

A Reclamation of Space

This is an assertion... not a defence

by

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This is an assertion not a defence

The parameters and expectations of this component are as follows.....

15.4.2 Defence Statement

The Defence Statement is a concise articulation of the theoretical, methodological, artistic framework of the Graduating Project. The Statement, in conjunction with the oral presentation given during the Defence (see **Section 17.3** below), will suggest an interpretive framework, references and/or set of terms which the student feels are most relevant to discussing the project.

Recognizing that the Defence Statement cannot express a complete framework of the Graduating Project, students should consider the following format:

- briefly discuss the background of the work, in relation to their previous practice;
- briefly contextualize the work in relationship to the field;
- describe the work itself;
- briefly reflect upon the process and how it influenced the final work.

It is the student's responsibility to distribute the Statement to the Graduating Committee two weeks before the Defence date; the Graduate Program Assistant will ensure that a copy is provided to the External Examiner.

I would like to start off by saying that this is an assertion and not a defense.... we are tired of defending.... Since contact we have been defending our lands, waters, culture, people, homes, children, sacred sites, knowledge, worldview, displaced peoples, vulnerable populations, along with nature and our animal brothers and sisters...It is exhausting... I want to acknowledge that this is heavy work... Heavy, emotionally draining labour... Labour that has serious visible impacts on our health and wellbeing, especially during this pandemic (Covid 19)... There is an urgency like never before to shift to systems of care... to think local... to be sustainable.. to respond to the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions's (TRC) Calls to Action....to UPHOLD the United Nation's Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)... which was adopted here in B.C. last year....

However, with all of the Indigenous rights violations taking place around the province and under the restrictions of this Covid pandemic... it appears like the adoption of UNDRIP here in the province of "British Columbia" is more like a public relations campaign than a guide to actually respecting the rights of Indigenous Rights and Title....

There are people mobilizing for the land like never before... People rising up on a global scale... Yet Indigenous rights continue to be violated atrociously around the world... These are things I know... things I live...and understand to my core... the living memory of my DNA... an

embodied connection to the land... Understanding life through a strong cultural lens and worldview...

INTENSE TIMES ARE UPON US>>> EMOTIONALLY TRYING TIMES

I want there to be an understanding that our people are still trying to heal from the atrocious violence and systemic genocide of the past.... while simultaneously fighting ongoing colonialism, exploitation and active genocide.... *Lateral Violence* and *Oppressive Systems* plague our communities with a pressure to conform.... a conditioned desire to **keep up with the Joneses...** the Joneses being the array of Canadians that occupy our homelands... Canadians whom have prospered through the corporation known as Canada.... with their free land grabs and variety of jobs that were founded on genocide, destruction of culture and resource extraction... all in the name of progress and development.... with their running water and addiction to the newest, shiniest, fastest, nicest things money can buy... conditioning the masses in sterile cube like environments and a variety of screens... prioritizing the workforce and tailoring education to create cookie cutter employees for industry... everybody racing around from place to place because time is money... or at least that is what people are conditioned to think...

History books and media tarnish the image of our people and beautiful culture

Scientific studies founded on racial superiority are employed to uphold systems and create frameworks for policy

Marketing tropes create lasting beliefs in generations to come

Beliefs of the lazy, unknowing Indian

Lazy in western eyes because we don't want to play the extractive, greedy games.... because we know you cannot eat money.... because we are well fed... in more ways than one.... by all the all the abundance and beauty which surrounds...all that nature provides for us...the sustenance it offers to our heart, body, spirit, mind and soul... we value relationships above all else... we love the land... we are the land... literally and scientifically

The government of Canada and much of the Canadian population claim to want reconciliation

So, I ask you... why are we still facing acts of genocide and assimilation????

Why do we still suffer violence at the hands of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP)????

Last year the RCMP spent 13 Million Dollars to militarize themselves against Women and Children.... Matriarchs & Hereditary Chiefs living on their Unceded Traditional Territories... Wet'suwet'en people trying to heal their communities from the horrendous injustices that Canada has subjected them too.... healing on the land... rebuilding and establishing connection to the lands they were once forcibly removed from....

Violence against the land and water are simultaneously thrust against Indigenous bodies... we know that our healing comes from our connection to the lands and waters... we have always known this... if the earth is sick, we are sick.... This is what is happening... Our grassroots people recognize the power the land has, not only to heal itself but each and every one of us... this is why we are so desperately fighting to preserve what little we have left.... while the government and industry push through projects that are devastating to our health and wellbeing.....Projects that are deliberate acts of genocide.... Projects that want to erase us from the land.... Projects that want to destroy our Indigenous Food Sovereignty... Projects that want to Break Our Spirits.... Projects that hire the RCMP as Security Guards for industry...

<<<<PROJECTS THAT INFRINGE AND TRAMPLE OVER OUR INHERENT RIGHTS & TITLE TO THESE LANDS>>>>

We are exhausted... We are tired of defending.... but with Inherent Rights come Inherent Roles & Responsibilities and it is our job to speak for the trees... to speak for the water... the salmon... the whales... the children... the unborn... the bears, eagles and cougars feeding their young ones along the river banks...

So, like flocks of geese we change our positions... allowing some to rest while others channel their energies to the multitude of frontline work taking place in numerous territories around the world... work of generations.... work that continues to unfold at this time.... So, we call our brothers and sisters forward... call our allies in... call the institutions to stand with us... call upon settler communities to show some reciprocities to the lands and peoples whom have offered you abundance and beauty.... we call upon each and every one of you to step forward to uphold your sacred duty and responsibility, as guests upon these lands... calling upon every one of you to educate yourselves on the dark history of this country... asking you to try and view these events in empathetic, embodied ways of understanding, rather than analyzing, theorizing, dismissing, or justifying through the illusion of the mind... to gain a greater understanding of Indigenous struggles....to consider the impacts of ongoing colonialism.... to be the change so many need to see... to dismantle oppressive systems and help create systems of care... we are calling upon you to respect the land and all mother nature provides... to engage in meaningful way with reconciliation.... to stand in solidarity with Indigenous peoples against the violent acts we are facing in this country... to honor Indigenous rights and title... to understand when no means no....

What we are currently seeing in this country, is not what reconciliation looks like...

I WANT TO SPEAK TO THE EMOTIONAL LABOUR... TO THE INHERENT RESPONSIBILITIES WE HAVE TO OUR COMMUNITIES AND TERRITORIES...TO THE ONGOING STRUGGLES AND FIGHTS WE HAVE FOUGHT ACROSS MULTIPLE GENERATIONS... FIGHTS AND BATTLES THAT CONTINUE TODAY.....FIGHTS AND BATTLES THAT TAKE AWAY FROM THE BEAUTIFUL, UPLIFTING HEALING WORK WE COULD BE DOING AND ARE CURRENTLY TAKING ON IN OUR COMMUNITIES.... JUST IMAGINE ALL THE BEATIFUL ENERGY WE COULD BE INVESTING IN OUR COMMUNITIES IF WE WERE NOT IN A CONSTANT BATTLE

WITH THE COLONIAL POWERS THAT BE... IF WE WERE NOT CONSTANTLY
DEFENDING OUR WAY OF LIFE....

We are grateful to our animal brothers and sisters because they helped us upon our arrival... from the numerous realms, from which we came.... they were here before us.... They shared their knowledge... They taught us how to survive... They sacrificed themselves for us.... We learned from them... it is because of this we flourished on these lands.... all because they welcomed us into their territories.... this is why we have such a deep respect for the land, the plants, the water, the animals... they each played a role in welcoming us into their territories and into their homes.... They provide us with abundance...

Our people are spread thin in numerous capacities tackling a number of fights for our collective survival... we continue to deal with state of emergencies, suicide epidemics, water crisis, addiction crisis, mental health crisis, trauma, housing, poverty, racism, police violence, assimilative policies, murdered and missing Indigenous women, youth, children, two spirited, and men, corrupt systems and industrial greed...

THESE ARE THE REASONS I WILL NOT DEFEND....

This should be a space of understanding... A space that pushes boundaries... A space that should be vocal... A space that fights injustice... A space that challenges unjust systems... Not a space that ignores, perpetuates or upholds colonial violence.... Like the words of Maya Angelou when we know better, we must do better... and this institution should know better.... Yet somehow, we still have pipelines being pushed through Unceded Territories with military force, jeopardizing numerous waterways and municipal water supplies... Impacting and displacing numerous animal species.... affecting our global air quality... placing our families and schools at risk... including the student body and faculty on Burnaby Mountain... I want to be very clear that SFU's Silence as an Institution is Violence.... This is an institution that should recognize its responsibilities to the lands and caretakers of these lands... As an academic institution full of educated human beings I truly hope that you can see why I needed to make this assertion at this time....

We have always had to defend, justify, plea, beg,.... We are still defending... defending the ones who walk, slither, crawl, fly, and swim....

My graduating project is a direct response to the heavily engrained colonial structure that is the university...

To fully understand the creation and need for my work you need to understand the current socio-political climate we are currently facing on a global level.

You need to understand the historical and continued forced assimilation of Indigenous peoples in this country and around the world.

The continued desire to remove the Indian from the child.

Assimilation processes continue today in our economies, communities, education, and political structures...some subtle... while others not so much... assimilation is occurring none the less, we see it in numerous systems across this country.... assimilation thrust against our bodies through academic texts, imposed through the racial hierarchies of knowledge, and dominating euro-centric worldviews....

Assimilation that can be heard in the voices of the leaders in this country... it reveals itself through the economic values we prioritize over the Indigenous peoples and their economies... we see it in the writers we read at school... the books and authors schools support... the modes of being they privilege... the train of thought they expect us to follow... the format and language we are expected to speak... the disproportionate wealth distribution... the racist perspectives... the values and ethics we are expected to uphold....

2020 is upon us and we need to make room for other ways of being within this colonial institution.... I have felt the heaviness of this space, an institution that prioritizes colonial values and upholds colonial violence by its very name sake... Simon Fraser University... a man who inflicted violence on Indigenous bodies...

At my Completion Ceremony, we heard stories shared on the floor about the violence and horrible treatment our relatives and their loved ones received at the hands of this man whose name you uphold.... Simon Fraser... violence that is remembered in our families and communities....

To many the name of this institution alone reveals its deep and troubling colonial legacy.

We know that violence continues to ravage both the Environment and Indigenous bodies on a global scale.... Now let us think locally and put things in perspective, we only need to look to the Trans Mountain Pipeline expansion on “Burnaby Mountain” to see the careless actions of our government... a great deal of my time with SFU was spent on that mountain... either in classes, on the land, in front of the gates at the Kinder Morgan tank farm, or in the Kwekwecnewtw Watchhouse.... I lived on that mountain... along with many other amazing human beings trying to stop this pipeline expansion... and we won... we did... we witnessed numerous victories... Kinder Morgan investors recognized that this is a bad investment... yet Canada chose to buy it anyways and is doing everything in its power to push it through, at all costs... even when insurance companies are refusing to back them... even when numerous scientific studies reveal the multitude of risks to such a project... even when it infringes upon Indigenous rights and could wipe out entire species... and possibly the human race...

Something else happened, that I never expected... just as I started school in September 2017 our community received a notice issued from the City of White Rock (COWR) to Semiahmoo First Nation (SFN) to disconnect our water service and supply... a water supply that has nourished us for thousands of years... During this time so many things were happening... I will briefly share a few of those events with you, to give you an idea of what we are dealing with.....

- Disconnection notice for water from COWR to SFN using Delta vs Tsawwassen (case law)
- Fentanyl Crisis

- Excavation of our village site without consultation by the COWR
- Development of our village site without any acknowledgement of history or recognition of SFN by the COWR
- Standing Rock- militarized force to remove Indigenous peoples from their lands (“Water is Life” movement)
- Further displacement of SFN by the COWR through the co-opting of our origin stories and family history (The Rock Peqoles)
- The purchase of the Trans Mountain Pipeline by the Federal Government
- Trudeau says First Nations cannot veto projects despite Tsleil-Waututh’s win in the Federal Court of appeal
- Former Indian Affairs Minister Bernard Valcourt and Andrew Sheer deny the results of the Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women & Girls Inquiry
- Colten Boushie is murdered in cold blood on his homelands
- Colten Boushie’s murderer Gerald Stanley is found not guilty by a jury of his peers
- Police failed to do a proper investigation of the case and reveal extreme racial bias
- The police & justice system once again, fail Indigenous peoples with their blatant racial bias
- Unist’ot’en raided with military force, snipers in place with live rounds of ammunition and women are removed violently from their lands at gunpoint by RCMP tactical units
- Coastal gas link destroys Wet’suwet’en village sites, traplines, archeological data
- Police conduct research against Indigenous land defenders, not on their criminal activity but their ability to influence and sway public opinion
- Georgia Straight discloses information from leaked RCMP documents that discuss the raid on Unist’ot’en the documents discuss things like “lethal overwatch”, “sterilize the site”
- At the time of the raid the RCMP also threatened to apprehend land defenders’ children from schools (a tactic historically used to control Indigenous peoples in Canada)
- Fish farms continue to destroy our wild salmon populations and have been put in without consultation from local nations
- Tahlequah the Killer whale pushes her deceased calf for close to 20 days for the world to see
- The government continues to push resource extraction
- Kanahus Manuel is attacked by an RCMP officer who breaks her arm on her traditional territory where the RCMP are stationed to protect the interests of the Trans Mountain Pipeline and its contractors
- Numerous murders of Indigenous leaders around the world continue in the name of “progress” and “development”
- Greed and dispossession of wealth continues
- Extreme changes in weather
- Fires roaring through many continents
- Draughts
- War
- Violence

- Forced migration of climate refugees
- Militarized states
- Surveillance
- Addiction
- Mental Illness
- Disease

All of these events have informed my work. They have each had a tremendous impact on my physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual wellbeing.

My assertion is an act of resistance and a reclamation of space.....

This is an act against the ongoing forced assimilation of our people.

I assert that we have a right to an education that respects our cultural understandings, traditional knowledge, values, ethics, systems, and way of life. An education that is informed by the lands we are on... informed by an accurate account of history... we have a right not to be limited by and pushed into assimilation through funding policies that only support colonial education in institutions like these. Institutions founded on racial superiority. Institutions that have educated, informed, upheld, and perpetuated the oppressive systems we continue to live in today.

The past has played a huge role in framing my assertive position.... so, has the present.... but it is the future I am concerned about... the future of these lands, are not up for “grabs”... they belong to the children and the unborn...

I will not allow myself to be colonized or assimilated... Instead, I adapt my hybridity to learn the skills and tools of my oppressor.... employing them to help preserve our way of life... co-opting systems to protect our way of life... enticing a paradigm shift

My work and practice stay grounded in long lineage of Salish culture.... This is who I am... where I come from... I have chosen to reject the terminology of research, reject its colonial positionality... So here I am before you, an Indigenous Woman grounded in lived experience.

I found myself naturally gravitating towards anthropology and interested in its progression from a once very racist discipline of study to a self-reflexive space of internal critique.... A critique that was prompted and pushed forward by Indigenous Voices... prompted by their outrage and frustration at the inhumane way anthropologists chose to study humanity and the savage...

I will not take a scientific lens to my work objectifying or dissecting Indigenous epistemologies to exploit my cultural being.... There are things that I will not explain or discuss... I will not lay everything out and try to validate myself or my thoughts through western paradigms or theorists... I cannot and I will not... these are my sovereign spaces...

Like many texts written.... each have an audience in mind.... many of those texts including my children’s current social studies textbooks were not written to be read by Indigenous minds... like we discovered in our graduate anthropology class....research was never intended to be done

by Indigenous scholars... my 16yr old son 25yrs later shares similar lived experiences in high school... the same high school I attended... getting answers wrong on things he knows to be true... being conditioned over and over with the same colonial stories and skewed accounts of history.... invoking frustration... othering children... causing them to question themselves... "these text books were not meant for me"....

So, I will not make my work easy to digest for an uninformed audience. Instead I ground myself and my work in strong resilient Salish teachings, morality, ethics, spirituality, social, and political ways of being...

I am committed to doing work that is culturally relative to me and others like me... who may one day find themselves in similar spaces encountering similar discomforts...

It is important to understand the deep complexities of Indigenous issues.... However, I am not here to provide that understanding for you... It is my hope that you become curious and activated to take some of that on for yourself... to gain a greater understanding of the long and taxing fight Indigenous peoples have been dealing with in this country.... Unfortunately, the Canadian education system has failed us all miserably in educating the masses on a true account of Canadian history.... especially on things like Indigenous Rights and Title... So here we are planting seedlings of hope and I ask you, where do we go from here?

Breakdown of work and time with SFU

My work at SFU started as a response to the letter I received while on council for Semiahmoo First Nation from the City of White Rock regarding the disconnection notice we received for our water supply. This started off my first semester of grad school and was the beginning of my crusade to reclaim space....

My thesis in its entirety is A RECLAMATION OF SPACE. There are 4 components of my graduating thesis which are of equal importance to one another....

1)*The White Paper ~ A Non Neutral Space: Ceremonial Action Against Assimilative Structures*
Written in 2017, is my ceremony, my space, my lived experience and not to be limited by the restriction of colonial expectations....

2)*Elh Tel Nong Et Tiá Sxwkwensonosem "Knowing this Window with Understanding"*
Was installed in the gallery window @ 149 W Hastings for our {MFA Graduating Exhibition 2018 WE ALL COME OUT FROM BETWEEN OUR MOTHER'S LEGS, NO ACTUALLY FROM INSIDE OUR MOTHER'S BODIES, OR WAIT HOLD ON, WE ALL COME FROM BODIES...} ~Maj Jensen

Elh Tel Nong Et Tiá Sxwkwensonosem was a collection of items created for *My Completion Ceremony* and installed in the gallery window.... knowing that the window itself much like the museum walls would remove my ceremonial objects from their original context.... leaving viewers to their own devices of interpretation....

3) *My Completion Ceremony*

The ceremony took place on the unceded lands of the x^wməθkwəyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Səlílwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) peoples... The table was set for 2:30 pm on January 11th 2020 in room 4270 @ SFU Woodward's.... It was an intense and beautiful time with people lined up... waiting to get in.... It was something I knew I needed to do... I needed to document my thesis and work in ceremony... our ceremonies and orality of culture are so important... I needed to share my work in way in which it could be understood and felt in the bodies of our faculty and reverberation of these institutional walls... not read through paradigms of intellect, art speak, or critique... I needed to bring our culture and our way of life forward rather than have it theorized through a window of misunderstanding.... once criticized as a culture without a written language.... yet our artwork embellishes everything... it tells stories, provides us with protection, documents history, sacred sites, regalia, ceremonial gifts, connects us to our ancestors, to the spiritual realm, makes political statements, adorns our canoes, marks our homes, teaches us connection, patience, gratitude and reminds us the importance of mother earth.... art is so much more than what I've learned in classrooms or books...but I thank you for the concept of an institutional critique...knowledge is passed down through embodied ways of understanding.... I was guided to do this work.... I needed to address the violence I felt against my spirit.... I needed to confront these assimilative structures and lack of spatial awareness... I needed to acknowledge the land in which SFU is situated on... I needed to bring forward the communities who hunting grounds we reside on... I needed people to understand beyond theory the long rich history of these lands in which this school is situated on.... the lands that went from lush forests to forts to the largest man camp in the lower mainland.... I needed to do this work.... For the future, we are creating...

4) This is an assertion... it is not a defence