energy in the space/land, and this energy inwardly unsettles those spectators who are confronted by what has been hidden from them.<sup>11</sup> The projection acts as the “double” of the history that has been erased from the space. The projection also creates an opportunity to unveil these ghosts that exist in the landscape, and positions them in relationship to the living through the incorporation of contemporary imagery of Indigenous life and resistance. The embedded energy of ghosts is brought into visibility through Stimson’s projections, and challenges the erasure of Indigenous history through the presence of the University as a physical space, as well as through its symbolic function as a representation of accepted colonial knowledge systems. The energy of these ghosts is ever present, ever capable of haunting the site.

Stimson’s installation is better understood through specific key theoretical terms that support the manifestation of the uncanny in the university site. One of these terms that foregrounds my exploration of the uncanny and haunting in projection-based works is “phantasmagoria,” which Brantley Johnson defines as “spectacular visual narratives whose themes dealt with ghosts, spirits, and black magic.”<sup>12</sup> The phantasmagoria, as described by film curator and author Laurent Mannoni was a filmic device and form of entertainment, invented in the 1780s, that used a hidden projector, which displayed an animated ghostly presence on the screen. The ghost would become enlarged or miniaturized on the screen, mimicking movement either towards or away from the spectators in order to terrify, causing unease and anxiety.<sup>13</sup> In Stimson’s *Bison in the Bowl: This is Indian Land*, the projection becomes a phantasmagoric site for the bison population of Canada, decimated through colonization, to return to the landscape. Through his use of imagery, Stimson calls upon the

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<sup>11</sup> Stimson, “Buffalo Boy,” 12.

<sup>12</sup> Brantley Johnson, “Phantasmagoria: Specters of Absence.” *Senses & Society* 4, no. 1 (2009): 117-122, doi: 10.2752/174589309X388618. 117-118.

<sup>13</sup> Laurent Mannoni, “The phantasmagoria,” in *Film History* 8.4, International Trends in Film Studies (1996): 390-415, <https://www-jstor-org.ocadu.idm.oclc.org/stable/3815390>. 390.

ghosts of the landscape, and invites them to take up material presence in the space in which they used to exist.

Johnson's definition of phantasmagoria builds on ideas that Freud highlights in his essay, *The Uncanny*. Freud's idea of the uncanny, much like the manifestation of ghosts through phantasmagoria, emphasizes the return of the dead, the visualization of ghosts that were meant to remain hidden. This is an idea that Freud borrows from German philosopher Friedrich Schelling, who stated that the "[uncanny] is the name for everything that ought to have remained... secret and hidden but has come to light."<sup>14</sup> Another attribute of the uncanny that parallels phantasmagoric performance is based upon the recurring whirl of images acting as a signifier, or double, to the subject. This double is an idea which Freud borrows from the theories of Austrian psychoanalyst Otto Rank, in stating that "the "double" was originally an assurance against the destruction of the ego, an "energetic denial of the power of death."<sup>15</sup> Freud's focus on bringing hidden knowledge to light, and the effect of doubling, suggests the uncanny can be purposefully and strategically unveiled in order to make present knowledge that has been repressed or erased from the site by settler colonialism. My analysis therefore looks at both the contents of Stimson's projection and the materiality of the medium. It is photographic and video evidence that plays between a state of being and non-being, accessed and relayed through the technological medium of the camera and projector. The projection questions what has been allowed to live and what has not, and Stimson answers this question by visually demonstrating the continuation of energy from past to present. In doing this, Stimson actively challenges the university as a space that selectively participates in colonial history without the acknowledgment of its position of power in dictating the accepted archive of the land. This archive is the one that is extensively documented, frequently acknowledged

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<sup>14</sup> Freud, 225.

<sup>15</sup> Freud, 235.

and observed through education, and remembered through public acts celebrating colonialism.

The second section of the paper looks at how site invokes the uncanny. It connects decolonial theories of haunting to Stimson's projection-based art installation. I analyze the university building, the university bowl, and the use of the family tipi in the installation as three different sites that are in active response to one another and that contribute to the uncanniness of the space. Each of these sites inform the projection and instill a sense of haunting that the spectator must walk through with the potential of being affected by the interaction between the projection and site. To understand haunting within the site, I explore the critical writing practice of Eve Tuck and C. Ree in their essay, "A Glossary of Haunting," in which they argue that haunting functions as an act of survivance by Indigenous peoples and contributes to the project of decolonization.<sup>16</sup> They describe haunting as "the relentless remembering and reminding that will not be appeased by settler society's assurances of innocence and reconciliation. Haunting is both acute and general; individuals are haunted, but so are societies."<sup>17</sup> Connecting these sites to the haunting defined in Tuck and Ree's text, I then turn to what Royle defines as the penultimate understanding of the uncanny, which is that, "above all, it is intimately entwined in language, with how we conceive and represent what is happening within ourselves, to ourselves, to the world, when uncanny strangeness is at issue."<sup>18</sup> I argue that by strategically using the language "This Is Indian Land" upon the university facade, Stimson alters the space into one that unveils the uncanny.

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<sup>16</sup> Survivance is understood through Gerald Vizenor's theories regarding postindian warriors through 'manifest manners.' As Vizenor writes, "the postindian warriors encounter their enemies with the same courage in literature as their ancestors once evinced on horses, and they create stories with a new sense of survivance. The warriors bear the simulations of their time and counter the manifest manners of domination...the postindian simulations are the core of survivance, the new stories of tribal courage." Survivance can therefore be interpreted as enacting resiliency and resisting what has manifested from colonial discourse. Gerald Vizenor, "Postindian Warriors," in *Manifest Manners: Postindian Warriors of Survivance*, 1-44 (Lebanon: University Press of New England, 1994): 4.

<sup>17</sup> Eve Tuck and C. Ree, "A Glossary of Haunting," in *Handbook of Autoethnography*, ed. Stacey Holman Jones, Tony E. Adams, and Carolyn Ellis, 639-658 (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2013), 642.

<sup>18</sup> Royle, 2.

The third section of this essay concerns the role of the spectator. I question the position of the viewer as fixed or ambulatory (moving around the installation), and how power dynamics shift between the installation and the viewer through this mobility (or motility). I employ a critique of Lacan's mirror stage through film theory to further understand the relationship between the spectator and the screen, exploring the ways that the spectator regards herself as being in control and having power over the image, when in fact this is a fallacy.<sup>19</sup> However, I question the idea of the passive subject in Stimson's confrontation between the imagery and the spectator, as the installation questions the complicity of the audience and forces them to reflect upon how they are positioned within the space. Royle also defines the uncanny as "not merely an aesthetic or psychological matter... it's bound up with analyzing, questioning, and even transforming what is called 'everyday life.'"<sup>20</sup> This concept of reflecting and critically questioning everyday life to establish a transformed perspective through the uncanny is present in the individual relationship between spectator and site. The spectator identifies the university space, one that they are familiar with, as an academic institution, but it is through Stimson's alteration to the site that the space becomes unfamiliar. Stimson enacts this change of space through both representational imagery, as well as the explicit presentation of the words "This Is Indian Land" upon the university wall. This alteration of space leads to the spectator's misidentification with the site; it is no longer recognizable, and the spectator is encouraged to reflect on what the imagery means, and why it has been projected upon the university's facade. The spectator's relationship to the site is essential to the unravelling of colonial national memory that has

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<sup>19</sup> As Lacan writes, "the recognition may be accompanied by pleasure. The child is fascinated by the image and seems to be trying to control and play with it... the human infant seems to go through an initial stage of confusing the image with reality, and may try to grasp hold of the image behind the mirror, or seize hold of the supporting adult. Then comes the discovery of the existence of an image with its own properties. Finally, there is a realization that the image is [her] own." See Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage," in *The Works of Jacques Lacan: An Introduction*, ed. Bice Benvenuto and Roger Kennedy, 47-62 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 52-53.

<sup>20</sup> Royle, 23.

come to obscure the traumatic history that the land holds. *Bison in the Bowl: This is Indian Land* establishes meanings that go beyond the content of the image and historical context of the site by unsettling the previous connection that the spectator had with the site.

This paper argues that while the history of the site informs the spectator's understanding of the projection's environment, the disruption of this history leads to an uncanny experience that complicates the viewer's understanding of the space. The uncanny is seen as embedded within both the lived experiences of the artist, and the affective experiences of the audience. Through psychoanalytic theory, we can begin to understand how projection artworks reinvent our understanding of a selected site, particularly through the concept of haunting. Adrian Stimson's *Bison in the Bowl: This is Indian Land* exemplifies what can be achieved through projection as a critical, decolonial medium: he projects an erased history back onto the land and site, transforming the space into one that recognizes loss and trauma, and reinscribes that history back onto the space. The projections are ghosts given presence, so as to haunt those who interact with the institutional space.

Much as Stimson's projection-based artwork calls for a self-reflexivity on the part of the spectator in thinking about their role in a history of colonial violence and trauma, this paper aims to also be self-reflexive about my position as a scholar in Canada. Stimson's MFA thesis exhibition, installed during the University of Saskatchewan's 100th year celebration, instead of passively engaging in the celebration of the university, actively challenged the institutional power that existed (and continues to exist) in the space.<sup>21</sup> It can be understood as an act of survivance — a term used by Anishinaabe critic and writer Gerald Vizenor —

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<sup>21</sup> A humorous reference to this "celebration" can be found in the title of the exhibition (I am referring, of course, to the numerical choice of "100" in "*100 Years of Wearing His Heart On His Sleeve*" an allusion, perhaps, towards Stimson's trickster identity, as the idiom to "wear one's heart on their sleeve" suggests the open display of feelings). For Buffalo Boy to be open with their feelings for 100 years infers being open with sharing the embedded histories of the land, in spite of the institution being selective with its history.



which is based upon “a sense of native presence over absence, nihility, and victimry.”<sup>22</sup> Survivance is acted out through the projection of erased histories back onto the site, while also referencing the survival of Indigenous peoples despite the extermination of the buffalo. The uncanny takes over the university space through the unsettling of the settler spectator, which is integral to achieving the broader projects of both decolonization and what David Garneau defines as “conciliation.” The act of conciliation aims to bring about harmony between Indigenous and settler people, with the goal of “mak[ing] room for production and reception of Indigenous experience and expression apart from the dominant discourse.”<sup>23</sup> As is clear from Stimson’s own writing about the project, the exhibition was Stimson’s way of grappling with his position in the university sphere, as well as his way of unsettling settlers (such as myself) who take part in these institutions, and take this space for granted.

The installation creates an affective response from the settler student, in which their relationship to the university institution is problematized. While students such as myself have the freedom to choose to celebrate and recognize institutional milestones (such as the 100 year anniversary of Saskatchewan, which coincided with the year of Stimson’s graduate exhibition), these activities take place in institutional spaces that are filled with ghosts, trauma, and are in need of healing. Stimson creates a new space in which healing can occur in *Bison in the Bowl: This is Indian Land*, and while my interest in the project began with the materials and methodology of its conception, I have in the past year been looking beyond the projection itself, and thinking about what it means to take part in Canadian academe. As Stimson states in his MFA thesis, “visual art can open the door to individual interpretation; to

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<sup>22</sup> Gerald Vizenor emphasizes the inability to determinedly define the term “survivance”, as its elusiveness is itself an act of resistance towards settler determinations. He writes that theories regarding survivance are “elusive, obscure, and imprecise by definition, translation, comparison, and catchword histories, but survivance is invariably true and just in native practice and company...Native survivance is an active sense of presence over absence, deracination and oblivion: survivance is the continuance of stories.” Gerald Vizenor, “Aesthetics of Survivance: Literary Theory and Practice,” in *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence*, ed. Gerald Vizenor, 1-23 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 1.

<sup>23</sup> David Garneau, 5.

change. I desire my exhibition to trigger those who seek to understand themselves through other points of view.”<sup>24</sup> My hope is that this paper demonstrates my process of thinking through the material of Stimson’s work, the history of its site, and my position as spectator in ways that challenge and unsettle colonial power from within this institutional setting.

## Unsettling Projections: The Visual Emergence of Ghosts

Art is much more a function of remembering, the creation and articulation of cultural memory. Memory, as a function of cultural formation, does not reside in written history, as is the norm in “Western cultures”... For Native People, memory is history. And, it is also the present and the future.<sup>25</sup>

Sigmund Freud defines the uncanny as “the frightening which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar.”<sup>26</sup> The uncanny, Freud writes, is the English translation of the Germanic word *unheimlich*, which directly translates to “unhomely.”<sup>27</sup> In Stimson’s work, the idea of the home that is made “unhomely” is grounded in the land upon which the university stands. The home, so to speak, can be understood through the land that the buffalo and Indigenous peoples shared, land that has since been claimed by settlers and by the University of Saskatchewan. Making the settler spectator aware of the uncanniness of this space is to make them no longer feel “at home.” As I argue, Stimson’s artwork establishes an uncanny space within an institutional site, rewriting the settler spectator’s perception of their environment by challenging the dominant presentation of time, national memory, and land. This is made possible through the use of projection, which activates the ghosts who occupy the site. It is these ghosts that haunt the place they once occupied, their home that has become “unhomely.” It is through the phantasmagoria of the projected installation, whose imagery

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<sup>24</sup> Stimson, “Buffalo Boy,” 6.

<sup>25</sup> Steven Loft, “Aboriginal Media Art and the Postmodern Conundrum,” in *Transference Tradition Technology, Native New Media, Exploring Visual and Digital Culture*, ed. Dana Claxton, Stephen Loft, Melanie Townsend, 88-103 (Banff: Banff Press, 2005): 89-91.

<sup>26</sup> Freud, 220.

<sup>27</sup> Freud, 219.

becomes uncanny, where the return of the dead forms a point of resistance to the site.

Through his imagery Stimson brings to light the repressed material that is at the foundation of Freud's idea of the uncanny, recalling his quote from Schelling that "[it] is the name for everything that ought to have remained... secret and hidden but has come to light."<sup>28</sup> Here, this "ought" is what colonialism attempted to erase or conceal; the violence that occurred on the land. These images are uncanny in that they have been manifested in a space that attempted to conceal them.

### The Manifestation of the Bison

If we consider the materiality of production, such as the impermanence and reproducibility of the image, and the distance between image and spectator, we might better understand how phantasmagoria and the uncanny work in Stimson's installation. To analyze Stimson's projection, one must first understand the role of the photograph as a signifier of the energy of the slaughtered bison. Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida* (1980) offers insight into the transition of subject to referent object through the photograph. As Barthes describes, when a photograph is captured, the subject "[is] neither subject nor object, but a subject who feels [s]he is becoming an object: [she] then experience[s] a micro-version of death (of parenthesis): [she is] truly becoming a specter."<sup>29</sup> This transformation of the subject into an image, where one becomes fixed into a specific frame, under specific conditions, and at a certain time in their life, becomes what Barthes refers to as the "referent," or "photographic referent" which, to Barthes, is "the real thing which has been placed before the lens, without which there would be no photograph."<sup>30</sup> The "referent" can therefore be understood as the stand-in for an absence, in that the photograph represents what cannot be physically present

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<sup>28</sup> Freud, 224.

<sup>29</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 2010), 14.

<sup>30</sup> Barthes, 76.

in that space. In so doing, the images of the bison and Indigenous peoples signify the death and removal that has been imposed upon them. In Stimson's *Bison in the Bowl: This is Indian Land*, death is signified, but also contested, through the images projected upon the university facade, which depict images of the dead against the living, as the projections consist of both video and still-images of bison in conjunction with selected images that Stimson identifies as representing the "contemporary Indigenous experience."<sup>31</sup>

Looking first at the images of the bison, Stimson projects the video of the bison in a snowstorm and other still images of the animals as a re-materialization of the energy released by the "historical slaughter of the bison... [which] became energy in the universe."<sup>32</sup> These reference images are not meant to simply signify, but to give physical representation of the energy that remains in the site. Scholar Danielle Taschereau Mamers writes extensively on the human-bison relationship in settler colonial Canada, stating that "at the close of the 18th century, there were between 30 to 60 million bison on the continent. These herds were a keystone species that influenced all aspects of life in the region... by 1980, less than a thousand buffalo remained on the continent."<sup>33</sup> Stimson's projection of the bison places the animals at the visual forefront of colonial history in the university space, despite the intended eradication of the animal from that land.

Although these images may be representative of the bison's death in the installation, Stimson argues that the energy released from their death remains "in the universe," and that he saw this energy as being "attainable and transforming."<sup>34</sup> A way to make this energy tangible is through the presentation of these images as signifiers of the bison's previous physical existence in this space. This return of the dead resonates with Royle's writing on

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<sup>31</sup> Stimson, "Buffalo Boy," 14.

<sup>32</sup> Stimson, "Buffalo Boy," 12.

<sup>33</sup> Danielle Taschereau Mamers, "Human-Bison Relations as Sites of Settler Colonial Violence and Decolonial Resurgence," in *Humanimalia: a journal of human/animal interface studies* 10.2 (2019): 10-41, stable URL: <https://www.depauw.edu/humanimalia/issue%202020/pdfs/taschereau%20mamers-pdf.pdf>, 16-17.

<sup>34</sup> Stimson, "Buffalo Boy," 12.

Freud's concept of the "death drive" as a motivating force for the uncanny. As he writes, "the uncanny seems to be about a strange repetitiveness. It has to do with the return of something repressed, something no longer familiar, the return of the dead, the constant recurrence of the same thing, a compulsion to repeat."<sup>35</sup> This recurrence of the dead through the projected photographs and video of the bison acts as a doubling of temporalities. The site is therefore a critical component in this production of "doubling" and repetition, as there are two histories being shown, overlaid upon one another. There is the colonial history, which is activated through the university upon which the images are projected, and there is Indigenous history, activated by the images of the bison, where Stimson is providing a visual cue that directs the viewer to the presence of this energy by returning the image of the bison to the landscape.

#### The Elimination of Time through Re-emerging Histories

Furthermore, by including images of what Stimson describes as ongoing scenes of "racism, resource extraction, and ongoing politics" in his projections, Stimson adds the trauma of present-day conditions to the weight of the death of the bison as visual evidence that colonial repression continues to this day. As Lynne Bell argues in her contributions to Adrian Stimson's 2010 exhibition catalogue, *Beyond Redemption*, "in [the] Treaty 7 archive, testimony links the buffalo massacre with government sanctioned policies of starvation in both Canada and US."<sup>36</sup> This direct correlation between the slaughter of animals and the genocide of Indigenous peoples is acknowledged and critiqued in Stimson's images, as he positions these images of the dead in conjunction with those of the living. Placing these images of past and present alongside one another on the university facade suggests these different sets of images are of equal importance in the need for settlers to unlearn colonial

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<sup>35</sup> Royle, 84.

<sup>36</sup> Bell writes that the Plains Nations who signed Treaty 7 in Alberta, in 1877 "refer to the buffalo as living kin, a revered elder, and a provider of food, shelter, clothing, fuel and tools..." Lynne Bell, "Beyond Redemption," in *Adrian Stimson: Beyond Redemption*, exhibition catalog (Saskatoon: Mendel Art Gallery, 2011), 110-111.

history. Royle, quoting Freud, states, “the uncanny has the capacity to ‘eliminate’ time, not only past but also the future.”<sup>37</sup> This collapse of temporalities occurs through witnessing what has disappeared, what remains, and what continues to thrive, all in relationship to one another. The images are fixed not in one present moment of time, but rather grounded in the site itself, a point that I will elaborate upon further in the second section of this paper.

Stimson’s installation is composed of video and photographic images projected upon the site, displayed over the three days when Stimson performed his Happenings.<sup>38</sup> Walter Benjamin’s concept of authenticity in relation to the reproducibility of the image is useful in understanding the effect Stimson’s intervention had on the site, because of the ways the reproducible image devalues the here and now. I argue that while the images may not continuously regenerate upon the university as screen, the site is forever changed for the viewer because of their interaction with the installation. I position Stimson’s installation as one that subverts the authenticity of the original object, the institutional site, by engaging reproduced images that have no fixed sense of physical duration. Stimson disrupts the “here and now” of settler colonialism within the university site through the use of the reproducible image, intervening and providing a counter-narrative through which to problematize the space. The images therefore affirm Benjamin’s assertion that historical testimony is problematized by the reproducible image, as Stimson’s projection contains images that acts as referents to the erased history within the space.

Another element that is unique to the experience of viewing projection art is the continual flow of imagery presented to the spectator. The projection, as film theorist Mary Ann Doane writes in the text, *Art of Projection*, is “instrumental to the establishment of the

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<sup>37</sup> Royle, 9.

<sup>38</sup> These Happenings are described by Stimson: “as far as the actions, it was basically projecting the this is Indian land onto the buildings, then on the final night the evening of the opening, both the Shaman Exterminator and Buffal[o] Boy made appearances, to “exorcise” the colonial space, lots of people came out and drummed, the[y] carr[ied] a huge drum from the tipi to the gallery...” Adrian Stimson, email message to author, April 21, 2019.

opposition between internal and external, subject and object.”<sup>39</sup> This opposition of the internal and external occurs both literally and figuratively in Stimson’s *Bison in the Bowl: This is Indian Land* through the inclusion of the university wall as a screen. Stimson addresses this in his MFA thesis support paper, stating that his intent through the work was to “create layers that speak to energy, matter, time, illusion, duality, and paradox.”<sup>40</sup> Positioning the images upon the university itself rather than as separate entities in different areas of the space, such as in a classroom or gallery space, Stimson creates a visual narrative that communicates the direct relationship between the bison and the existence of Indigenous peoples. He asks the viewer to question the relationship between death and removal from the land, not only for the bison, but also for present-day Indigenous people. Doane goes on to state, “the screen intercepts a beam of light, but the perception of the moving image takes place somewhere between the projector and screen, and the temporary ephemeral nature of the image is reaffirmed by its continual movement and change.”<sup>41</sup> This idea of continual movement that Doane proposes speaks directly to the concept of the phantasmagoria, in which a sequence of images is understood as simultaneously real and imagined. This is enacted through Stimson’s imagery, including the ghosts of the bison, and those that represent contemporary Indigenous life.

Projection also functions through its impermanence as a medium. Yet, as performance art historian Amelia Jones argues, while there is an assumed supplementarity to the documentation of an ephemeral performance in which the “art event needs the photograph to confirm its having happened: the photograph needs the... art event as an ontological ‘anchor’ of its indexicality,” documents also create intersubjective experiences of their own with the reader or researcher that are different, but no less valuable, than experiencing the work in

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<sup>39</sup> Mary Ann Doane, “The Location of the Image,” in *Art of Projection*, ed. Stan Douglas and Christopher Eamon, 151-166 (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2009), 160.

<sup>40</sup> Stimson, “Buffalo Boy,” 14.

<sup>41</sup> Doane, 152.

person.<sup>42</sup> If the animals and people are seen as impermanent and as only existing in colonial spaces through referent images, Stimson reverses this logic by writing that the energy of the bison is manifested through the projected images, and remains present beyond the removal of the installation — a significant assertion that this energy exists outside of the artwork, as part of the land and universe, which will always remain in Indigenous cultural memory.

### Unsettling the Mutable Screen

A third material component of Stimson's artwork important for my reading of the work as a site of the uncanny is the mutable screen surface. This surface, or rather site, is the focus of section two of this paper, where I elaborate on the conditions that haunt the institutional site, but for now I will focus on the materiality of the screen. Media historian Anne Friedberg analyzes the different conditions of the screen, such as light, blank space, and architecture, writing that "the film screen is a surface, a picture plane caught in a cone of light/dark/empty until projected images are caught."<sup>43</sup> In Stimson's projection-based installation, the screen is an architectural building, with its own context, history, and design. The projection itself, rather than depending on a blank surface to clearly communicate its content, acts differently by intervening with the site and altering the facade with its content. Friedberg's analysis of "the architecture of spectatorship" calls into question the position of architecture in relationship to the screen. This is important in understanding how Stimson's installation functions, as Friedberg states that, "for the architectural spectator, the materiality of architecture meets the mobility of its viewer; for the film spectator, the immateriality of the film experience meets the immobility of its viewer."<sup>44</sup> While a film screen would leave the spectator immobile and potentially passive, Stimson engages the university facade as a screen

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<sup>42</sup> Amelia Jones, "'Presence' in Absentia," *Art Journal* 56.4 (1997): 11-18, doi: 10.1080/00043249.1997.10791844, 16.

<sup>43</sup> Anne Friedberg, "The Screen," in *The Virtual Window: From Alberti to Microsoft*, 149-189 (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009), 166.

<sup>44</sup> Friedberg, 173.



where the spectator can move around the space, turning it into an experience that must be processed and considered through the viewer's own movement through the space. Friedberg continues in stating that, "architecture is experienced in a complex matrix of space. Using, visiting, inhabiting a building involves movement in, through, up, down, out. But as film spectators... we are immobile in front of screens full of images and sounds... the screen functions as an architectonic element, opening the materiality of built space to virtual apertures in an "architecture of spectatorship."<sup>45</sup> Stimson combines these concepts of mobile versus immobile spectatorship, with the architecture operating as a surface that is responsive to the content that is projected upon it, rather than being passive and receptive. The spectator is able to move within the space, and rather than merely engaging with a virtual architecture provided through the image's depth, they are able to physically as well as virtually interact with the projection. The university building exists because of the removal of the bison, and Stimson creates an environment in which the bison virtually return to their former dwelling. By introducing them back into the land, and upon the building, Stimson creates a virtual, phantasmagoric space, through the visual reminder of ghosts who have never been physically present at the site as it exists now. The "energy" of the bison therefore intervenes with the frame of the screen—creating a tension between imagery and screen. Stimson draws attention to the materiality, physicality, and tangibility of the screen surface, commenting on its continuing existence in this space.

Returning to the idea of the uncanny, of detecting the unfamiliar in ourselves, each of these material components of the art installation challenges the viewer to acknowledge their position in relation to the images and the screen. In regards to time in relation to the uncanny, Royle states that, "the uncanny entails another thinking of beginning: the beginning is already

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<sup>45</sup> Friedberg, 150.

haunted. The uncanny is ghostly.”<sup>46</sup> The “beginning” of the university is premised upon the death of the bison. Stimson draws the viewer back to their own settler positionality by signifying that the university is premised on loss. The institution is no longer understood through its educational context, but rather through the land that it occupies, turning what is familiar into the unfamiliar. This space engages the uncanny in a way that challenges the viewer to think of their relationship to the land and site.

### Unsettling the Site: The Haunting of the Colonial Institution

I have been physically separated from the land, placed on reserves that segregate and identify difference analogous to the bison. Although racist and often oppressing, reserves have been a reposition[ing] of culture and spaces of resistance, somewhat like the University. By projecting images on colonial space, I am creating a site of resistance, the illusion of constructed space and history.<sup>47</sup>

The screen in Adrian Stimson’s projected installation establishes a critical relationship between the projected image, the site, and the spectator. By projecting onto the university facade rather than onto another screen surface, Stimson makes the site an active component that contributes to the viewer’s interpretation of the installation. Stimson is clear in his writing that his relationship with the university space is troubled. As he writes, “the privilege of becoming a part of the historical record through my relationship with western education; this is a space where I am aware of my compliance to the colonizing of my mind. Yet this is my opportunity to tell my story, to wear my heart on my sleeve, a site of resistance.”<sup>48</sup>

Stimson is aware of his participation within the institution, and this exhibition acts as a means of challenging the site, troubling the settler spectator’s understanding of colonial history, as well as his own compliance in participating in western education. Stimson’s act of resistance

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<sup>46</sup> Royle, 1.

<sup>47</sup> Stimson, “Buffalo Boy,” 14.

<sup>48</sup> Stimson, “Buffalo Boy,” xii-xiii.

by projecting the bison and Indigenous presence back onto the university space makes the latent and repressed knowledge of settler colonialism manifest, and positions the institutional screen as a frame that embodies these colonialist power structures. It is through this colonial space that uncanniness emerges from haunting through the alteration of knowledge and the exposure of historic truths. I turn to visual cultures theorist Avery Gordon's articulation of haunting to work through this exposure of repressed history. Gordon states that "to be haunted is to be tied to historical and social effects,"<sup>49</sup> which is a critical concept when understanding the settler colonial institution. To take part in or have association with the institutional site is to become haunted, and it is therefore necessary to engage in conciliatory practices for the ghosts to be respectfully acknowledged (though they will continue to remain on the land).

While the screen typically acts as a passive blank frame, in this installation the images directly interact with the building itself, and unveil the site as haunted. The viewer's reading of the artwork is therefore informed by their relationship to that space and how it changes through experiencing this artwork. While the images relay direct information to the viewer, particularly in the case of the scrawled text, "This Is Indian Land" (Figure 2) upon the façade, these images are placed upon the site so as to challenge the site's selective history and repression of loss. By reflecting upon the use of the site in relationship to the projected imagery, the spectator is left with the site becoming unsettled and unfamiliar, as its latent history is visually made manifest.

### Haunting the University Archive

Scale is significant when analyzing site specific installations. Photography's invention brought with it the dual capacities of enlargement and miniaturization, where enlargement

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<sup>49</sup> Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 190.

was seen as an industrial and commercial form of photography (such as the billboard), and miniaturization, in opposition, existed in the private realm (such as photographic albums).<sup>50</sup>

While there is a monumentality to the university as an institution of the state, Stimson's imagery relies on the historic relationship of both the building and the land to be understood, and challenges the university by projecting erased Indigenous histories back onto the site.

The work uses the images in order to disrupt the building itself, and it is therefore necessary to project the images at the scale of the institution.

Architecture and film theorist Giuliana Bruno discusses projections within the context of the "architectural imaginary," which she defines as "a visual depository that is active: it is an archive open to the activities of digging, re-viewing, and reenvisioning in art."<sup>51</sup> I apply this concept of the "architectural imaginary" to the screen as architectural surface. In Stimson's installation, the site is activated through the projection of an archive that has been erased to be reviewed, reconsidered, and re-envisioned through this confrontation. The building itself is also an archive, one that is institutional, and holds its own history and documentation within its architecture. Confronting the university as a structure that contains a selected archive with the archive of erased history asserts an activation of what needs to be seen and remembered. The projections allow for a reconsideration of the site through the juxtaposition of the two archives alongside one another, challenging the historical perspectives of the viewer.

The haunting of university land by the residue of the slaughter of the bison can be understood through Jacques Derrida's description of haunting in his book, *Specters of Marx* (1993), specifically through his contestation of a temporally determined history. As Derrida describes, haunting is "historical, to be sure, but it is not dates, it is never docilely given a

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<sup>50</sup> Olivier Lugon, "Photography and Scale: Projection, Exhibition, Collection," in *Association of Art Historians* 38.2 (2015): 386-403, doi: 10.1111/1467-8365.12155, 389-390.

<sup>51</sup> Giuliana Bruno, "Projections," in *Surface: Matters of Aesthetics, Materiality, and Media* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 190.

date in the chain of presents, day after day, according to the instituted order of the calendar.”<sup>52</sup> This is to say that the ghosts, or specters, are ever present in that they exist to make their continuing presence known to those who have attempted to remove them from the space. In this way, the bison enact their resistance on the site erected upon their land—and Stimson invokes their energy through the projected imagery. He directs the haunting outwards, onto the entryway of the institutional building, so that one must see the work as one enters the space, rather than stationing the imagery upon a blank screen, or inside the university gallery walls. Derrida elaborates on haunting, as it “belongs to the structure of every hegemony,”<sup>53</sup> and positions it as a way “to answer for the dead, to respond to the dead.”<sup>54</sup> These definitions of haunting affirm that time does not act as a limitation within a space of trauma. In Stimson’s installation, haunting occurs through the presence of the bison energy, and through the manifestation of that energy in visual form against the wall of the university. The haunting therefore occurs within the power structure of the institutional site, and is a way of engaging with the deaths of the past in order to disrupt the present colonial institution. Haunting in Stimson’s installation is a critical element in understanding and thinking through the power dynamic between university site and Indigenous presence, as his way of responding to the dead, and calling upon the settler spectator to recognize this erasure through haunting.

Haunting is also defined as a strategic survivance tactic that Indigenous peoples use to challenge hegemonic social structures. Haunting, as Tuck and Ree define in their essay, “Glossary of Haunting,” “is both acute and general; individuals are haunted, but so are societies... Haunting doesn’t hope to change people’s perceptions, nor does it hope for

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<sup>52</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge Classics, 1994), 3.

<sup>53</sup> Derrida, 46.

<sup>54</sup> Derrida, 136.

reconciliation. Haunting lies precisely in its refusal to stop.”<sup>55</sup> In Stimson’s *Bison in the Bowl: This is Indian Land*, the haunting of the site occurs with or without the presence of Stimson’s performed Happenings, the installation of the tipi, or the projections. The university’s presence on the land is enough for haunting to take place on this site. It is through this artwork, however, that Stimson calls forward the ghosts of the land, and enacts a means of resistance. Tuck and Ree state that, “social life, settler colonialism, and haunting are inextricably bound; each ensures there are always more ghosts to return.”<sup>56</sup> Stimson’s manifestation of the energy that came from the slaughter of the bison acts as an assurance that the ghosts will continue to permeate the space, as the removal of the bison will always be a part of the land’s history. The erasure of history is also a significant point in Tuck and Ree’s concept of haunting, in that “erasure and defacement concoct ghosts; I don’t want to haunt you, but I will.”<sup>57</sup> This erasure is signified in Stimson’s projections, as he directs the settler spectator to witness the ghosts that have been repressed by the presence of the University.

### Resistance through Remembering

The inclusion of the tipi in Stimson’s installation is one component that does not operate within the same conditions of resistance as the projection does. Stimson’s use of the tipi in his installation, which he references in his thesis support paper as being his family tipi, aptly named “Buffalo Particles” (Figure 6), is described as a site for healing.<sup>58</sup> He writes, “in Blackfoot tradition, painted tipis were created for protection and the healing of a family.”<sup>59</sup> Reflecting on this visual and immersive component of the installation, I questioned the function and placement of the tipi: how was it to be engaged with? By whom? If it is to be a site for healing within the university bowl, who is being healed in this process? If it is

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<sup>55</sup> Tuck and Ree, 642.

<sup>56</sup> Tuck and Ree, 642.

<sup>57</sup> Tuck and Ree, 643.

<sup>58</sup> Stimson, “Buffalo Boy,” 12.

<sup>59</sup> Stimson, “Buffalo Boy,” 12.

through haunting, through the reminder of the bison and Indigenous presence, and the loss that has come from the occupation of this land that the settler spectator becomes unsettled, then why include a space that is meant to heal? Stimson writes that “in placing [his] tipi in the University Bowl, [he] honour[s] the bison and the space it once roamed” and that “a union of disparate histories that can be healed through the presence of an aboriginal healing device, the tipi.”<sup>60</sup> Stimson also writes that “putting my tipi in the bowl was an act of remembering that indigenous people lived on this land... it also focused on the absence of the bison on the prairies, so again remembering.”<sup>61</sup> This helped to clarify my understanding of the tipi’s presence. It was not necessarily used as a device for healing, but rather a physical space that acted as a reminder of trauma and loss. However, the tipi could serve as a device for potential healing on a national scale by offering a space in which conciliation can occur through the act of remembering.

The tipi therefore functions not as a means to heal the site and absolve the trauma that is present through the energy of the bison, but rather to heal in terms of joining histories through the act of remembering, acknowledging the past presence of the bison within the space. In this way, the tipi follows Tuck and Ree’s concept of “mercy” in regards to haunting, where “mercy is a gift only ghosts can grant the living, and a gift ghosts cannot be forced, extorted, seduced, or tricked into giving... decolonization is not an exorcism of ghosts, nor is it charity, parity, balance, or forgiveness.”<sup>62</sup> The presence of tipi is therefore an access point in which Stimson enacts a physical remembering, and draws attention to the colonial and Indigenous histories that are both recognized in the installation.

### Settler Attempts Towards Conciliation

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<sup>60</sup> Stimson, “Buffalo Boy,” 14.

<sup>61</sup> Stimson, email message to author, April 21, 2019.

<sup>62</sup> Tuck and Ree, 648.

Evann Siebens's 2017 installation, titled *Orange Magpies* (Figure 3), attempts to engage in settler conciliation by projecting a video onto the facade of the Vancouver Art Gallery. The video consists of two dancers "in bright orange jumpsuits mov[ing] through the landscape of Vancouver."<sup>63</sup> These dancers move through different environments in Vancouver city, which act as visual backdrops to their performance. These spaces include a park space, steps, a residential area, a forested area by a water source, and in front of a mural created by Indigenous artist Joseph Tisiga (Figure 4). Positioning these videos upon the gallery's facade, Siebens directly connects the gallery to the settler land upon which it stands. As a settler identified artist, Siebens wrote that she was "interested in juxtaposing the neoclassical architecture of the Vancouver Art Gallery and its colonialist associations, with the contested landscapes shown in the film. The city as site, with the dancers dressed in orange questioning the institutional superiority of the architectural building, and layered overtop of its Vitruvian principles."<sup>64</sup> Siebens explains the meaning of the title and the costumes that the dancers are wearing, both aesthetic choices that I have difficulty connecting to the identification of the work as an acknowledgement of the settler colonial harm done to Indigenous land. Siebens depicts the dancers in orange jumpsuits, which she states are "bright, everyman jumpsuits (outsiders, also read as prison suits, referencing Vancouver [Art G]allery's history as a courthouse and prison)."<sup>65</sup> To place the dancers in orange jumpsuits is to acknowledge the gallery's previous history as a courthouse and prison. The title furthers the focus on the courthouse and prison as a selective history of the space, and Siebens writes that the title "refers to the associations with thievery that magpies hold in European folklore."<sup>66</sup> What is confusing about the work is Siebens's aim to identify the piece as an acknowledgement of the contested land and unceded territories by juxtaposing the orange-clad dancers against sites in

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<sup>63</sup> Evann Siebens, "Orange Magpies," *Evann Siebens*, accessed January 10, 2019, <http://evannsiebens.com/orange-magpies>.

<sup>64</sup> Evann Siebens, "Orange Magpies."

<sup>65</sup> Evann Siebens, "Orange Magpies."

<sup>66</sup> Evann Siebens, "Orange Magpies."



Vancouver that represent Indigenous erasure. Are the images and the dancers successful in confronting each other upon the surface of the gallery, and in challenging what the gallery site represents? Does the gallery as a screen reinforce the dominance that is displayed in the dancers over their environment? It seems that while Siebens is attempting to work through the different histories of the land, she is combining colonial and Indigenous histories by purposefully positioning the Indigenous visual narrative in the background as a metaphor for the colonial dominance that has occurred. In so doing, she reinscribes this power dynamic back onto the space, instead of attempting to disrupt the site through images of the loss of Indigenous land. Garneau specifies that the “goal of non-colonial curatorial and art practices is to make room for the production and reception of Indigenous experience and expression apart from the dominant discourse.”<sup>67</sup> I find it problematic that Siebens’s work, in representing historic colonial dominance, has not allowed for the erased Indigenous history to take back power over the gallery site. This ties to Maria del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren’s description of haunting in space as places that are “simultaneously living and spectral, containing the experience of the actual moment as well as the many times that have already transpired and become silent — though not necessarily imperceptible — to the present.”<sup>68</sup> This haunting is grounded upon the site, and the universality of Siebens’s display therefore problematizes the space, as she foregrounds the history of the Vancouver Art Gallery over the erased Indigenous histories of Vancouver. When incorporating repressed and silenced Indigenous histories, settler artists must take care in giving the images the space they need in order to unsettle or disrupt the accepted history of the site.

Analyzing Siebens’s artwork after reflecting on Stimson’s *Bison in the Bowl: This is Indian Land* has prompted several questions for me as an art historian: where do settler artists

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<sup>67</sup> Garneau, 4-5.

<sup>68</sup> Maria del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren, “Possessions: Spectral Places,” in *The Spectralities Reader*, ed. Maria del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren, 395-401 (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), 395.

succeed or fall short in their attempt to engage in conciliatory artistic practices? To make a familiar space unfamiliar, the settler artist must not only become aware of the history of the land, they must also be cautious in the presentation of this trauma and loss. My struggle with the reading of Sieben's work connects directly to Garneau's assertion that, "settlers who become unsettled become a respectful guest."<sup>69</sup> It is not enough to point out that these spaces within modern-day Vancouver are colonialist in nature, one must also attempt to disrupt, intervene in, or alter the viewer's perception of the site upon which Indigenous imagery is cast. While Siebens signifies the space through the final frame of the video projection (Figure 5), which states, "these dancers were shot on sites that are unceded and the traditional territories of the Coast Salish peoples, Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh, and Musqueam nations,"<sup>70</sup> it is not enough to signify the space after the fact. Stimson's installation operates differently through his assertive statement "This Is Indian Land" on the university wall. He makes this statement clear, and has it take the foreground in intervening with the site. Siebens's installation needs to move beyond an acknowledgement. If the work is intended as an earnest gesture of conciliation, it needs to foreground the narrative of what has been removed from the site, rather than re-enacting the problematic power structure between Indigenous and colonial histories. Drawing back upon Royle's theorizations of the uncanny, he states, "it is impossible to think about the uncanny without this involving a sense of what is autobiographical, self-centred, based on one's own experience. But it is also impossible to conceive of the uncanny without a sense of ghostliness, as sense of strangeness given to dissolving all assurances about the identity of a self."<sup>71</sup> To experience unfamiliarity, and a problematized sense of self, becomes a critical component of the uncanny. Siebens's work could move in the direction of conciliation by reflecting on her own positionality, and

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<sup>69</sup> Garneau, 5.

<sup>70</sup> Evann Siebens, "Orange Magpies."

<sup>71</sup> Royle, 16.

providing care in how the histories are being enacted or represented within the installation space.

The uncanny experience of the unfamiliar within the familiar presents the opportunity for growth and development in settler spectatorship. In examining Siebens's artwork, and asking what it means to use a transitory medium to engage in artistic practice that questions time, space, matter, and memory, I thought about my own relationship with the function of the institutional site. As a university student completing my own master of arts degree, where I hope to use the degree in order to participate in and work for galleries and universities in the future, it is crucial for me to consider and reflect on what it means to learn on land that is haunted. Garneau's description of conciliation, which he describes as a non-colonial "action of bringing into harmony"<sup>72</sup> in which settlers can take part in conciliatory spaces "not to repair 'Indians' but to heal themselves, who come not as colonizers but with a conciliatory attitude to learn and share as equals, [and thus] may be transformed" is vital in undertaking this work.<sup>73</sup> Siebens's work can be seen as an attempt through this settler learning process. What is missing is her personal investment in disrupting the site, as the work offered the opportunity to investigate her own settler ties to the space. *Orange Magpies* is the beginning of the journey as a settler unlearning the colonial landscape, and bettering her own understanding of the disparate histories that exist by using her artistic platform as an opportunity to expose the spectator to the histories that have been erased.

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<sup>72</sup> Garneau, 12.

<sup>73</sup> Garneau, 25.

## Unsettling the Spectator: The Transformation of Accepted Histories

The power of seeing becomes a tool to keep particular histories and stories buried and others above ground, thus erasing the genocidal, colonial, and violent historical scars on the land we now know as Canada.<sup>74</sup>

The impact of Stimson's *Bison in the Bowl: This is Indian Land* is directed at individual spectators. The installation cites a sense of recognition, as well as reflection, for the viewer. This individual recognition of positionality requires the spectator to think critically about their relationship to the site, as well as to reflect upon the history of the land that is being projected upon. Stimson imposes change by bringing to light the haunting that is present in this building, and in so doing, exposes the repressed histories of the site. It becomes a deeply personal account of ongoing and historic trauma (through images of contemporary Indigenous life), as well a space for settler reflection. The uncanny, through the alteration of individual perspective, shifts the viewer's point of view, with the intention of unsettling and affecting those who operate within the institutional site.

Haunting and the uncanny go hand in hand in Stimson's *Bison in the Bowl: This is Indian Land*. To haunt the site of the university, Stimson engages the site of trauma with imagery of the dead, the projection acting as a reminder of the ongoing erasure of Indigenous memories and presence. By enacting this return of what has been forcibly erased, Stimson creates a space in which the spectator must reflect on what it means to be a settler upon land that holds repressed memories, loss, and animal as well as human matter. This invokes the uncanny as "not merely an aesthetic or psychological matter... [but as] bound up with analyzing, questioning, and even transforming what is called 'everyday life.'"<sup>75</sup> Through their encounter with Stimson's work within the university, the spectator becomes confused about

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<sup>74</sup> Julie Nagam, "Singing Our Bones Home," in *Land/Slide: Possible Futures*, ed. Janine Marchessault, Chloe Brushwood Rose, Jennifer Foster, and Aleksandra Kaminska, 127-128 (Montreal: ABC Books, 2015), 128.

<sup>75</sup> Royle, 23.

their relationship to the site, prompting questions such as, what does the university stand for and represent, if it exists only because of the forced removal of the original inhabitants of the land? How does the university attendee then change how they operate within this space? How is this work successful in challenging the relationship between projection, site, and spectator?

### Gazing back at Ourselves as Settler Spectators

Jacques Lacan's "mirror stage" is a critical component in understanding the spectator's relationship with the projected image. The mirror stage, as Lacan describes it, is the "formative event in the development of the subject. It occurs between six and eighteen months, when infant begins to recognize his image in the mirror."<sup>76</sup> What is significant in this recognition is the development of the infant's sense of reality and the formation of their ego, which are both the result of this anticipation and fascination with the self that is obtained through the gaze as the point of recognition.<sup>77</sup> Lacan's idea of the mirror stage is often used to understand the relationship between the screen and spectator in film theory. Tedd McGowan however, expands traditional Lacanian film theory in his text, *Looking for the Gaze* (2003) — McGowan first establishes what is accepted within traditional Lacanian film theory, where the spectator "understands the gaze as it appears in the mirror stage and as it functions in the process of ideological interpellation."<sup>78</sup> The gaze represents a point of identification, an ideological operation in which the "spectator invests [her]self in the filmic

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<sup>76</sup> Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage," 52.

<sup>77</sup> Lacan, "The Mirror Stage," 55.

<sup>78</sup> Tedd McGowan, "Looking for the Gaze: Lacanian Film Theory and Its Vicissitudes," *Cinema Journal* 42.3 (2003): 28, doi: 10.1353/cj.2003.0009. — Ideological Interpellation refers to Althusser's "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," which identifies the position of the individual subject within the structure of ideology as centred around the "Absolute Subject." Althusser elaborates, saying that, "all ideology is centred, that the Absolute Subject occupies the Centre, and interpellates around it the infinity of individuals into subjects in a double mirror-connexion such that it subjects the subject to the Subject." (34) This affirms the identification of the subject in relationship to the conceived Absolute, and this is the point at which Lacan says the spectator invests themselves in the image. Louis Althusser, "On the Reproduction of the Conditions of Production," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, New York: Monthly Review Press (1971): 34.

image.”<sup>79</sup> This positions the spectator in control over how the image is understood, projecting her identification and individual perception of reality upon the image.

This experience is different in Stimson’s *Bison in the Bowl: This is Indian Land*, as the spectators are not only looking upon the imagery being cast, they are also looking through the imagery, onto the university building that lies beneath it. Using the university wall actively unsettles and disrupts the relationship of the spectator to the screen, by engaging their relationship to the space while they witness the projected images. The gaze is broken in that the spectator is not intended to identify themselves within the imagery, but rather with the screen itself. Their recognition is grounded upon their identification as an attendee of the university, or as a spectator who has traversed the university space. The site is actively unsettled in that the university is no longer clearly recognizable. It is instead shrouded with imagery that intends to confront and expose the trauma that has occurred upon this land. Much like the identification of self in the infant’s recognition of being separate from the mother in the mirror stage, the settler spectator extricates themselves from the colonial institutional space in viewing Stimson’s installation.

In questioning their relationship with the newly troubled site-as-screen, the spectator must then turn to the imagery in an attempt to understand why the space is no longer recognizable. The projected imagery can thus be perceived as a veil, or a threshold between the spectator and the site-as-screen, and in this presentation the uncanny is activated. This places the screen in a position of unsettling, as it is no longer fixed with the preconceived notions of its own reality or history. It is at this stage that McGowan’s expansion upon Lacanian film theory supports my understanding of Stimson’s work. McGowan states, “the gaze is not the look of the subject at the object, but the point at which the object looks

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<sup>79</sup> McGowan, 28.

back,”<sup>80</sup> and that, “the gaze thus involves the spectator in the image, disrupting her/his ability to remain all-perceiving and unperceived in the cinema.”<sup>81</sup> In *Bison in the Bowl: This is Indian Land*, Stimson’s use of the university space returns the gaze back to the spectator, unsettling them by disrupting their understanding of history within the context of the land. The spectator is actively engaged in the image, in that Stimson makes them accountable for their presence or participation in the institutional space. It is through this accountability that the power dynamic shifts from the spectator holding power by looking at the installation, to the work unsettling the spectator’s experience of time and history within the space.

#### Participatory Acts of the Settler Spectator

A work that similarly engages projection upon a site-specific mutable screen through the Indigenous methodology of haunting is Julie Nagam’s 2013 installation, titled *singing our bones home*. The installation consists of a wigwam placed within a wagon shed (Figure 7). Projected images and sound are used in the interior of the wigwam, with imagery that consists of “static or monochromatic landscapes that appear to be dismal or uninhabited” (Figure 8).<sup>82</sup> This installation was created to pay “homage to the buried bodies in the Markham Ossuary... simultaneously, this work reflects the constant relocation of Indigenous bodies that are moved, replaced, or stolen in various colonial geographies.”<sup>83</sup> Projecting the landscapes as uninhabited represents the lack of Indigenous living presence in the land. In addition, the installation “grapples with the myth of terra nullius, which considers the land to be void of people or settlement”.<sup>84</sup> By placing the wigwam inside the wagon shed, Nagam infers settlement and colonial presence overcoming the nomadic lifestyle of the Indigenous

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<sup>80</sup> McGowan, 28.

<sup>81</sup> McGowan, 29.

<sup>82</sup> Julie Nagam, *Land/Slide: Possible Futures*, accessed January 30, 2019, <http://www.landslide-possiblefutures.com/site.html#nagam>.

<sup>83</sup> Julie Nagam, “Singing Our Bones Home,” 127.

<sup>84</sup> Nagam, *Land/Slide: Possible Futures*.

peoples.<sup>85</sup> As the spectator experiences the installation, they walk freely into the wigwam, and in so doing, activate a collection of sounds and songs that Nagam has installed.<sup>86</sup> Nagam writes that, the “recordings consisted of outdoor ambient noises with the inclusion of four different honour songs in the languages of Iroquois, Cree, Anishinaabemowin, and French/Metis. These songs are to honour the bodies and to begin to sing those bodies back home to the spirit world or, at the very least, give them some form of peace.”<sup>87</sup> Nagam is therefore working through the same practices of engaging haunting within the site, holding the settler spectator accountable for their ability to move freely within the space and upon the land, unlike the Indigenous peoples who have been forcibly removed from the space.

However, this site functions differently from Stimson’s projection work in some regards, as it positions the spectator as a receptive learner who might not have personal associations with or histories tied to the site. This problematizes the use of the uncanny within Nagam’s installation, as it is unclear if the space was successfully made unfamiliar for those who viewed the installation, and whether the spectators would problematize their understanding of everyday life upon seeing the work. The screen in *singing our bones home* works similarly to Stimson’s installation in enacting survivance tactics through the expansion of Lacan’s mirror stage by turning the gaze back upon the spectator. Nagam states that “many of the burial and archaeological sites in many Canadian cities remain unseen or invisible,” and that “this inability to ‘see’ is rooted in settler ideologies of the occupation of space.”<sup>88</sup> This sight, or gaze, is addressed in the work through the installation’s depiction of the barren landscape, which alters the viewer’s understanding of the surrounding environment outside of the wigwam. Nagam writes that “when Indigenous bodies and knowledge are ‘seen,’ the

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<sup>85</sup> Nagam, *Land/Slide: Possible Futures*.

<sup>86</sup> Nagam, “Singing Our Bones Home,” 128.

<sup>87</sup> Nagam, “Singing Our Bones Home,” 128.

<sup>88</sup> Nagam, “Singing Our Bones Home,” 127.



master narrative is challenged and settler ideologies are ruptured.”<sup>89</sup> She goes on to quote theorist Katherine McKittrick, who states that, “when these bodies are ‘out of sight,’ these stories remain concealed, which have ‘real and discursive socio-spatial process of evidence struggles — over soil, the body, theory, history, and saying and expressing a sense of place.’”<sup>90</sup> The settler spectator then becomes able to see the loss of Indigenous bodies that has occurred upon the land, and challenges their self-accountability for being a part of the colonized landscape. Nagam engages this accountability by demonstrating the spectator’s freedom of movement through the installation space, and the control that the spectator has in the orchestration of the audio component of the work. The songs resonate as the signifier for the ghosts’ presence, haunting the viewer through the reminder of the symbolic force of the barren landscape.

This positions the spectator as an active subject, who receives the installation’s visual information and learns from and is affected by it through their participation in the space. Critical theorist Claire Bishop examines participatory art in her book *Artificial Hells* (2012), where she states that “participatory art demands that [the viewer] find[s] new ways of analyzing art that one no longer links solely to visibility, even though form remains a crucial vessel for communicating meaning.”<sup>91</sup> This obligation to engage in conceptual and theoretical analysis of participatory art is critical in reading works such as Stimson’s and Nagam’s, as it calls upon the viewer to analyze the work beyond the formal construct of its materiality. The use of projection in each of these works is a point of access for the spectator to engage with and witness the histories that have been repressed from their respective spaces. Bishop goes on to state that the viewer needs to “find ways of accounting for participatory art that focus on the meaning of what it produces, rather than attending solely to

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<sup>89</sup> Julie Nagam, “The Occupation of Space,” in *Land/Slide: Possible Futures*, ed. Janine Marchessault, Chloe Brushwood Rose, Jennifer Foster, and Aleksandra Kaminska, 146-151 (Montreal: ABC Books, 2015), 150.

<sup>90</sup> Nagam, “The Occupation of Space,” 150.

<sup>91</sup> Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (New York: Verso, 2012), 7.

process.”<sup>92</sup> This emphasis on the production of installation works that engage in participatory practices relates back to the unveiling of the uncanny. What is uncanny about Stimson’s and Nagam’s installations are the changed perceptions of space, or rather, the unsettling of the spectator’s familiarity within their environment. Both works challenge the spectator’s certainty of knowledge and histories within their respective sites.

## Conclusion: Unlearning through the Uncanny

The uncanny is an unstable, perplexing, and unsettling sense that one cannot easily wrap their head around. It has to do with our sense of time, memory, space, site, and situational context. Uncanniness can be unveiled in a space, but in a sense this means that it was already there to begin with. The uncanny is achieved by projection installations through their materiality, as the imagery, light, and screen all contribute to the unsettling of the site. Such material elements are in and of themselves unfixed, transitory, and impermanent. They are themselves ghostly elements that are signified in this artform to take shape for a fixed amount of time. The projection is therefore what brings uncanniness into light, making the repressed content of the site manifest for the spectator. By unsettling the viewer, the uncanny functions similarly, although I would argue, less strategically, to haunting as it is articulated in decolonization theory. Haunting is relentless and continual: it is always enacting itself upon and within a site without assistance. By comparison, the uncanny requires projection as an intermediary in these works. However, the terms function similarly in signifying the ghosts and energy which engage the viewer in producing an affective response. It is through the uncanny that projection installations alter the site permanently for the spectator. With this

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<sup>92</sup> Bishop, 9.

in mind, accessing the uncanny through projection art offers an opportunity for artists to critically engage with erased or hidden histories.

This essay is the product of my ongoing effort to continuously confront and learn about histories that have not been documented, archived, or acknowledged in institutional spaces of state settler power, including and especially the site of the university. The projected installations of Stimson, Nagam, and Siebens re-present erased knowledge onto these spaces, to varying degrees of success. What has been previously repressed or stripped from the context of the land of the University of Saskatchewan, the Markham Ossuary, and the Vancouver Art Gallery has been returned in the form of visual haunting, altering these sites into uncanny spaces through the intervention of images. A question that remains is whether this uncanniness resides only for the time in which the projection is cast onto the site, or if that uncanniness behaves similarly to haunting by remaining perpetually in the site, waiting for those who move through the space to become unsettled by what they imagine and “know” as familiar. Does this mean that the uncanny purely resides in the experience of reaction (and would therefore be unveiled for some but not others)? Or are these spaces defined as uncanny precisely because of the history that has been actively removed from them, and thus they offer the possibility for these erased histories to be resurfaced or remembered by artists and educators? And finally, what does this mean to expose erased histories within the institutional framework, and how is this information then shared within academia? These are all questions that cannot easily be resolved within the confines of this paper, and require ongoing care and consideration when pursuing a deeper understanding of what it means to take part in the university institution as it rests on Indigenous sovereign land.

These works also function as ephemeral events, ones that rely on their documentation to exist beyond the dates in which they occurred. My analysis of Stimson’s, Nagam’s, and Siebens’s works is therefore limited to the documentation I had access to, and to written

accounts, both from the artists, and from scholars and curators who have written about the works. It is therefore a question of what has been selected for preservation as the representative images of these installations. What significance do these particular images hold? This also puts into question what remains to be archived from these ephemeral artworks. Particularly in the case of *Bison in the Bowl: This is Indian Land*, the institutional archive is limited, or possibly even selective, in the documentation it gathers for future generations. Nagam's work contributed to "Land|Slide: Possible Futures," a public art exhibition curated by Janine Marchessault, with the goal of exploring themes of community, multiculturalism, and sustainability.<sup>93</sup> Siebens's work contributed to a collective public art exhibition through the 2017 "Facade Festival," commissioned by the Burrard Arts Foundation, with the aim to respond to Vancouver's urban landscape and city centre.<sup>94</sup> Documentation of Nagam and Siebens's ephemeral works exists through exhibition catalogs and write-ups, whereas Stimson's work existed as a critical analysis of the University of Saskatchewan for his master of arts degree. I rely heavily on his MFA thesis paper as well as our virtual correspondence over email in order to better grasp a sense of the works as they existed in the space. Obtaining documentation from the University of Saskatchewan proved difficult, and there were no video nor audio recordings made of *Bison in the Bowl: This is Indian Land*. Because of this, I am aware of my limitations in analyzing the temporal and physical aspects of the installation. However, this only contributed towards and reinforced my sense of purpose in working through the conceptual analysis of the work, and questioning the accessibility and limitations of the university archive in preserving critical works of public intervention by Indigenous artists.

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<sup>93</sup> *Land|Slide: Possible Futures*, accessed January 30, 2019. <http://www.landslide-possiblefutures.com/site.html#about>.

<sup>94</sup> *Facade Festival*, accessed January 30, 2019. <https://www.facadefest.com/#about-facade-festival>.

It is also critical to emphasize the limitations of my analysis and readings of these works, as these artworks carry embodied knowledge that deal with trauma that I have never experienced. My analysis of these works is by no means a final assessment. As Stimson states in an interview with Jonathan Dewar, “the art object itself cannot heal. The object itself could be a trigger, for somebody else to consider their own situation, in their own context.”<sup>95</sup> These works provide a critique of the sites in which they were installed, and these are sites that I willingly move through and continue to participate in on a daily basis. As a white settler on this land, I am afforded with a point of privilege that allows for me to move through these institutional spaces with ease. This paper analyzes these artworks and sites from a settler perspective, and aims to participate in a conciliatory gesture through the method of unlearning. These works operate through the uncanny as an unsettling of settler identity, and this misrecognition of identity becomes critical in Garneau’s assertion of conciliatory practices.<sup>96</sup> This paper signifies the need for open and conciliatory conversations about the histories that have been purposefully removed or erased from this land. Future researchers should aim to continuously reflect on other works that challenge the conditions through which settler spectators understand space and site.

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<sup>95</sup> Adrian Stimson, “Adrian Stimson: Interview with Jonathan Dewar,” in *The Land We Are: Artists and Writers Unsettle the Politics of Reconciliation*, ed. Gabrielle L’Hirondelle and Sophie McCall, 185-199 (Winnipeg: ARP Books, 2015): 193.

<sup>96</sup> Garneau writes that, “in environments of perpetual conciliation, non-Indigenous people struggle with their inheritance of privilege, unlearn the colonial attitude, and work toward non-colonial practices.” Garneau, 5.

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## Appendix A: Figures



Figure 1. Adrian Stimson, *Bison in the Bowl*, *Bison in the Bowl: This is Indian Land*, “Buffalo Boy’s Heart On: Buffalo Boy’s 100 Years of Wearing His Heart on His Sleeve,” Installation still, University of Saskatchewan, 2005



Figure 2. Adrian Stimson, *Bison in the Bowl*, *Bison in the Bowl: This is Indian Land*, “Buffalo Boy’s Heart On: Buffalo Boy’s 100 Years of Wearing His Heart on His Sleeve,” Performance still, University of Saskatchewan, 2005



Figure 3. Evann Siebens, *Orange Magpies*, performed by James Gnam and Vanessa Goodman, Installation still, Vancouver Art Gallery, 2017

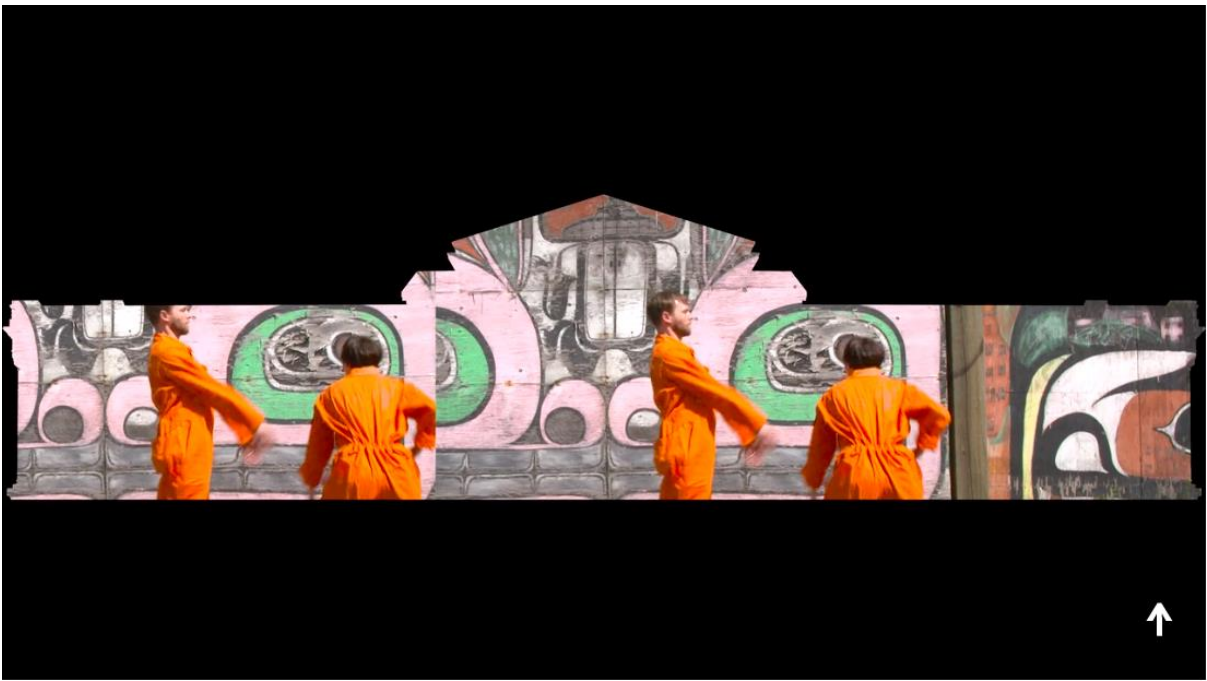


Figure 4. Evann Siebens, *Orange Magpies*, performed by James Gnam and Vanessa Goodman, Artist rendering, Vancouver Art Gallery, 2017

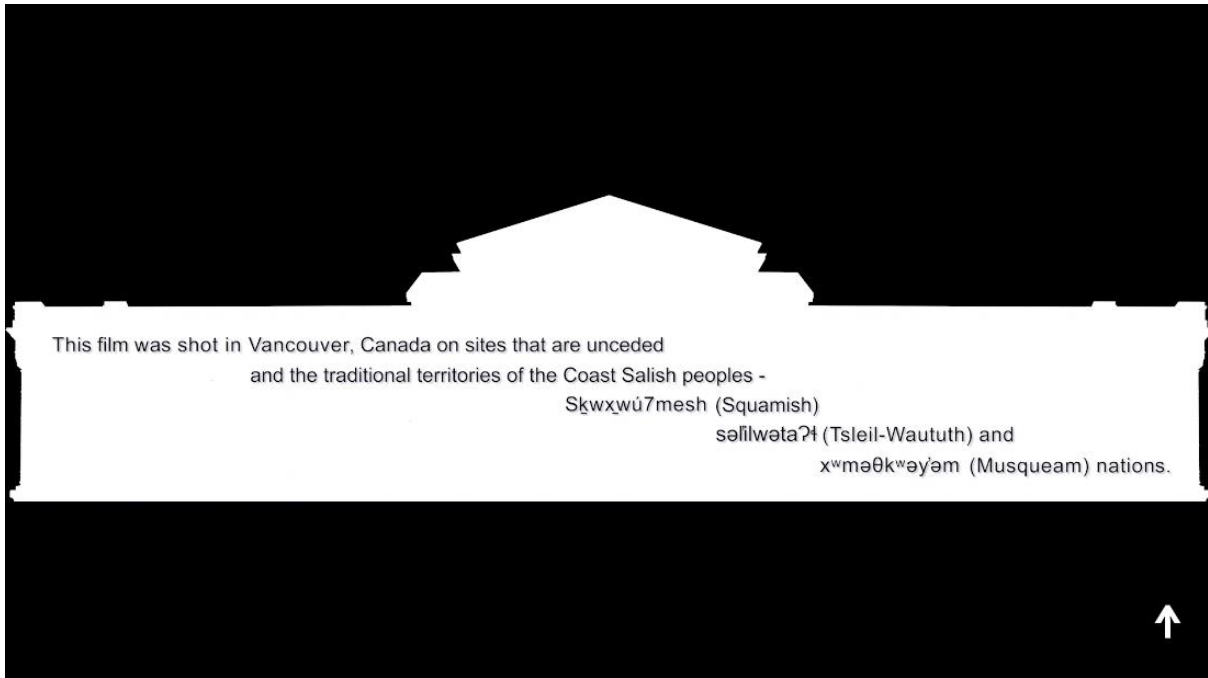


Figure 5. Evann Siebens, *Orange Magpies*, performed by James Gnam and Vanessa Goodman, Artist rendering, Vancouver Art Gallery, 2017



Figure 6. Adrian Stimson, *Bison in the Bowl*, *Bison in the Bowl: This is Indian Land*, "Buffalo Boy's Heart On: Buffalo Boy's 100 Years of Wearing His Heart on His Sleeve," Performance still, University of Saskatchewan, 2005





Figure 7. Julie Nagam, *singing our bones home*, Installation still, Markham Museum, 2013, collection of Will Pemulis



Figure 8. Julie Nagam, *singing our bones home*, Installation still, Markham Museum, 2013, collection of Will Pemulis