

each individual is irreducible as an individual, and therefore enters the world “innocent”, or free of obligation — she identifies a chain of relations and kinships within which the individual is indiscernible from the various processes that constitute and exceed them, and, in so doing, is destroyed altogether. What remains is everything as a ghost of everything else.

1. Eve Tuck and C. Ree, “A glossary of haunting,” in *Handbook of Autoethnography*, ed. Stacey Holman Jones, Tony E. Adams, and Carolyn Ellis (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, Inc., 2013), 641.
2. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, “Land as pedagogy: Nishnaabeg intelligence and rebellious transformation,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 3, no. 3 (2014): 1–25.
3. Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 13.
4. Tuck and Ree 642.
5. Coulthard 12.
6. Ibid. 159.

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# THE SPECTRAL LEDGER

**BY STEVEN COTTINGHAM**

There can be no doubt that the colonial paradigm is a question of haunting. What remains for debate, however, is the assignation of roles. Who is haunting who? There are arguments to be made for either arrangement. Are colonizers the spectral monsters who prey upon colonized inhabitants? Or do the colonized exist as ghosts who haunt the every act of colonial invaders? In "A glossary of haunting", Eve Tuck and C. Ree identify two types of hauntings portrayed in popular cinema, distinguishable only by their framing. In the first, "hauntings are positioned as undeserved, and the innocent hero must destroy the [ghost] to put the world in balance again". In the second, "because the depth of injustice that begat the monster or ghost is acknowledged, the hero does not think herself to be innocent, or try to achieve reconciliation or healing, only mercy, often in the form of passing on the debt."<sup>1</sup>

In either instance, the haunting in question inevitably results from a trespass, an affront which may be deemed too minor in comparison to the elicited reaction. Still, the notion of trespass precedes even the settler concept of property. This may appear paradoxical until we consider the way in which life inevitably necessitates death—one organism (animal, plant, micro) persists only through the consumption of another. Every becoming is also an unbecoming, and therefore each trespass begets a debt to (a ghost of) that which has preceded it.

In an art context, we may recall Marcel Duchamp's famous wordplay, "a guest + a host = a ghost". He first deployed this phrase in 1953, as adornment on otherwise blank tin-foil squares used as candy wrappers. Appropriating the form of an equation, we can note that the sum of ghost is *irreducible* to either addend—meaning that the ghost is produced as an *emergent* property of the entangled guest and host. This may help us as we grapple with the question of haunting under colonialism.

To do so, we must address the confluence of several terms. In the colonial paradigm, settler institutions frequently make recourse to their status as "uninvited guests". There is much to be said by both critics and advocates alike of this acknowledgement, but for now let it be noted that this practice represents a

philosophically pragmatic approach to settler colonialism, wherein subjects as individuals must reckon with systems that 1) operate beyond their agency and 2) ensure the atomization of said agency.

We can extend Duchamp's pun to account for the uninvited nature of the guest, but only if we also address the nature of the host. "Uninvited"—a lightly-put, but nonetheless accurate descriptor—insinuates that "host" be similarly qualified, possibly resulting in a coerced or unwilling host. The addition of qualifiers to each term results in an equation of paradoxes, meaning that each addend performs its own local contradiction or cancellation, resulting again in the sum of ghost. "An uninvited guest + an unwilling host = a ghost".

In Krista Belle Stewart's figuration, the "host" can be said to take the form of vessels, containers, and voluminous spaces made from her and her family's land in Spaxomin (Douglas Lake). Her deployment of the host is twofold. The host is literal land (which, as resource, constitutes the subject of colonization itself) given the form of a receptacle (which receives, "hosts", and carries).

With the catalyst of heat, Stewart's earth becomes earthenware. This is an *immanent* procedure: the work as we see it stems from a reorganization of matter rather than an addendum to it. For these reasons, we can say that her land, and the various substances entangled within it (land as pedagogy<sup>2</sup>, land as "system of reciprocal relations and obligations"<sup>3</sup>) are singular under the term "host". This is true not only of the material itself, but of the forms expressed by the reconfigured land. Fired earth is ground to become a pigment, applied as paint to the walls of the room—which is itself a kind of holding form. Elsewhere the land becomes clay, shaped into capsule forms that host dirt taken from other exhibition sites. In this configuration, the layers of earth become tectonic. A spatial element becomes a temporal one through the figuration of geological strata: earth on earth, dirt holding dirt as archive.

I want to argue that Stewart's work instantiates a new arrangement for Duchamp's equation. This rearrangement stems from the schism hidden within the mathematical expression,

made evident only when considered linguistically. Consider the chronology of the addends: while addition, unlike subtraction, does not distinguish an order of operations, it will not serve us to say that "action + reaction = justice" is the same as "reaction + action = justice". So we will need to modify our formula to better describe the scenarios laid out by Tuck and Ree and the work undertaken by Stewart.

The first alteration may be a chronological correction. A guest does not precede a host, in fact it is the other way around. So we might write "a host + a guest = a ghost". And yet, it is truer to the colonial paradigm to note that the presence of the uninvited guest begets and sets the terms for the coerced or unwilling host—meaning that they can only be accurately discussed in the original order. But this is not merely a deductive exercise; we must work with the precedent provided by Stewart's installation.

If the ghost, as a form taken by justice, is irreducible to either side of the colonial binary, then they can only be invoked at the same time through subtraction. Given that Stewart's "host" takes the form of a doubled receptacle, we can say it instantiates its own contradiction. It is a volume that holds volumes, a vessel for vessels. If we accept some of the language used to invoke ghosts—via channeling or mediums—then we might also note that Stewart's doubled receptacles are precisely concerned with holding space for ghosts, justice. Their contradictory form can be written as the sum of a positive and a negative, and the equation can be arranged to position the terms like so: "a ghost - a guest = a host." The host, here, stands alone and unoccupied by a guest (invited or not). In its place, the ghost and guest are distinguished as minuend and subtrahend, respectively. As minuend, the ghost and the question of haunting can be seen more clearly. "Haunting doesn't hope to change people's perceptions, nor does it hope for reconciliation. Haunting lies precisely in its refusal to stop. Alien (to settlers) and generative for (ghosts), this refusal to stop is its own form of resolving. For ghosts, the haunting is the resolving, it is not what needs to be resolved."<sup>4</sup>

And yet, Stewart does not simply rearrange the colonial paradigm of "uninvited guest" and "unwilling host" to repress the colonizing position in favour of the colonized. Ultimately,

such a dichotomy allows colonial logic to remain intact. It is not that the colonizer inhabits one part of this binary, and the colonized the other, but that colonial governing logic suppresses the possibility of inhabiting more than one role at a time, whereas an indigenous worldview—as system of *reciprocal* relations—necessitates their simultaneity. Every trespass (becoming) begets a ghost (unbecoming).

Stewart's receptacles embody the host in one context and, as artworks, assume the role of guest in another. Their transience cannot be discounted, nor can Stewart's position as a guest in the studios of those who aided in the fabrication of this work, or her presence on the unceded and contested lands of other nations. The soil of prior exhibition sites contained within the capsules requires the equation to be rewritten once again: if "a host = a guest + a host" and "a guest = a guest + a host", then "(a guest + a host) + (a guest + a host) = a ghost". Because the addends are not symmetrical with the sum, we amend the procedure to note that "a" ghost is never singular, nor reducible to any originary point.

Throughout these various rearrangements, the ghost is ultimately revealed as commons, a justice procedure within which all else is immanent. The commons, as Glen Coulthard writes, "deeply inform and sustain Indigenous modes of thought and behaviour that harbour profound insights into the maintenance of relationships within and between human beings and the natural world built on principles of reciprocity, nonexploitation and respectful coexistence."<sup>5</sup>

To this end, Stewart's work poses a complication to Tuck and Ree's usage of ghosts and hauntings. Whereas Tuck and Ree identify the ghost as that which haunts, Stewart (by way of Duchamp's equation) understands the ghost and haunting to be inseparable. They stand for a non-usurious but nonetheless endless debt, an obligation that can be neither deferred nor repaid. In Stewart's work, it is the debt to land, and to the labours and resources it provides, that must be brought to the fore of the decolonial endeavour because its very conception is *exterior to the colonial paradigm*. ("Indigenous resurgence is at its core a *prefigurative* politics—the methods of decolonization prefigure its aims.")<sup>6</sup> Against the settler paradigm of atomization—wherein