

A Pedagogy of Walking With Our Sisters

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Abstract: This article examines the pedagogical and ethical implications of a white settler's encounter with the Walking With Our Sisters commemorative art installation honouring missing and murdered Indigenous women. I argue that the installation offers a pedagogical intervention in official state memory and conventional approaches to teaching difficult knowledge. I offer an analysis of the centrality of embodiment, vulnerability, the visual, and affective force in the memorial in order to make legible the pedagogy of affect and non-mastery at work in the exhibit and the ethical possibilities of such an approach to social justice education. I respond to the task of accountability and responsibility I felt summoned to address as a learner-participant in remembering the ongoing racial and gendered violence of white settler colonialism.

Keywords: Ethics, Affect, Visuality, Embodiment, Vulnerability, Pedagogy, Responsibility, Racial and Gendered Violence, Public Memory, Remembrance.

Indian women 'disappear' because they have been deemed killable, able to be raped without repercussion, expendable. Their bodies have *historically* been rendered less valuable because of what they are taken to represent: land, reproduction, Indigenous kinship and governance, an alternative to heteronormative and Victorian rules of descent. Theirs are bodies that carry a symbolic load because they have been conflated with land and are thus contaminating to a white, settler social order.
(Audra Simpson, 2014, p. 156; emphasis in original)

The labor of settlers should be to imagine alternative ways to be in relation with Indigenous peoples. Perhaps a process of rupture and conflict might generate settler political identities anew? Settler colonialism is invested in gaining certainty to lands and resources and will achieve access through the dispossession of Indigenous peoples, violently or legislatively, a process that begins with the body, specifically the bodies of Indigenous women.
(Rachel Flowers, 2015, p. 34)

They are not forgotten. They are sisters, mothers, aunts, daughters, cousins, grandmothers, wives and partners. They have been cared for, they have been loved, they are missing and they are not forgotten.
("Walking With Our Sisters", 2017)

Introduction

Walking With Our Sisters, a travelling commemorative art installation honouring missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, was temporarily installed in the gymnasium of the Aboriginal Education Centre in Tkaronto¹ from October 15th until October 22nd, 2017. Over the last 30 years, over 1,181 Indigenous women and girls in Canada have gone missing or been murdered with indifferent and inadequate inquiry into their disappearances ("Walking With Our Sisters," 2017). Indigenous families, communities, and organizations like the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC), believe that the incidents which have come to light reveal only part of the larger story of systemic violence against Indigenous women and girls (Amnesty International, 2004, p. 14). The installation comprises over 1,800 pairs of vamps—the top of the moccasin that covers the foot—submitted by over 1,300 different artists to the Walking With Our Sisters national collective following a call from artist and author Christi Belcourt in 2012 to address the violence and loss of Indigenous women and girls. The artists include Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals and collectives from across Turtle Island and nine pairs of vamps were submitted from Europe. Over 100 pairs of children's vamps were also donated, dedicated to those children who never returned from residential schools ("Walking With Our Sisters," 2017). Upon completion, the installation will have travelled for seven years to a total of 32 locations. According to Belcourt, the vamps, the top of the moccasin that covers the foot, remain fragments of the whole, unfinished like the lives of the women and girls they remember. Moreover, she notes, moccasins are traditional burial footwear in some North American Indigenous

¹ Tkaronto is the Haudenosaunee word for the territory now known as Toronto, Ontario. The word means "where there are trees in the water" and not "meeting place" as popularized in settler tourist literature advertising the city (Gray, 2003, para.5). Tkaronto is in Dish with One Spoon territory, which refers to the treaty agreement, and corresponding wampum belt, between the Haudenosaunee confederacy and Anishnaabeg nation to mutually care for the "dish," i.e. the land and water that serves as hunting grounds, while not interfering with the sovereignty of the other nation(s). (See Simpson, 2008).

death rites (as quoted in Everett-Green, 2013); without feet to dress, the vamps strikingly point to the absence of both bodies and graves.

Violence against Indigenous women in Canada is not only legally sanctioned and socially normalized but is also constitutive of settler-colonial identity-making in settler-colonial societies (Razack, 2002). Settler-colonial societies are those in which the colonial invasion is permanent, where the colonial mission is to gain ownership of land by destroying original peoples, their ways of being, knowing, and doing and replacing them with settler colonizers and settler worldviews. Settler subjects in Canada come to know themselves as superior through identity-making and nation-building violence against Indigenous women; violence that is linked directly to the central project of white settler colonialism²: dispossession. As Leanne Simpson (2017) wrote, “land and bodies are commodified as capital under settler colonialism and are naturalized as objects for exploitation” which, “is why sexual and gender violence has to be theorized and analyzed as vital, not supplemental, to discussions of colonial dispossession” (p. 41). For Simpson, body and land sovereignty are one and the same, and white settler elimination tactics target both; the elimination of Indigenous women’s lives ensures an ongoing structure of dispossession.

After decades of political organization by families of the disappeared such as the NWAC and Amnesty International (among others), the federal government launched a national inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women in 2016 (see Palmater, 2016, for more background on the inquiry). At the time of writing, the inquiry has been fraught with resignations, setbacks, and loss of confidence from family members and communities (Cain, 2018). The commissioners have requested a two-year extension to complete the inquiry’s mandate and produce a final report with recommendations that intend to “remove systemic causes of violence and increase the safety of Indigenous women and girls in Canada” (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2017, p. 17). The extension remains to be decided.

Who Am I? Self-location in Relation

I come from a family that has been in the business of settler colonialism for eight generations. My paternal family are Scottish settlers who were landowners in unceded Algonquin Anishnaabeg territory and therefore have been, and continue to be, actively complicit in the dispossession of Indigenous lands. My mother’s family, on the other hand, descends from a French settler who arrived in the early to mid-1600s and settled in what was then known, according to the invaders, as Port-Royal (Acadia).

I grew up with the (all too common and problematic) Acadian and French-Canadian family practice of both claiming and erasing Indigeneity. My family told stories of our Indigenous ancestry including that we were related to Louis Riel and that my grandmother spent summers with her mother’s Indigenous family during her youth. At other times our stories firmly located us as non-landowning French/Acadian Catholics who settled over the years in Mik’maq, Kanien’kehá:ka, Cree, and Anishnaabeg territory. The stories of Indigeneity were always shrouded in mystery and were told in particular circumstances to serve particular ends. That is, to serve the purpose of Indigenous erasure and the naturalization of entitlement to stolen land acquired through violence.

The more I think through my positionality and the responsibilities it entails, the more I am concerned about the white settler revisionist practice of indigenizing the descendants of early French settlers and self-identifying as Métis that Adam Gaudry and Darryl Leroux (2017) have recently critiqued as a threat to Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination. That is, I am concerned about people like me finding Indigenous people in their genealogical searches, or in old family stories like the ones mentioned above, and inflating the meaning of this “bio-racial anecdote” (Gaudry & Leroux, 2017, p. 121) to claims of Indigeneity and entitlement to rights, land and identity. Let me be clear, I attended and reflect upon *Walking With Our Sisters* and the responsibilities it entails as an uninvited zhaganash/white settler whose very presence on this land reflects and is complicit with over 400 years of gendered, colonial violence.

² I use the term white settler colonialism not to insist that white people are the only people complicit with the violence and dispossession of settler colonialism but rather to explicitly mark white supremacy as the project of white settler nation-building and not re-entrench its absence by simply calling Canada a settler state.

The *Walking With Our Sisters* Memorial

The *Walking With Our Sisters* memorial is unlike any other I am aware of; a grassroots community-based multiple-artist exhibition that is entirely volunteer-run. The installation challenges traditional memorial forms in its collectivity, its impermanence, and its local specificity to each territory and corresponding protocol, in which it has installed its lack of textual narrative and dearth of spectacle. While official state memory of colonial violence is codified by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, the *Walking With Our Sisters* exhibit offers what might be thought of as a countermonumental or contestatory site of remembrance to the former, more governmental approaches.

I attended the event on closing day and was struck not only by how much the installation moved me but also in *how* it moved me: physically, emotionally, and intellectually. Upon entering the space, visitors were invited to remove their shoes, grasp tobacco in their left hand, and smudge with the smoke from burning sage.³ The vamps were laid out in two concentric circles and visitors were asked to walk around the outer circle in one direction and the inner circle another, in honour of two different protocols⁴ from traditions with ties to Tkaronto: Haudenosaunee, and Anishnaabeg. As I moved through the memorial I was struck by the physicality of the experience, the sensations of shoeless feet on fabric, the stickiness of the tobacco in my hand, with my head consistently bent forward in a reverent bow facing the art laid out beside my steps. Within my first few paces I was overcome with grief and a profound, ineffable sense of loss and perhaps even fear; I felt undone, unbound, and called into question by the exhibit, but also, simultaneously, summoned to respond.

A Theoretical Framework for Responsibility

Roger Simon (2014) wrote of the summon to respond to the pain of others as a particular kind of labour that intertwines thought and affect. He turned to Jacques Derrida's (2004) theorizing of the gift and the work of inheritance in his analysis of what exhibitions on social trauma, or what Deborah Britzman (1998) called difficult knowledge, do. The gift, in Derrida's counter-intuitive formulation, is a command to respond responsibly and thoughtfully. "One's inheritance is never simply that which is given, 'it is always a task'," as Simon (2014) wrote, "one response is to view exhibitions as initiating the task of inheritance. In this sense, exhibitions may be understood as a form of a gift, one that interpolates its intended receivers in a manner that demands a thoughtful response" (p. 215). This paper is my attempt to heed the command of response and responsibility, to take up the work of inheritance and task myself with critically thinking through and making legible my encounter with the *Walking With Our Sisters*' memorial. The task of inheritance, however, is better articulated in a settler colonial context as the work of accountability because inheritance suggests the social trauma is not ongoing but in the past. An accountable settler response might be one that works to transform the rupture of the encounter with the memorial into reflection and action, not only for oneself, but also for other settlers.

I am interested in the pedagogy of the traumatic past and present the memorial offers. *Walking With Our Sisters* proposes that it is something other than knowledge mastery that is essential for the ethical attention to and remembrance of these women and girls. Visitors are confronted not with the names, narratives, nor photographs of those disappeared. Yet, there is nevertheless an encounter with the loss of an unknowable, singular other that reveals and compels my responsibility to the irreducible vulnerability and relationality of life itself. The exhibit, I argue, demands a thoughtful and accountable response from those of us who are settlers on this land, one that is critical of the dispossession of Indigenous lands through violence against Indigenous women and that calls out our complicity. The gift the exhibit commands is the disruption and discomfort of becoming unsettled, unbound and undone, of imagining relations otherwise, if we as settlers are open to the learning from the wisdom it offers.

In the following sections, I turn to the work of Emmanuel Levinas (1989) and Levinasian scholars, who offer a theoretical framework that critiques the violence of Western imperialist traditions of epistemology (knowing) and

³ Sage is one of the four sacred medicines in Anishnaabeg tradition (cedar, sweet grass, and tobacco constitute the others). The smoke from burning sage is used as purification at the beginning of meetings and ceremonies in to order to bring people together with a good mind, heart and spirit (see Native Women's Centre, 2008).

⁴ The exhibit instructions though clear, did not indicate why visitors were asked to walk in two different directions. My knowledge of the circle direction protocols come from spending time in Indigenous-led classrooms and at community events.

ontology (being). They posit instead a radical ethics that prioritizes relationality and responsibility. Prior to all else in Levinasian thought, we are obligated to (and responsible for) others. The stakes of this responsibility for the Other are emphatically high; it is the very condition of our humanity.⁵ Any indifference to the pain of others, especially the pain in which one is complicit, in Levinasian thought subverts one's humanity. Put in another way, Sherene Razack (2016) wrote, "the violence against Indigenous girls and women must end; all of our lives depend on it" (p. i).

After five years as a Nazi German prisoner-of-war, Levinas began his project of radical ethics. The context out of which this theory emerged is important. I turn to this body of work, not because it is the best theoretical framework with which to address an Indigenous art project honouring missing and murdered Indigenous women, but because it offers a framework for settler responsibility. Clearly, Indigenous theoretical traditions are the more appropriate frameworks, however, Indigenous scholars are already articulating these positions in relation to the *Walking With Our Sisters* memorial far better than I ever could (see Martineau, 2015; Recollet, 2015; Simpson, 2017). I think with Levinasian thought, despite its failure to sufficiently translate into the specificity of the white settler colonial context, because it helps elucidate the ways in which the memorial stages an encounter that calls us out and summons us to account for our complicity in gendered colonial violence. I acknowledge, however, a remaining problem of the politics of citation. There are too many non-Indigenous scholars in my reference list, and Indigenous women's voices are not sufficiently centered. I leave this tension as it is because these questions of citation and appropriation are not easy to answer and, I think, are a necessary struggle white settler scholars must reckon with.

In order to trace the conditions that make the radical ethical encounter described here possible, I begin by thinking about the visibility of the exhibit, asking if the vamps can "face" us in a Levinasian sense. That is, I ask if they can cause a rupture that summons settlers to responsibility and in what ways they offer an opportunity to examine the act of seeing. Then, I turn to questions of affect, embodiment, and vulnerability in the exhibit, arguing that it is through affect and not cognition or knowledge mastery that visitors come to learn from the wisdom and resistance of the exhibit. I then conclude with some thoughts on what makes the encounter pedagogical and ethical above all else.

More than Meets the Eye: Visuality in *Walking With Our Sisters*

The *Walking With Our Sisters* memorial was visually striking in a number of ways. The gymnasium floor was covered in a bright, blood red fabric with the vamps carefully laid out in the circular pattern described above. Initially, the sheer number of vamps in the room overwhelmed my gaze. As I began to walk around the path, I was compelled to look more carefully at each pair and, every once in a while, I would pause to reflect on the multitude of vamps in my wake. The visual arrangement of the items insisted on the singularity of each pair of vamps, and the life they represent, while also making clear that this is not a random violence nor one committed simply by autonomous individuals, but rather a systemic practice of dispossession. The arrangement of the objects in space insisted on the absolute singularity of those represented, each deserving of her own unique pair of vamps, while simultaneously emphasizing relationality. The relationality, that is, between the victims as a collective, between the victims, artists, and collaborators who set up the local iteration of the exhibit, of my relation, as a settler, to the victims, artists, and the task of accountability to which the vamps summon me to attend.

Hagi Keenan (2011) used the Levinasian concept of "the face" in order to analyze the street/graffiti art of Klone, a Ukrainian born emigrant to Israel (another settler colony), whose work engages questions of difference and belonging. The Klones, the artist's iconic images that blend human and animal faces, are intentionally strange and defamiliarizing and rupture the viewer's sense of natural belonging by calling them into question. The face, for Levinas, is a metaphor for the encounter with difference that cannot be transcended. The face-to-face encounter is a relation that is pre-cognitive and escapes the imperial grasp of the knower. We cannot know the face of the Other, but it implicates, obliges, and moves us. I turn to Keenan's work on the Klones because he extends the Levinasian concept of the face to visual culture and images, arguing that an ethical encounter can be initiated through aesthetic images and not just through the strict face-to-face encounter Levinas prescribed. This move to open the conditions

⁵ The Other to which Levinas refers is not a sociological other but rather a philosophical concept of absolute alterity. It is capitalized throughout to indicate absolute alterity and left in the lowercase when a more conventional meaning is intended.

of possibility for the ethical encounter to objects or images and not just human faces offers a way to think about the vamps as a facing that implicates the settler viewer and calls for responsibility.

Kenaar (2011) recalled that for Levinas an image can never be the face, that the “face calls for a radically different kind of approach: ‘it is a ‘vision’ without an image, bereft of the synoptic and totalizing objectifying virtues of vision’” (p. 145). The vamps, rather than a “vision” without an image, are objects without purpose beyond that of being an image, but simultaneously recall their object-hood, resisting “generic and categorical understanding” (Kenaar, 2011, p. 145). That is, they cannot be reduced to either their objecthood or their visuality as images. They are objects that are incomplete and in their incompleteness they point to the temporalizing logic of settler colonialism. That is, the vamps point to the failure of colonialism in its settler form to do “what it is supposed to do: eliminate Indigenous people; take all their land; absorb them into a white, property-owning body politic” (Simpson, 2014, pp. 7-8). The irresolvable tension and enigmatic quality of the unfinished moccasins make the absence of the women present. The vamps identify settler colonialism, ongoing systemic gendered racism, and the dispossession of Indigenous lands as the root cause of the disappearance and defy a synoptic, totalizing, and objectifying gaze. In this sense, then, the vamps could be said to “face” the memorials’ learner-participants.

However, the vamps remain visual “at heart” they are not only “perceptible or visible but they specifically meet the eye as that which offers itself to sight” (Kenaar, 2011, p. 144). They offer themselves to sight as primarily visual objects and in so doing sight itself is seen. They represent but not in a traditionally representative form, they do not simply re-present. The vamps do not frame the content of the memorial, nor are they expected to, they gesture toward and mark the uncontainable. It is what is invisible or uncontainable that ruptures the visuality of the *Walking With Our Sisters* installation and as such is “the expression of the very form of the Other’s appearance” (Kenaar, 2011, p. 153). It is in this rupture that the address of the Other emerges, a painful and troubling “traumatism of astonishment” (Levinas quoted in Todd, 2003, p. 11) that implicates me and calls my complicity out. The vamps have a built in relational structure, like the images of the Klones described by Kenaar, which at their core can be neither “self-enclosed, self-sufficient nor self-identical” (p. 157), they have a being beyond themselves and cannot be reduced simply to the image that meets the eye. It is in this sense that “what we face when we look at pictures is never a given, but, alternatively, a giving” (Kenaar, 2011, p. 157). What settlers face when they look at the vamps is the initiation of the task of accountability, which is action based, a task.

One concern about the limits of the visual in initiating an ethical encounter is the concern of making a spectacle out of violence. In Simon’s (2014) comparative examination of two iterations of the “Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America” exhibit, he interrogated how the affective encounter with those photographs propel the viewer. In tracing scholarship on the question of how viewers are propelled, he cites Jacqueline Goldsby who suggests that “when lynching is represented in the medium of photography, it fetishizes such violence and makes it easier to disavow. This is because photography transforms the violence of lynching into a spectacle that paradoxically proves ‘impossible to ignore or see’” (quoted in Simon, 2014, p. 166). The *Walking With Our Sisters* memorial is self-consciously an attempt not to fetishize and make a spectacle out of violence. In an interview published online in *Canadian Art* (see Collins,[2014]), Christi Belcourt described the “straw that broke the camel’s back” as “seeing one too many posters of missing Indigenous girls” (para. 2). It was in the repetition of seeing the photographs of missing girls and women, a practice that could be said to fetishize, that Belcourt decided against curating an exhibit of difficult knowledge with the same potentially fetishistic visual material. This memorial explicitly refuses to transform the violence against Indigenous women and girls into a spectacle, the vamps do not function like photographs and transform the violence into something that can be seen, fetishized, and disavowed. The violence itself is not represented, preventing the potential of yet another settler dismissal.

Affective Pedagogy: Non-mastery and Learning Difficult Knowledge Differently

Leanne Simpson (2017) argued that violence against Indigenous women, broadly, and missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, specifically, “is genocide. This is sexual and gendered violence as a tool of genocide and as a tool of dispossession. It is deliberate” (p. 97). In the following section, I turn to Ernst Van Alpen (2015) who theorizes the role of non-mastery and affect in Holocaust education. Missing and murdered Indigenous women, however, are not undergoing the same phenomenon as the Holocaust. The dispossessive violence against Indigenous women and girls cannot be isolated to a particular epoch, beyond the long duration of settler colonialism itself. The elimination of Indigenous people (and women more specifically) is, per Patrick Wolfe (2006), a structure and not an

event. That is, violence against Indigenous women is not isolated to a containable temporal event; it persists. Wolfe (2006) argued that while “the settler-colonial logic of elimination has manifested as genocidal” and is “inherently eliminatory”, it is not “invariably genocidal” (p. 387). The violence against Indigenous women and girls is the eliminative logic manifested as genocide. It is for this reason that scholarship on the Holocaust and questions of how to teach the difficult knowledge of genocidal violence strike me as relevant to this context.

Van Alpen (2015) argued that the evaluation of Holocaust art tends to be reduced to how it promotes remembrance and education in a straightforward and unimaginative manner. That is, “it is an unassailable axiom in Holocaust education and remembrance, that historical genres and discourses... are much more effective and morally responsible in teaching the historical events than are imaginative discourses” (p.185). His critique of this axiom is its proposition that it is through mastery of knowledge, through knowing more about the historical event, that a recurrence of the Holocaust will be prevented. The Holocaust, he argued, is a history of trauma, one that cannot be memorized or mastered because it is a history of non-mastery; the traumatic break cannot be remembered or memorized (Van Alpen, 2015).

The pedagogy of the *Walking With Our Sisters* memorial does not ask visitors to memorize or master knowledge of missing and murdered Indigenous women. The structure of the exhibit asks that visitors engage in a form of identification outside the realm of representation and cognition. As I walk through the path of vamps, I am asked, as a settler learner-participant, to identify with the women whose feet the moccasin vamps represent and would fill the moccasins if they were complete; at the same time as I am asked to identify why I can walk this path and not be represented in it. That is, the identification that the exhibit compels for the settler learner-participant is with that of the victim and the perpetrator, whether that perpetration is as an active participant in dispossessive violence against Indigenous women or as an enabling, silent, and indifferent bystander (see Amnesty International, 2004, for more on the violence of silence). As we walk the path our experiences of the memorial are shaped by and related to our self-location. The ethical demand of the path is to recognize that my existence on this land, in and of itself, participates in, is complicit with, and benefits from the genocidal and dispossessive drive of white settler colonialism. My existence is predicated on the usurpation of land belonging to another woman and, while I walk the path and identify with the disappeared women, feeling loss, grief, and rage, I simultaneously walk the path identified as complicit with perpetrators.

This dual identification process ensures that settler visitors are not reassured of their “fundamental innocence” (Van Alpen, 2015, p. 196). My identification with both the victim and the perpetrator compels an affectively powerful experience. The dual identification process forces settlers to come to know themselves as complicit, regardless of their potential conscious or intentional innocence, and it is the feeling of complicity, rather than the knowledge of how many women have been disappeared, that compels the power of the pedagogy at work in the exhibit. That is, in the space of the memorial we learn not from knowing but from feeling. It is not knowledge mastery or cognition that is mobilized for the learning that takes place in the memorial, “we can say that the artists install a new condition of knowledge that enables a production of knowledge that is first of all affective instead of cognitive” (Van Alpen, 2015, p. 196). The lack of explanatory text in the memorial functions to intensify the affective experience suggesting that the production of knowledge at work is affective in the first instance. The significance of deconstructing the psycho-affective attachments to innocence in settler Canadian identity-making practices cannot be understated here. Part of what ensures the ongoing gendered colonial violence and prevents any true reconciliation is this very attachment to innocence, to not feeling complicit.

The claim that the vamps entice the viewer into a relationship that is affective rather than cognitive requires a deeper consideration of what the affective does in the memorial. Simon (2014) defined the affective as “a reference to a nonspecific, immediate sensation not pre-coded by a representational system that settles its substance within specific linguistic markers that offer an understanding of just what it is that one is feeling (e.g., the emotions of sadness, anger, etc.)” (p. 11). While I tried to describe the immediate sensations that I experienced upon entering the memorial space, words failed beyond that of “ineffable”; affect is that which cannot be mastered through knowledge. Despite the failure of language to communicate the affective quality of my experience, I am compelled to grapple with its pedagogical and ethical implications.

Embodiment and Vulnerability in Learning from the Other

Levinasian scholar Sharon Todd (2003) argued that nonviolent and ethical relations reside in “moments of relationality that resist codification” and in our “susceptibilities, vulnerabilities and openness to the Other” (p. 9). It is this very condition of vulnerability that opens me up to the incalculable and uncodifiable affects of the encounter with the memorial. For Levinas, she argued, affect is “about the potentiality to be moved” and “binds the self to Other” (Todd, 2003, pp. 11-12). The *Walking With Our Sisters* memorial, by asking visitors to remove their shoes, grasp tobacco in their hands, and bow their heads to face the art, foregrounds the body and the senses in the participation in what Claudia Eppert (2000) might have called remembrance-learning. Remembrance-learning is a concept that Eppert developed to account for the task of learning from witnessing historic trauma through what she calls “witness literature” and being called to responsibility. Eppert (2000) contended that remembrance-learning is a “becoming”, a learning practice about “what it means to be answerable to the address of past and present others” (p. 215).

The centrality of the embodied participation in the memorial recalls Judith Butler’s argument that we are politically constituted by the social vulnerability of our bodies. That “loss and vulnerability seem to follow from our being socially constituted bodies, attached to others, at risk of losing those attachments, exposed to others, at risk of violence by virtue of that exposure” (Butler, 2003, p. 10). My body, foregrounded in the memorial, is where I feel the passion, heartbreak, and rage at the loss of lives and is the very condition of my vulnerability, made more pronounced with my shoes removed in a public space.

The affective force brought forth in the memorial, much like the affective force brought forth in the “Without Sanctuary” exhibit,

does not simply interpolate the already morally predisposed viewer as a particular kind of subject (expressing horror at the act of racial violence, sympathy for the victims, and outrage for its perpetrators), but rather it instantiates a tactile connection that, despite who we are, bodily impacts on us, (Simon, 2014, p. 71).

The bodily impact that the exhibit has on us, despite who we are, is the very grounds of the political in the exhibit. It is the condition of doing (or praxis) rather than just knowing (or theory). The body already “has its invariably public dimension” (Butler, 2003, p. 15), and in the context of a site of public memory, where remembrance and affect moves “beyond the boundaries of the singular corporeal body” (Simon, 2005, p. 88), the increased vulnerability and tactile connection facilitated by walking a path without shoes, open to the touch of others while stepping in the imprints of other others (who also haunt the path), serves as the basis of our commonality.

Importantly, though, Butler argued that the task is to think through this common, corporeal vulnerability with a theory of power and to attend to the inequitable ways that corporeal vulnerability is distributed. That is, we are not all equally vulnerable to gendered colonial violence. The memorial does not suggest that all those who walk the path are as vulnerable to this violence as those for whom the memorial was made, nor that each visitor has the same relationship to this vulnerability.⁶ However, it does recognize that different visitors will be vulnerable in different and unpredictable ways and that there is an “ambivalent potentiality of vulnerabilities” (Tinning, 2017, p. 15). That is, vulnerability is both the condition of our commonality at the same time as it is situational and differential, dependent upon our social location, our relation to vulnerability, to violence, and, as such, our relation to power.

Conclusion: The Ethical Pedagogical Encounter

The *Walking With Our Sisters* exhibit facilitates a creation of community where the loss of the lives of those deemed ungrivable by the settler-colonial state are transformed into lives that are memorable and mournable for settler learner-participants; these lost lives come to count. Jarrett Martineau (2015) argued in research on Indigenous art, resurgence, and decolonization, that the transversal and transformative potential in Indigenous art can rupture and reconfigure both the commons and common sense. He wrote “toward this coming new community, we can see that Indigenous art, in and for itself, conditions the possibility of new emergences” (p. 122).

⁶ It is noteworthy, here, that trauma-informed mental health professionals were on site and available for support.

Simon (2014) argued that in the curation of difficult knowledge the stake is “not just the question of the re-formation of self but the possibility that a museum exhibition might convene the formation of a public with the reflexive capacity to transform one’s self-other relations” (p. 131). The work of public grieving that the memorial initiates transforms relational ties, opening up the possibility of new emergences and new ways of being in relation that furnish “a sense of political community of a complex order” (Butler, 2003, p. 12). Martineau (2015) reminded us that the exhibit is “not simply collaborative, but created by a nascent and geographically distributed community” (p.131). The memorial is not only created by this community but simultaneously creates new community. There is a desire for a future different from the past and present embedded in acts of remembrance, Simon argued, or in the words of Stanley Cavell, “the future between us is at stake” (quoted in Simon, 2014, p. 37) in our response to the pain of others. It is the affective force of the exhibit that propels the creation of new community, the possibility of new emergences and mobilizes the political potential of our response to the pain of others.

The capacity of the affective force of an exhibit to facilitate the political potential of transformation is fundamentally a pedagogical question. That is, as a material social practice that shocks, “it is still important to ask on what terms might such a shock be conceived as a force that compels thought rather than a traumatic disruption that leads to the extended abandonment of thought” (Simon, 2014, p. 176). There are at least two interconnected ways in which the exhibit compels thought rather than its abandonment. First, in staging the exhibit in a public education institution, an invitation is extended to think through the ongoing complicity of the education system in the perpetration of dispossessive violence against Indigenous families. Second, the inclusion of children’s vamps, representative of the children that never returned home from residential school, invite visitors to reflect on the specificity of the attack on children and futurity. There is an implicit interrogation of the role of the colonial and Eurocentric education system in the disappearance and murder of Indigenous women and girls. Visitors are invited to reflect on the tension between the positive and destructive role that education can have; that “the force of education to change lives and instantiate new modes of relationality is where its dangers as well as its aspirations lie” (Todd, 2003, pp. 6-7). While the memorial serves as an example of the transformative potential of pedagogical encounters, the ongoing history of Indigenous experience in Eurocentric and colonial education institutions stands in stark contrast (see Battiste & Henderson, 2000).

Part of an evaluation of the pedagogical implications of any given memorial is in what relation between affect and thought is provoked. The question, James Young (1993) wrote, “is not, how are the people moved by these memorials? But rather, to what extent have they been moved, to what historical conclusions, to what understandings and actions in their own lives?” (p. 13). Here, the relation between a long and ongoing history of colonialism, fortified by a violent and bankrupt educational system, and the disappearance of Indigenous women and girls is implicated in what are generally thought by the white settler state and its subjects to be two separate issues. The choice of installing the exhibit in a public school reminds us of the history of the site, the specificity of residing on stolen land and the role public education continues to play in dispossession and colonial domination, including its own forgetfulness.

That the *Walking With Our Sisters* memorial is a travelling exhibit is significant to the ethics of the encounter it stages. Part of the way the exhibit implicates the learner is in its inevitable disappearance. James Young (1993) argued that vanishing monuments function to return “the burden of memory to visitors” (p. 30). While conventional memorials can relieve us of the burden of memory that we should all be carrying, vanishing memorials refuse to grant such relief. Part of the performativity of the exhibit is in its disappearance; the absence of the women, their bodies and graves, is remembered by the reproduction of the absence after the installation moves on to another location.

The memorial, I have argued, stages an ethical and pedagogical encounter for the settler learner-participant. The act of remembrance initiated by the exhibition makes what Simon (2005) would have called a “transactional” claim on the visitor, evoking a persistent sense of “not of belonging, but of being in relation to” (p. 89). It is in the very emphasis of the relational ties that bind us through the force of affect and memory that provokes critical thought and the potential for a new emergences and complex political community. The transactional claim the exhibit makes on visitors has the potential to shift settler structures of feeling, to reconfigure the psycho-affective attachment to innocence and belonging on stolen land to one that is less proprietary and more relational. The embodied nature of the memorial foregrounds the vulnerabilities, differential and situational, that ground the new community forged through grieving the un-grievable. The memorial viscerally implicates me, summons me to

respond, and refuses to offer an easy translation of the experience into terms I recognize as my own. The vamps “face” us, demanding that through affect and not cognition we come to learn not about the Other but from the Other. What we face when the vamps “face” us is the insistence that every one of us has a responsibility to stand with Indigenous women and girls and end the ongoing racial and gendered violence of white settler colonialism. Indeed, all our lives depend on it.

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