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# Our Home(s) and/on Native Land: Spectacular Re-Visions and Refusals at Vancouver's 2010 Winter Olympic Games

**Natalie J.K. Baloy**

## **Abstract**

In this essay I examine how Indigenous artists and performers leveraged Indigenous inclusion in Vancouver's 2010 Winter Olympic Games to refuse conditions that spectacularize Indigeneity for the consumptive appetite of settler-spectators. Their refusals, I suggest, called upon settler-spectators to reorient their placement on Indigenous land: to move from understanding themselves as citizens of a postcolonial nation-state celebrated through Olympic (inter)nationalism, to settlers (still) occupying unceded Indigenous territory. I critique how settler subjectivity and settler colonial relations have historically been produced through non-Indigenous people engaging with Indigenous people and political expression as spectators, enjoying the privilege and presumption of consuming and looking at Indigenous people and art. To be called into a different relation by Indigenous art and performance that refuses our spectatorship, we are called upon to relinquish our position as spectators, to identify ourselves as settlers, and to reorient ourselves temporally, spatially, and politically to Indigenous peoples and land. The positioning of Indigenous art and performance as refusals within and against the Olympics, the ultimate spectacle of statehood and inclusion, intensified their potency. Refusing and revising the spectacle, they playfully and powerfully unsettled settler-spectators and settler colonial conditions.



Fig. 1. *No Olympics on Stolen Native Land*. Sticker, downtown Vancouver, Canada. 2010. Photo credit: Natalie JK Baloy.

## Introduction

The 2010 Winter Games featured unprecedented levels of Indigenous involvement in the Olympic mega-event franchise. The Games took place on the unceded territories of the *xʷməkwəy̓əm* (Musqueam), *Skwxwú7mesh* (Squamish), and *Selilwitulh* (Tseil-Waututh) peoples in Vancouver, prompting anti-Olympics activists to rally under the slogan “No Olympics on Stolen Native Land” (Fig. 1). At the same time, these three First Nations—the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tseil-Waututh— plus the Lil’wat Nation in the Whistler region, signed multi-million dollar agreements with the Vancouver Olympic Committee and multiple levels of government to act as Olympic co-hosts. Hundreds of

Indigenous artists, dancers, and storytellers performed in the Four Host First Nations' Aboriginal Pavilion, at Olympic venues across the city, and during the opening ceremony. Community activists also gathered in the Downtown Eastside neighborhood to contest ongoing colonial violence and inequities, both in a tent city erected to contest Olympic-related gentrification and for the 19<sup>th</sup> annual February 14<sup>th</sup> Women's Memorial March to commemorate missing and murdered Indigenous women.

During the Games, I attended dozens of Olympic-sponsored performances and art exhibits, watched publicly televised broadcasts of the Opening and Closing ceremonies, and attended protest actions and the Women's Memorial March. This mega-event ethnographic fieldwork was part of a broader project analyzing settler colonialism and Indigenous "inclusion" in the civic and economic life of the city (Baloy, "Spectacle, Spectrality, and the Everyday"). Although I paid careful attention to the myriad forms of Indigenous participation in the Games, the primary focus of my critically reflexive ethnography was non-Indigenous spectators' engagement (including my own) with Indigenous art, performance, and representations. Through this project, I came to understand and critique myself and other non-Indigenous people who act as settler-spectators—not just during the Games but at all times in settler colonial spaces (Baloy, "Spectacles and Spectres").

### Settler-Spectators

Today, over 600,000 people live in the city of Vancouver and 2.3 million live in Metro Vancouver. Approximately 2% of the population is Indigenous, from either local First Nations communities or other Indigenous communities across Canada. Vancouver's Indigenous population is highly culturally and linguistically diverse, as is its non-Indigenous population. Early colonialism was instituted and since reproduced through white British, European, and Euro-Canadian dispossessive-settlement, and migration from other parts of the world began as early as the 1880s with the arrival of Chinese and Japanese workers. Since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, waves of migration from India, the Philippines, and East Asia have resulted in visible "minorities" surpassing the white "majority," reaching 51.8% of the city's population according to the 2011 census (Statistics Canada).

Vancouver is a settler city situated on Indigenous land. As Rachel Flowers explains in her recent essay "Refusal to Forgive," the terms "non-Indigenous" and "settler" are not synonymous. She asserts that "settler" is "a critical term that denaturalizes and politicizes the presence of non-Indigenous people on Indigenous lands, but also can disrupt the comfort of non-Indigenous people by bringing ongoing colonial power relations into their consciousness" (33). Unlike non-Indigenous—a descriptive term designating individuals or groups as simply *not Indigenous*—the term "settler" names a political positionality. "Settler," Flowers suggests, is "a position of privilege and enjoyment of standing... a relational term that signifies the settler's relationship

to colonialism” (33-34). She argues that the “the labor of settlers should be to imagine alternative ways to be in relation with Indigenous peoples” (34).

In turn, I argue that settler subjectivity is produced through engaging with Indigenous people and political expression as spectators, enjoying the privilege and presumption of consuming and looking at Indigenous people and art. Rather than understanding ourselves as actors in the reproduction or transformation of settler colonialism, we often engage in “looking relations” (Townsend-Gault, “Circulating Aboriginality” 189) by positioning Indigenous art and performance as spectacles: cultural not political, visual not multidimensional or multi-sensorial, distinct from everyday life not constituting it, mediated not directly encountered. We *become* settlers as spectators of Indigenous people and the colonial politics they contest, obfuscating our own role in colonial politics and relations. To be called into a different relation by Indigenous art and performance that refuses our spectatorship, we are called upon to “imagine alternative ways to be in relation with Indigenous people”—and land (Flowers 34). We are called upon to relinquish our position as spectators, to identify ourselves as settlers, and to reorient ourselves temporally, spatially, and politically to Indigenous peoples and land (Roth, “Reflection 1”).

During Vancouver’s Games, Indigenous artists and performers advanced political messages of settler colonial critique, repeatedly emphasizing Indigenous sovereignty. These moves are iterations of what Audra Simpson calls “refusals”: a distinctive approach to Indigenous political expression that refuses the authority of the colonizer to set the terms of engagement, and refuses liberal logics that position Indigenous people as another minority to be “included” in the body politic of the settler state (see also Tuck and Yang). Refusal differs from resistance, recognition, and reconciliation, which can all function to reify the settler colonial state as the arbiter of “postcolonial” justice (Simpson; Tuck and Yang).

In this essay, I examine how Indigenous artists and performers leveraged Indigenous inclusion in the Games to refuse conditions that spectacularize Indigeneity for the consumptive appetite of settler-spectators. Their refusals, I suggest, called upon settler-spectators to reorient their placement on Indigenous land: to move from understanding ourselves as citizens of a postcolonial nation-state celebrated through Olympic (inter)nationalism, to settlers (still) occupying unceded Indigenous territory. Anthropologists Karen-Marie Elah and Helen Hyunji argue that Olympic-sanctioned forms of Indigenous participation, like the development of the Four Host First Nations and performances in the Cultural Olympiad, limited and effectively delegitimized anti-Olympic and anti-colonial political expression and action (see also Boykoff, “The Anti-Olympics”; Boykoff, “Space Matters: The 2010 Winter Olympics and Its Discontents”). In this essay, however, I demonstrate that many Indigenous artists and performers in fact embedded anti-colonial messages in their Olympic-sanctioned art and performance, offering powerful examples of refusals and the productive tensions that can emerge through efforts toward “inclusion” (Simon-Kumar and Kingfisher). The

positioning of these refusals within *and* against the Olympics, the ultimate spectacle of statehood and inclusion, intensified their potency. Refusing and revising the spectacle, they playfully and powerfully unsettled settler-spectators and settler colonial conditions.

### Setting the Stage

In many ways, Vancouver's Games reproduced historical reliance on abstractly Native symbols to bolster settler nation-statehood, supporting familiar forms of non-Indigenous spectators' consumption of Indigeneity and Aboriginalia (Franklin). From "living exhibits" to themed concessions to choreographed performances, Indigenous people have been on display for non-Indigenous audiences at World's Fairs and/or Olympic Games since the 1700s, with "ethnographic showcases" reaching a peak at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, right when the modern Olympic movement got off the ground (Corbey; O'Bonsawin, "Spectacles, Policy, and Social Memory: Images of Canadian Indians at World's Fairs and Olympic Games"; Raibmon, "Theatres of Contact"; Raibmon, *Authentic Indians*). Exhibits and performances at that time were deeply implicated in colonial politics and policies, with displays intended to contrast Indigenous exoticism with European/White modernity. As philosopher Raymond Corbey has argued, these spectacular displays offered ways for emerging nation-states to deal with the Others of their empires and naturalize Western hegemony through narratives of cultural evolution, classification, and racialized difference. These spectacles taught Western peoples to look upon Indigenous Others and overlook the politics of their circumstances—to become voyeurs and enjoyers of an imperial world order, to become settler-spectators.

While ethnographic exhibitions have ostensibly fallen out of favor, Indigenous Otherness continues to fascinate Western audiences, accessible now through cultural performances, art, and fashion (cf. Stanley). Cultural difference is now an attractive means for contemporary cities and nation-states to showcase their multicultural tolerance and unique forms of diversity. As Indigenous scholar Darren Godwell explains in his critical analysis of Indigenous inclusion in the 2000 Sydney Olympics, hosts of Olympics and other hallmark events must repackage the same product (e.g., international sports events, industrial exhibitions) yet make theirs distinct and memorable. Indigenous people, he suggests, offer an ideal way to distinguish one place from another, particularly by emphasizing pre-contact, anachronistic forms of Indigenous cultures and art detached from political contestation (246; see also McCallum, Spencer, and Wylly). The modern Olympic movement emerged when ethnographic shows reached peak popularity, and Indigenous people have continued to play a significant role in the presentations of Olympic hosts in settler states ever since. (Indeed, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) formalized its expectations for Indigenous inclusion as part of its environmental and social sustainability policy, Agenda 21. For critical analyses of Canadian Olympic Indigenous inclusion see Adese; Ellis; Forsyth; O'Bonsawin, "Spectacles, Policy, and Social Memory: Images of Canadian Indians at World's Fairs and

Olympic Games”; O’Bonsawin, “‘No Olympics on Stolen Native Land’: Contesting Olympic Narratives and Asserting Indigenous Rights within the Discourse of the 2010 Vancouver Games”)

As geographers Jennifer Silver, Zoe Meletis, and Priya Vadi argue, it is also necessary to situate Indigenous representation and participation in Vancouver’s Games in a regional political context.. They argue that Vancouver’s hosting relationship with local First Nations “emerged from a complex and place-specific history that engendered political and legal uncertainties” in British Columbia (296-297). Most of the province, including all of the Lower Mainland, does not have historical or modern treaty agreements in place to guide contemporary land use decisions (with the exception of the 2009 treaty signed by Tsawwassen First Nation under the BC Treaty Commission process). As a result, Vancouver and other Olympic venue sites rest on unceded lands, mandating a duty to consult appropriate First Nations communities for development and land use projects. Local First Nations leaders’ expectation to be consulted manifested in the Four Host First Nation partnership agreement signed by the Lil’wat, Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations.

Ongoing tensions between Coast Salish emplacement and non-Coast Salish Indigenous representation also animated Vancouver’s Games. As historian Jean Barman has argued, “Indigeneity got from elsewhere”—such as Haida and Nuu-chah-nulth totem poles in Stanley Park—has been actively emplaced in Vancouver’s public spaces for some time, eclipsing “Indigenous Indigeneity” and histories of colonial dispossession of Coast Salish territory (*Stanley Park’s Secret*; “Erasing Indigenous Indigeneity”). This tension continues to inform non-Indigenous experiences of Indigeneity in the city, often (re)producing historical amnesia about local Indigenous histories and turning decontextualized Indigenous art into sites of settler-spectatorship.

### Taking the Stage

Vancouver’s Games featured hundreds of opportunities for Olympic spectators to engage with Indigenous art and performance—and for artists and performers to refuse and revise the spectacle. Official venues were scattered around downtown in popup locations. The Aboriginal Tourism Association of British Columbia staged the Klahowya Village in the Pan Pacific Hotel on Burrard Inlet, featuring daily singing and dance performances, basket-weaving and Métis sash-weaving demonstrations, and rotating exhibits. Singing and dance groups performed each day at noon at Robson Square, and sometimes in the evenings. At a carving shed at the corner of Georgia and Howe Streets, Susan Point (Musqueam) and other artists demonstrated cedar pole carving. The BC Pavilion (housed in the Vancouver Art Gallery) and the Northern House pavilion featured hours of Indigenous programming each day. The Cultural Olympiad launched hundreds of theatre, dance, film, media, and music performances and dozens of visual art exhibits and installations over three years, and sponsored the annual Talking Stick Festival in 2010.

While some art and performances were largely conciliatory as well as celebratory of the Olympic movement, these venues and events also offered myriad opportunities and genres for spectacular refusal and re-visioning Indigenous futurities. Indigenous leaders, emcees, singers, dancers, storytellers, and fashion designers expressed and explained Indigenous sovereignty at every turn, calling upon their audiences to understand themselves as, variably, witnesses, political interlocutors, colonizers, allies, and ultimately settlers on Indigenous lands. They acknowledged Coast Salish hosts and territories, as well as addressed a host of political issues like intellectual property rights, land reclamation, environmental degradation of traditional territories, fishing and hunting rights, the interference of Crown governance, and the legacies of residential schools and other harmful colonial policies.

In the following sections, I describe a series of examples of Indigenous artists and performers refusing conditions of settler spectatorship. I do not include photos of the art pieces I describe. There is a long history of settler peoples circulating Indigenous art without permission, attribution, or compensation. These practices support the kinds of settler-spectatorship and passive consumption of Indigeneity I am critiquing in this essay. I direct readers to artist and gallery websites instead as a gesture of support for the artists—an encouragement to readers to engage with their art in context, in the presence of artist statements and opportunities to learn more about their other works.

I also include a few photos I took as an Olympic spectator. This representational decision is inspired in part by Ken Gonzales-Day's *Erased Lynchings* series. In his photographs, Gonzales-Day removes the rope and bodies of Black, Chinese, Latino, and Indigenous lynching victims from lynching postcard photographs in California and elsewhere in the American West. Emphasizing that public lynchings were acts of racialized violence, Gonzales-Day explains that his photographic manipulation is a "conceptual gesture... intended to redirect the viewer's attention away from the lifeless body of [the] lynch victim and towards the mechanisms of lynching and lynching photography, to allow viewers to see the crowd, the mechanisms of spectacle, the role of the photographer... and their various influences on our understanding of this dismal past. The perpetrators, when present, remain fully visible" ("Ken Gonzales-Day"). Likewise, this essay aims to allow readers to "see the crowd" and the "mechanisms of spectacle": to redirect the reader's gaze to conditions of settler-spectatorship.

### The Cultural Olympiad

The 2010 Cultural Olympiad sponsored many politically charged events, including *First Nations/Second Nature*, the inaugural exhibition in Simon Fraser University's Audain Gallery in the Woodward building. Curated by Candice Hopkins (Carcross/Tagish), the exhibition description reads, "With its roots in the local history of Vancouver, *First Nations/Second Nature* [features] works that mediate the politics of sites and shifting conceptions of territory." The



pieces selected for display clearly interrogated connections between power, nationhood, colonialism, territory, and place.

Located on Hastings Street in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES), the gallery displayed in its front window Rebecca Belmore's striking portrait, *sister*, a large photograph of a woman with black hair in a denim jacket with her arms outstretched, facing away from the camera, her back to the street. (See the photograph on the Jennifer Bradley Gallery website: [http://jessicabradleyinc.com/artist/rebecca-belmore#postImage\[post-4325\]/3/\"Jessica Bradley | Rebecca Belmore\"](http://jessicabradleyinc.com/artist/rebecca-belmore#postImage[post-4325]/3/\)). Belmore, a celebrated Anishinaabe-Canadian artist, recently explained:

The DTES is hyper charged with the contradictions of people struggling with addiction and visibly surviving on the street against a backdrop of aggressive gentrification. Many of our sisters were murdered and have gone missing from this place. The work *sister* was site-specific and strategically placed to be present during the February 14th Annual Memorial March, which passed right in front of the gallery window on Hastings Street. The stance of *sister* – is she being apprehended, is she being crucified, is she taking flight? My intention with this work was to use the site to acknowledge our sisters who were last seen in this place, to picture them with grace and beauty. (Nanibush 216)

Belmore's *sister* turns her back from the gaze of the viewer, raising her hands and raising questions around the spectacle of violence against Indigenous women in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. The Olympic spectacle is largely ignored to focus instead on colonial violence and poignant commemoration of the disappeared, a redirective act repeated and reinforced during the February 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Memorial March (see Fig 2.) that passed by the gallery window, as Belmore anticipated.

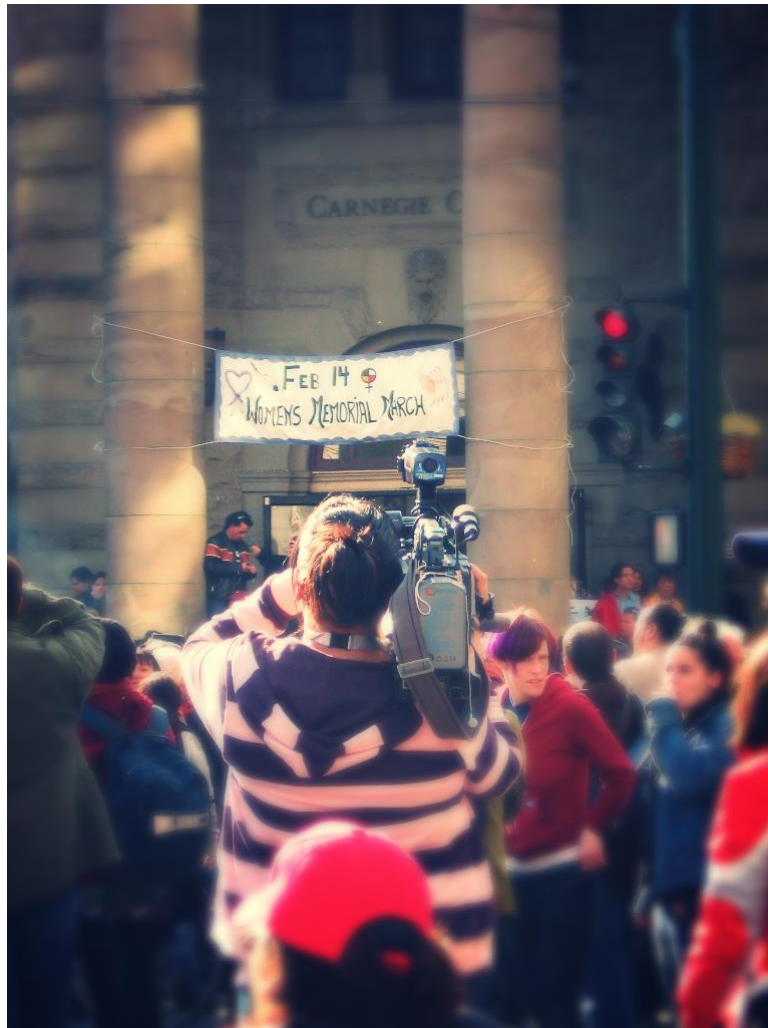


Fig. 2. At the corner of Main and Hastings at the 19<sup>th</sup> Annual February 14<sup>th</sup> Women's Memorial March. The march passed by the Audain Gallery and Rebecca Belmore's *sister*, located three blocks away. 2010. Photo credit: Natalie JK Baloy.

Next to *sister*, the gallery displayed a bright green lightbox created by Sam Durant, with the words *You Are On Indian Land Show Some Respect*. Durant, a non-Indigenous artist, regularly critiques histories of state violence, including settler colonial dispossession and historical amnesia (see the sign on the artist's website at <http://www.samdurant.net/index.php?/projects/electric-signs/>, "Electric Signs : Sam Durant"). His lightboxes, the *First Nations/Second Nature* gallery guide explains, "recontextualize handmade protest signs found in archival photographs of Aboriginal land protests in Australia and African American and Native American civil rights protests in the United States into the language of commercial signage" (SFU Galleries). The words on the gallery's lightbox "resonate with recent housing protests at the Woodward's site as well as the history and ongoing struggle for recognition of Native land rights in the

Vancouver region.” The lightbox places the viewer—you are on Indian land—and places a command on her—show some respect. Benign spectatorship is refused.

In addition to Belmore and Durant, other critical artists such as Sonny Assu participated in Cultural Olympiad events and Olympic commissions, and also offered socio-political commentary through their work (see also Roth, “Culturally Modified Capitalism: The Native Northwest Coast Artware Industry”; Townsend-Gault, “Not a Museum but a Cultural Journey: Skwxwu7mesh Political Affect”). Prior to the Games, Assu created several popular satirical art pieces, including *Coke-Salish*, a lightbox that reimagines the iconic Coca-Cola red and white script, rewritten to read *Enjoy Coast Salish Territory* (see the sign on the artist’s website at <http://www.sonyassu.com/images/coke-salish>, Assu). According to a feature profile of Assu’s work in *Canadian Art*, the artist designed the project soon after the announcement that Vancouver would host the 2010 Winter Olympics. “Assu envisioned the craze the international event would bring to BC and how the event would overshadow the region’s cultural history of First Nations peoples as the traditional keepers of the land. Vancouver is built on Coast Salish territory and with *Coke-Salish*, Assu signaled that when visitors arrived in Vancouver, they would ‘Enjoy Coast-Salish Territory.’ With the familiar... Coca-Cola logo, Assu took his audience beyond the familiar first glance into a deeper history of place” (Harnett).

In a post-Olympic interview, Assu discussed his ambivalence about participating in the Cultural Olympiad, and described the inspiration and development of his commissioned piece, a painting entitled *Authentic Aboriginal* (the longer working title was a tongue-in-cheek critique of the process: *Authentic Aboriginal 2010 Olympic Commission*). Reflecting on the piece, he states, “All in all, it was a commentary on how the Games promoted the stereotype of the Indian, the stereotype of the crafts-person over artist. Parading Canada’s Aboriginal people out, exploiting their culture, yet ignoring all the problems of colonization” (Baxley and Assu). In the very act of embedding this commentary in an Olympic commission, Assu refuses politically sanitized expression of Indigeneity for the benefit of settler state spectacle and celebration.

Yet another example is Nlaka’pamux playwright Kevin Loring’s award-winning play, *Where the Blood Mixes*, which dramatically portrayed the damaging psychological effects of the Sixties Scoop on an Indigenous family. The Sixties Scoop refers to a time of increasing apprehension of Indigenous children, mostly by white foster parents and adopters—a painful form of settler state dispossession (Fournier and Crey). Actors in Loring’s play performed loss and redemption in the heart of the Games, working against celebratory narratives of Canadian nationhood. Assu, Belmore, Loring, and many others mobilized the opportunities of the Cultural Olympiad to refuse settler colonial violence, erasures, and spectatorship by highlighting Indigenous resilience and political survivance: “survance is an active sense of presence over absence, deracination, and oblivion... survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, detractions, obtrusions, the unbearably sentiments of tragedy, and the legacy of victimry (Vizenor 1).

### The Four Host First Nations' Aboriginal Pavilion



Fig. 3. Lining up at the Four Host First Nations' Aboriginal Pavilion. 2010. Photo credit: Natalie JK Baloy.

The Four Host First Nations' Aboriginal Pavilion (Fig. 3) was the primary official venue for Indigenous cultural and political expression during the Games. Its spatial position on Queen Elizabeth Plaza was a uniquely settler colonial juxtaposition: an Indigenous-run performance space occupying a site in the heart of the city commemorating a key imperial figure. Averaging 14,000 visitors daily, the Pavilion was a popular stop on the pavilion circuit and often had lines over an hour long (Four Host First Nations).

Over its two-week stint at the Queen Elizabeth Plaza, the Pavilion featured a wide range of performances. Each day began with four back-to-back hour-long shows, hosted by different Indigenous communities across Canada, with one day reserved for international Indigenous participants. In the late afternoon each day, the Pavilion screened the short film *We Are Here*, produced specifically for the Pavilion by and about the local Four Host First Nations. In the evenings there were music concerts and films produced by Indigenous filmmakers.

I conducted audience ethnography at the Aboriginal Pavilion, observing non-Indigenous pavilion-goers' responses to performances almost every day during the Games. Most visitors only came for one show and their opinion of the Aboriginal Pavilion largely depended on how well they liked that particular event's expressions of Indigeneity. In conversations I had and overheard in line, non-Indigenous spectators expressed their anticipation to watch Indigenous performers sing, dance, and drum in what they understood as "traditional"

styles. Some expected to see a sort of curated space in the Pavilion, with museum-like displays and storyboards. With these expectations in place, spectators were often caught by surprise when they got inside and were invited by their hosts to acknowledge Coast Salish territory, to listen to stories of dispossession and reclamation, or to be reminded of nation-to-nation responsibilities for all Canadians living on Indigenous lands.

Overtly politicized performances seemed to receive mixed reviews, judging by audience members' countenance and decisions whether to stay or leave during shows. For example, after watching the Wabanaki Showcase show at the Pavilion, I overheard a couple of white women complaining to one another about the documentary about land dispossession and broken treaties the Wabanaki had chosen to show. "I didn't really need to hear about *that*," one of the women said, frustrated with the organizers for using the Pavilion as a political platform. The Wabanaki refused to fulfill these women's desire for an enjoyable cultural spectacle, using their time on stage instead to communicate their historical grievances and contemporary efforts toward redress.

While performances did seem to fulfill and conform to expectations of apolitical cultural tradition and decorum, most also advanced political critiques. As anthropologists Julie Cruikshank and Susan Roy have explained, some Indigenous performers present political and social commentaries in ways that non-Indigenous audiences may not perceive as overtly political. Roy suggests that non-Indigenous audiences may miss political messages because of a perceived divide among Westerners between culture and politics that bears little relevance for Indigenous peoples and performance traditions historically or today. At the Pavilion, many "cultural" performances were prefaced with recognition of unceded Coast Salish territories, couched in stories of resilience and revitalization that alluded to assimilation and colonial policies, and were loaded with references to treaties and rights.

Such performances refused the dialectic between spectacle and settler coloniality that shaped their audiences' expectations, including expectations of static authenticity and difference. During many performances at the Aboriginal Pavilion, I observed many non-Indigenous audience members snapping photos and clapping along to powwow dancers and songs sung in Indigenous languages, and leaving during hip hop, rock, and country music performances. (Not all non-Indigenous audiences left of course; some were delighted and intrigued. After a hip hop performance began, a woman sitting near me caught my eye, smiled, and said, "Well, I wasn't expecting that!" She stayed for the show.) Partway through the Games, Pavilion volunteers began telling visitors that the Pavilion was a performance space, not an exhibit space, and letting them know whether that day's performances were "traditional" or "contemporary." Consistent enthusiasm for "traditional" performances conveyed non-Indigenous spectators' persistent desires to watch Aboriginal people perform their difference in familiarly spectacular ways (Stanley; Povinelli).

The culminating event at the Pavilion was a presentation by the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) on February 27<sup>th</sup>. As audience members entered the dome, they found a booklet on their seats: a full-text copy of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, which Canada had not

yet endorsed. Meanwhile, an AFN film played examining colonial policies and contemporary reconciliation. At the end of the film, AFN National Chief Shawn Atleo (Nuu-chah-nulth) told a story: his grandfather had a vision of trying to turn a heavy page in a book – so heavy that he realized everyone would need to work together to turn the page toward reconciliation. After the film finished, Atleo delivered a speech in person. He called on audience members and state officials to help turn another page—to support Canada’s signing of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Canada had voted against endorsing the declaration in 2007, along with Australia, New Zealand, and the United States; the rest of the United Nations members voted to endorse it. On March 3<sup>rd</sup>, days after the AFN’s show, the Government of Canada announced that steps would be taken toward endorsing the declaration. On November 12, 2010, Canada issued a conditional statement of endorsement.

The AFN’s show is an example of the “productive tensions” that emerged in and through official forms of Indigenous inclusion in the Olympics (Simon-Kumar and Kingfisher), and perhaps most closely resembles reconciliation and recognition models of Indigenous politics critiqued in recent analyses of refusal and anti-colonial revolution (cf. Simpson; Coulthard). Despite its state-focused appeals, the AFN’s show nonetheless enacted refusals of settler-spectatorship: confronting pavilion-goers with the UN Declaration, non-Indigenous audiences were called upon to act and reorient, not simply look. Indigenous participation through performance in official Olympic venues was neither wholly transformative, nor wholly a hegemonic reproduction of the status quo. As these examples convey, many performers in the Cultural Olympiad and at the Aboriginal Pavilion made a spectacle of the spectacle, using their performances to demand their non-Indigenous audiences reorient themselves and reverse their gaze.

### Kinnie Starr at Robson Square



Fig. 4. Kinnie Starr at Robson Square. 2010. Photo credit: Natalie JK Baloy.

One of the Games' most memorable refusals was Kinnie Starr's lively concert at Robson Square (Fig. 4; listen to the artist's music at <https://myspace.com/kinniestarr>, "Kinnie Starr"). Starr is a Mohawk hip hop and rock singer. She occasionally inserts political commentary about Indigenous issues into her performances. At Robson Square midway through the Games, Starr performed a hip hop adaptation of the national anthem, Starr converted the first line, "O Canada, our home and native land," inviting the crowd to participate through call and response by chanting "our homes *ON* Native land." She repeated the line several times, emphasizing the revised preposition and pointing at the ground in an exaggerated manner for greater effect.

A few hundred people gathered for Starr's concert, and many clapped and sang along during Starr's "anthem." A small group of non-Indigenous teenagers sitting near me were not so enthusiastic. One of the teenagers said to her friends, "Wait a second. I don't like this." Another listened for a moment and said with disgust, "Our homes *aren't* on Native land." A third chimed in, "It's because she's Native." The teens listened for a moment and decided to leave, refusing to accept or participate in Starr's political statement.

Starr did not refuse the opportunity of the spectacle; she refused its conventions and subverted expectations of her audience, including these teenagers. Starr uses her time in the spotlight to reverse the gaze on Indigenous spectacle to implicate her spectators in the politics of colonial dispossession.

She reminds her audience that settler colonialism is neither settled nor only an issue for Indigenous people; settler colonialism implicates all Vancouverites and all Canadians into the future: *our* homes are on Native land *today*. The land beneath Vancouver's streets and skyscrapers has still not been ceded by its original inhabitants through formal agreement or treaty, and that Indigenous people living in the city today continue to experience colonial violence. The Canada imagined in "O Canada," performed at the opening ceremonies and each time a Canadian received a medal, is made uncanny in Starr's reinterpretation. The idea of unproblematic settlement and settler nativity in Canada—"our home *and* native land"—is refused and revised—"our homes *on* native land"—to remind settlers of the unfinished business of the colonial project.

The teenagers at Starr's performance, uncomfortable with this shift from their typical role as passive observers of cultural spectacle to invited participants in a political act, refuse to be implicated. "Because she's Native," the teenagers feel empowered to disregard Starr and her politics, to deny her call upon them to be included in settler colonialism in favour of an exclusive and exclusionary interpretation. Disregarding Olympic refusals, these teenagers construct their own relationship to land as settled, theirs. The structure-not-event of settler colonialism (Wolfe 2) and settler-spectatorship has allowed them, their parents, and other white settlers like me to claim the land as our own home and to expect and enjoy only depoliticized cultural performance. We feel able to walk away from colonialism or away from performances that do not meet our expectations... but artists like Starr and others will be there to remind us that in fact we are not able to walk off Native land.

Through their subversive art and performance, they alert their interlocutors to what has been there all along: Coast Salish people and their attachments to place, colonialism and its legacies, and our own participation in continually trying to bury this past and present only to see it unearthed again and again. They refuse conditions that erase Indigeneity from the city or politics from the Olympics. The settler city and celebrated nation are subverted, re-presented as Indigenous space. Time is inverted, too—settler futurity is called into question by emphasizing Indigenous resilience and futurity, their utter refusal to go away (Tuck and Yang).

## Conclusion

The Indigenous artists and performers discussed here invited non-Indigenous people to recognize themselves in the inclusive "we" of settler colonialism rather than the Othering "they" of Indigeneity and spectacle. In doing so, these artists refused to enable spectatorship at all, inverting a monologic looking relationship into dialogic callouts and calls and response. *You* are on Indian land. *Our* homes on Native land. The question is posed: how will you "imagine alternative ways to be in relation with Indigenous peoples?" (Flowers 34).



Some spectators in turn refused this relational reorientation: *Our homes aren't on Native land. We don't really want to hear about land dispossession or relate differently.* Settler-spectator privilege involves not only engaging in acts of looking, but also looking away—away from Indigenous performance, away from conditions of settler coloniality, and away from colonial complicity. Yet, in refusing an invitation to see ourselves as settlers, we are further entangled. We have already been implicated, the spectacle collapsed. We can look away—but not for long and certainly not forever. Indigeneity and the legacies of colonialism will continue to return, again and again, to change the pronouns and prepositions of contemporary relationships between people and land: repeat after me, *our homes on Native land.*

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