

**Domestic Space, Familial Memory, and Indigenous Experience in Stephen Graham Jones's
Mapping the Interior**

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Abstract

Stephen Graham Jones's *Mapping the Interior* (2017) transforms the domestic home into an unstable spatial and psychological terrain where familial memory, paternal loss, Indigenous identity, and haunting converge. This study argues that Junior's attempt to measure and draw the house becomes a way of confronting experiences that resist ordinary spatial and narrative containment. The house functions as a material dwelling, family archive, and uncanny structure whose impossible dimensions externalize Junior's uncertain knowledge of his father and family history. The father's spectral return is significant because the ghost is recognizable through Junior's memories of his body, regalia, dancing, and unrealized potential. The family's movement away from the reservation further shows that geographical relocation cannot erase cultural memory or socioeconomic history. Junior's mapping consequently becomes an attempt to map familial relationships, grief, responsibility, and inherited experience. The novella ultimately suggests that even after the physical house disappears, its architecture survives as an internal map through which the adult narrator negotiates the past.

Keywords: Indigenous Gothic; domestic space; haunting; familial memory; spatiality.

Introduction

Contemporary Indigenous Gothic frequently unsettles the boundary between the familiar and the uncanny by transforming ordinary spaces, memories, and relationships into sites of disturbance. Stephen Graham Jones's *Mapping the Interior* (2017) offers a concentrated example of this process. The novella places Junior, a twelve-year-old Blackfeet boy, inside an apparently ordinary family home whose dimensions gradually become impossible to reconcile with the structure he knows. After seeing the ghost of his deceased father moving through the house at night, Junior begins to investigate and map its interior. What begins as a child's attempt to solve a spatial mystery becomes a confrontation with paternal loss, familial memory, cultural identity, and the persistence of the past (Jones).

The title establishes the central problem. To map is to measure, delimit, order, and make a territory knowable; yet the interior Junior maps continually exceeds the stability of his measurements. The house contains spaces that should not exist, and its architecture becomes inseparable from memories that Junior cannot fully organize. The physical interior and psychological interior therefore develop together. As Junior investigates the house, he also attempts to understand his father, his family, and the experiences that have shaped him. The Gothic effect emerges from this failure of containment: the past does not remain safely outside the present but acquires spatial form and enters the domestic world (Jones; Caruth).

Existing criticism has connected the novella with haunting, trauma, Indigenous identity, memory, and Gothic space. Stratton emphasizes the emotional relationship between Junior and his father, while Animkii examines Indigenous ghosts, identity formation, and settler colonialism. Burnham and Jenkinson provide broader contexts for understanding Indigenous Gothic as a mode in which cultural histories and contemporary experience can reshape Gothic conventions. Related studies of Indigenous haunting, including Bergland's work on Indian ghosts and Castricano's discussion of Eden Robinson, also demonstrate the importance of memory, spectrality, and place. Rather than claiming that these concerns have been overlooked, this study narrows its emphasis to the act of mapping: Junior's floor plan becomes a material attempt to organize a family history that cannot be made fully legible (Stratton; Animkii; Burnham; Jenkinson; Bergland; Castricano).

The domestic interior is inseparable from the family's Indigenous and socioeconomic circumstances. Junior's mother observes that leaving the reservation does not necessarily free the family from the economic conditions associated with reservation life. The new house therefore cannot be read simply as a symbol of escape. Geographical relocation does not erase cultural memory or socioeconomic history; the family carries aspects of its previous life into the new domestic space. At the same time, Jones avoids reducing the reservation to deprivation. Pow-wow culture, fancydancing, regalia, and family history make Indigenous life part of the everyday world from which the Gothic emerges (Jones; Burnham; Jenkinson).

Jones complicates nostalgia by refusing to make the father's return purely comforting. Junior wants to see his father again, but the return exposes the distance between the father he remembers and the father who actually existed. The ghost is desired because he is absent but feared because his return makes that absence unstable. The house is the ideal Gothic space for this contradiction because it is both the place where family life continues and the place where the past intrudes (Jones; Stratton).

Junior's mapping develops this contradiction through rational procedure. He measures rooms, draws a floor plan, and searches for discrepancies between the house as it should exist and the spaces he encounters. The procedure resembles scientific investigation, yet the house refuses to become fully knowable through measurement. The map consequently records the limits of rational knowledge: it can describe dimensions but cannot explain the emotional and historical meanings carried by them (Jones).

The adult framing strengthens this connection. The haunting is reconstructed by an adult narrator who has survived its consequences, creating a double interior: the physical interior of the childhood house and the psychological interior of adult memory. When the adult Junior returns to the site, the structure has disappeared, yet its arrangement remains accessible through recollection. The childhood map thus becomes a means of organizing what cannot be physically recovered (Jones; Caruth).

The danger to Dino changes the meaning of Junior's investigation. Mapping begins in curiosity and the hope of understanding his father, but it becomes protective when Dino is placed at risk. Junior cannot remain a passive observer; he must understand the structure of the house and the father's intentions. Knowledge of space becomes necessary for survival. Positioned between father and brother, Junior attempts to interrupt the repetition of familial violence, making mapping an ethical as well as epistemological act (Jones; Caruth).

The Indigenous dimension of the haunting should not be reduced to a single allegory of colonial suffering. Jones integrates Indigenous identity into family experience through reservation life, pow-wow culture, fancydancing, regalia, and displacement. Indigenous trauma is most useful here as the intersection of familial loss with the cultural and historical circumstances in which the family understands itself. The immediate emotional structure remains familial—father, mother, children, grief, fear, and responsibility—while broader histories shape the conditions in which those experiences occur (Animkii; Burnham).

The house itself resists symbolic simplification. It is a rented modular structure, a family home, a place marked by economic limitation, a labyrinth, a site of supernatural intrusion, and a remembered landscape. Its multiple meanings make it effective as Gothic space. Jones does not replace ordinary domestic reality with fantasy; he allows the supernatural to emerge from contradictions already present within family life. The haunted house becomes a spatial archive in which relationships between father and son, brother and brother, past and present, and cultural memory and displacement become visible (Jones; Burnham).

Mapping therefore becomes the novella's central epistemological problem. Junior assumes that if he understands the structure of the house, he can understand what is happening. Yet the house teaches him that knowledge is not equivalent to measurement. Some spaces are known through memory, relationship, fear, and experience. The word interior refers both to the inside of the house and the inside of the self: Junior maps rooms and thresholds while also mapping grief, fear, paternal longing, and responsibility (Jones; Caruth).

The later disappearance of the house confirms that the physical structure is not the narrative's ultimate object. When the building is gone, Junior's internal map remains. Its destruction cannot destroy the history contained within it. The remembered house becomes a psychological architecture that the adult Junior continues to carry. Survival does not necessarily mean leaving the past behind; it may mean carrying and reinterpreting what cannot be physically recovered. Mapping thus changes from architectural measurement into a method of remembering (Jones).

Ultimately, mapping, haunting, memory, and trauma are interconnected through architecture. Junior maps the house because he needs to know where he is, but the deeper question is where he stands in relation to his father, his brother, his family, and his own past. The ghost is one trace of inherited history; the house is another; Junior's map is another. Each gives form to something that cannot be fully contained, making the domestic interior a map of relationships and histories that the survivor must continue to negotiate (Jones; Animkii).

Conclusion

Stephen Graham Jones's *Mapping the Interior* reveals that the most unsettling spaces are not necessarily unfamiliar territories but familiar spaces that contain histories one has been unable to understand or escape. By transforming an ordinary family home into an impossible and threatening interior, Jones connects domestic space with memory, paternal absence, Indigenous identity, and familial trauma. The house becomes more than the setting of a supernatural narrative: it becomes the material form through which Junior encounters the unresolved dimensions of childhood (Jones).

Junior's attempt to map the house is central to this transformation. His measurements and floor plans express a desire to impose order on a space that resists rational explanation. Yet the impossibility of completely mapping the house reflects the impossibility of completely mapping memory. The hidden spaces correspond to aspects of family history that remain inaccessible, particularly Junior's relationship with his father. Mapping therefore becomes an emotional and psychological process through which he confronts absence, grief, fear, and responsibility (Jones; Caruth).

The father's ghost intensifies this relationship between space and memory. He is not simply an external supernatural threat but the father Junior remembers desires, fears, and attempts to understand. His association with fancy dancing and Indigenous cultural identity makes the haunting inseparable from the meanings attached to the father. Likewise, the family's movement away from the reservation does not produce complete cultural or historical separation. Economic limitation, family history, and cultural memory remain present within the new home, showing that displacement does not necessarily erase the past (Jones; Stratton).

The destruction of the house finally demonstrates the durability of this interior map. The building may disappear, but the architecture survives in memory. The title therefore refers simultaneously to architectural, psychological, familial, and cultural interiors. Jones reconfigures the Gothic haunted house as a space of inherited memory rather than merely supernatural terror. The novella's most enduring haunting is not simply the return of the dead father but the persistence of the past within the living. Junior's map becomes a form of survival because it allows the adult narrator to carry and reinterpret experiences that cannot be physically recovered (Jones; Animkii).

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