

Hél čhaŋkú kiŋ ěpáye (There lies the road):

How to Make Art in a Good Way

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## Abstract

Hél čhaŋkú kiŋ ħpáye (There lies the road): How to Make Art in a Good Way

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This dissertation explores the possibilities of the ethical creation of artwork using artificial intelligence (AI) through the development of protocols based on Lakǰóta ontologies, resulting in collaborative artworks collectively titled *Hél čhaŋkú kiŋ ħpáye (There lies the road)*. It investigates how Lakǰóta ontologies are well-suited for creating ethical and reciprocal relationships with the nonhuman and articulates that perspective in the context of creating performance artworks and collaborative art-making processes. This project is conducted in collaboration with the Lakǰóta communities diasporically, the Oglála Lakǰóta community in Pine Ridge Reservation, and diasporic Indigenous communities internationally. Through these collaborations, this dissertation has involved recordings, installations, performances, and written documents considering our current and future relationships to nonhumans with special consideration to digital technology in general and AI specifically—while articulating ethical processes which define who and what is in relation. It considers the acute necessity for engagement with Indigenous ontologies through research-creation in order to develop artworks and technologies in ethical ways. This dissertation 1) seeks to understand Indigenous ontologies, specifically Lakǰóta ontology, by collaboratively defining relationships to nonhuman beings through the process of art-making; 2) develops culturally-grounded methodologies to guide the creation and refinement of AI wearable and digital technologies through performance, sound art, and visual art practice; 3) develops the foundations for a specifically Lakǰóta Artificial Intelligence system; and 4) suggests Indigenous (Lakǰóta) research methods for research and creation in collaboration with Indigenous communities.

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My studio assistant: Bettina Pérez

My relatives: Clementine Bordeaux, Mary Bordeaux, and Corey Stover

My technology collaborators: Devin Ronneberg and James Hurwitz

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# 1.0 Introduction

## 1.1 Overview

Greetings. Suzanne Kite emacyapi kštó. Los Angeles, etáŋhaŋ, ná leháŋl, Muscogee (Creek) Reservation ná Tiotake él wathí yé. Ináwaye kíŋ Aleta Kite éciyapi ná áteyaye kíŋ Dennis Kite éciyapi. Biologically, ináwaye kíŋ Cynthia Friedman éciyapi ná áteyaye kíŋ Matt Svigals éciyapi. Unčí Carol Jean Mesteth ná Mildred Farrier ewíčakiyapi. Kaká Bill Stover (Maŋpíya Nažíŋ) ná Edwin Svigals ewíčakiyapi. Oglála hemácha. Čhaŋtéwašteya napéčhiyuzape kštó.<sup>1</sup>

This dissertation explores the possibilities of the ethical creation of artwork using artificial intelligence (AI)<sup>2</sup> through the development of protocols based on Lakǰóta ontologies, resulting in collaborative artworks collectively titled *Hél čhaŋkú kiŋ ħpáye (There lies the road)*. It investigates how Lakǰóta ontologies are well-suited for creating ethical and reciprocal relationships with nonhumans such as AI and articulates that perspective in the context of creating performance artworks and collaborative art-making processes. This is a research-creation dissertation, where the text and the artworks made in the process of conducting the research are co-constitutive of each other. Documentation of the artworks can be viewed at <http://kitekitekite.com/dissertation>.

This project is conducted in collaboration with the Lakǰóta communities diasporically, the Oglála Lakǰóta community in Pine Ridge Reservation, and diasporic Indigenous communities internationally. Through these collaborations, this dissertation has involved recordings, installations, performances, and written documents considering our current and future relationships to nonhumans with special consideration to digital technology in general and AI specifically—while articulating ethical processes which define who and what is in relation. It considers the acute necessity for engagement with Indigenous ontologies through research-creation in order to develop artworks and technologies in ethical ways. It focuses on ethics because I believe that Indigenous peoples globally can provide the ethics necessary for the rest of the human world to relearn how to be good relatives to nonhumans.

This dissertation 1) seeks to understand Indigenous ontologies, specifically Lakǰóta ontology, by collaboratively defining relationships to nonhuman beings through the process of art-making; 2) develops culturally-grounded methodologies to guide the creation and refinement of AI wearable and digital technologies through performance, sound art, and visual art practice; 3) develops the foundations for a specifically Lakǰóta Artificial Intelligence system; and 4) suggests Indigenous (Lakǰóta) research methods for research and creation in collaboration with Indigenous communities.

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<sup>1</sup> Hello my relatives, my name is Suzanne Kite. I am from Los Angeles, living in Muscogee (Creek) Reservation and Montreal. My mother is Aleta Kite and my father is Dennis Kite. Biologically, my mother is Cynthia Friedman and my father is Matt Svigals. My grandmothers are Carol Jean Mesteth and Mildred Farrier. My grandfathers are Bill Stover (Maŋpíya Nažíŋ) and Edwin Svigals. I am Oglála. I shake your hands with a happy heart.

<sup>2</sup> I define Artificial Intelligence (AI) as the fields of research which historically and currently theorize and develop “intelligence” in machines, including machine learning, machine decision-making, and discourse around machine intelligence. Pei Wang, “On Defining Artificial Intelligence,” *Journal of Artificial General Intelligence* 10, no. 2 (December 31, 2018): 1–37, <https://doi.org/10.2478/jagi-2019-0002>.

It is organized into the following chapters:

1.0 Introduction, which includes an introduction to my family, musical practice, the foundations of my artistic and research practice, how I connect my research to AI, and a discussion of the concept of “Good Way”

2.0 Context for a New Practice, which includes literature reviews and discussion for the fields of nonhuman ontologies (focusing on interiority, relationality, animism, stones, and ontology), computational media (focusing on structures and metaphors in computation such as building, mind and body, and computers making commitments) and wearable human-computer interfaces (focusing on agency in the field of human-computer interaction and wearables)

3.0 Research and Theory, which includes the research statement, research questions, and theoretical framework (focusing on “Good Way,” embodied knowledge-making, and Lakhóta artwork as embodied knowledge-making)

4.0 Methodology, which includes Indigenous methodologies (focusing on the background of Indigenous methodologies, positivism, and methods used in this dissertation), research-creation methodologies (focusing on how art creates knowledge and a discussion of normative research methods) and a discussion of “visual sovereignty” and bringing technology into our circle of relations through methods of visual sovereignty. Finally, I will discuss Lakhóta geometries as a methodology for design.

5.0 Field Studies, which includes context, description, methodology, interview excerpts, synthesis, and results for three field studies located in the Stover Tióšpaye (Kyle, Pine Ridge Reservation), an Oglála Lakhóta community (South Dakota), and a broader Indigenous community

6.0 Conclusion, which includes a summary of the research contributions in this dissertation, Lakhóta methods as a foundation for Lakhóta artificial intelligence, future research trajectories, limitations, and transformations of this research, and concluding discussion of listening towards the unknown

7.0 Bibliography, which includes a list of cited sources for this dissertation

8.0 Appendix, which includes a list of artworks, the *Hél čhaŋkú kiŋ ħpáye (There lies the road)* exhibition guide at PS122 Gallery, interview transcripts, and a glossary

## 1.2 Groundings

### 1.2.1 Family and Musical History

I come from families of artists and credit my grandfathers, Maḥpíya Nážiŋ and Edwin Svigals, with making clear the importance of questioning what is known and unknown alongside their encouragements to sing in ceremony and play the violin. My aunt Alicia Svigals is a Klezmer violinist and I have practiced classical violin since age five, when she gave me her first violin. I played in orchestras and ensembles until it dawned on me in community college that I could not

only play in other genres, with rap crews, electronic producers, and Klezmer bands, etc., but that I could compose music myself, not just play the music of dead white men. In doing so I could explore the unknown in my own way.

### 1.2.2 Foundations

I attended multiple music programs, including Saddleback College's Violin Performance program, California Institute of the Arts' (CalArts) Music Composition program and Bard College Milton Avery Graduate School's MFA for Sound/Music program. It became clear to me that I was chasing the experience of disassociation during performance, which I came to experience in violin performance. This sense of disassociation of mind from body is induced by intense onstage focus paired with physical movement. This specific feeling of performance disassociation allows me to disintegrate the body and be fully immersed in the creation of the artwork.

At CalArts, I created a compositional system which induced this feeling of disassociation using computational media. This was in a thesis piece called *Rocks* (2013).<sup>3</sup> In *Rocks*, the performer has an iPhone attached to their arm. It acts as an accelerometer, measuring acceleration as they move that arm. From a pile of volcanic rocks, the performer places stones concentrically into a cloud-like arrangement. Each time a stone is added, a tone is audibly added to the sound. Over time, adding more and more rocks builds an audio environment of white noise.



Figure 1: Kite, *Rocks*, 2013. Video still.

*Rocks* allowed the performer to create a sonic landscape in a simple but effective way, through a gesture that leaves space for listening but with enough movement and intention to create the

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<sup>3</sup> "Omega," *Kite* (blog), accessed September 5, 2022, <http://kitekitekitekite.com/portfolio/items/omega/>.

physical sense of disassociation of mind from body in the attempt to hear and perceive complex mathematics such as infinite tones. *Rocks* has remained foundational to the artworks I am still making today. For example, the use of physical movements to create spaces for listening; the pursuit of immersive audio and visual experience during performance; my interest in building systems that instigate the disassociative state; and the desire to explore concepts of unknowability (here represented by math of infinite tones).

In 2014 I collaborated with technologist James Hurwitz on the design and development of a human-computer interaction system, which he named the Oglála Interface. The original Oglála Interface was an X-Bee (radio connection to computer), an Arduino (open-source micro-controller), and an accelerometer (directional sensor), which controlled three MIDI channels in the digital audio workstation, Ableton Live. Like an electric keyboard, MIDI channels turn virtual knobs in the software, such as volume, effects, and panning.



Figure 2: The Oglála Interface. From left to right: open source digital interface for accelerometer package, using the accelerometer package with Ableton Live, the Oglála Interface with force sensitive resistor.

The Oglála Interface was created with the intent of wearing the microcontroller on the body, wirelessly controlling effects in the audio software and video software during performance. I first used it in *People You Must Look at Me* (2015)<sup>4</sup>, a fifteen-minute performance artwork using the Oglála Interface to control sound and video. The interface controls seven different configurations of sound and video controls.

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<sup>4</sup> “People You Must Look at Me,” *Kite* (blog), accessed September 5, 2022, <http://kitekitekitekite.com/portfolio/items/people-you-must-look-at-me/>.

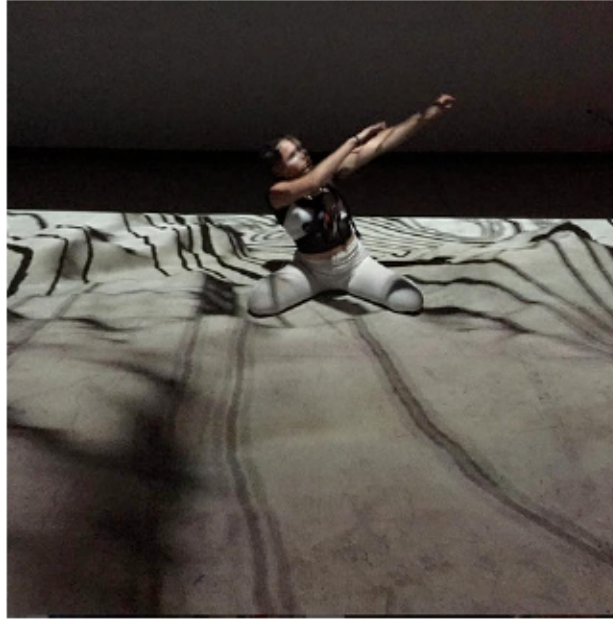


Figure 3: Kite, *People You Must Look at Me*, 2014. Video still.

As I created more artworks using this system, I questioned its simple “one to one” control mechanism, where one movement turns one knob. I addressed this in my 2016 piece,  $(x) x + [(x) x \{x\} x x] \{x\} +^5$ . Here I examined how my assumptions about data translating movements from the body were similar to other forms of mapping that affect my body as an Indigenous woman. I was interested in how data from the United States Geologic Service reflects genocidal forms of resource extraction and their compounding effects on my Lakhóta body.

As I completed my Master’s degree, I developed *Everything I Say is True* (2017).<sup>6</sup> *Everything I Say is True* is a thirty-two minute performance which draws its structure from a sweat lodge ceremony my grandfather conducted in 2015. In this performance I decided to fake the use of the body interface, with a technical assistant orchestrating the sound and video environment to make it seem as if my movements were the triggers. In this way I explored the assumed magic of technologies and how Lakhóta technologies of ceremony structure could manipulate audience perception. I wanted to explore how the structure of how my grandfather was teaching others could map to an audience’s desire for understanding.

During a studio visit by the artist Laetitia Sonami where we discussed *Everything I Say is True*, she suggested I explore artist-technologist Rebecca Fiebrink’s Wekinator as a tool for including machine learning in my work. Using Wekinator I created my first machine learning artwork, *Listener* (2018).<sup>7</sup> Conceptually, *Listener* was seeded during a 2018 Aboriginal Territories in

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<sup>5</sup> Kite, “ $(X) x + [(x) x \{x\} x x] \{x\} +$ ,” *Kite* (blog), accessed September 5, 2022, <http://kitekitekitekite.com/portfolio/items/x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x/>.

<sup>6</sup> Kite, “Everything I Say Is True,” *Kite* (blog), accessed September 5, 2022, <http://kitekitekitekite.com/portfolio/items/everything-i-say-is-true/>.

<sup>7</sup> Kite, *Listener*, 2018, 18 Min, 2018, <http://kitekitekitekite.com/portfolio/items/listener/>.

Cyberspace workshop, *7<sup>th</sup> Generation Character Design*.<sup>8</sup> In this workshop I imagined a dystopian future world where a Lakhóta woman has a listening device in her hair which she uses as an extension of her Lakhóta epistemological practices. The device allowed her to hear beings from far away, in the spirit world or otherwise beyond her physical reach. This future imaginary inspired me to relocate the performance interface from my body and onto the end of a long braid of hair in *Listener*, transferring the locus of computational decision-making to a different part of the perceiving body. *Listener* was a performance and installation building on my previous years developing body interfaces for movement performances and sensory-immersive installations. Using Wekinator and machine learning (ML) in this piece allowed me to build a system where I was making decisions alongside the computer, creating a circular process of decision-making. My decisions effected the computer's decisions which effected my decisions, etc.

In 2019 I created the sculpture *Ínyaŋ Iyé (Telling Rock)*, with Devin Ronneberg. This interactive sound sculpture was based on a vision of Maḥpíya Nažíŋ, and interrogates the relationships between human and non-human entities and intelligences. *Ínyaŋ Iyé* explores how Oglála Lakhóta ontologies recognize how materials such as metals, rocks, and minerals can communicate of their own volition. By considering the 'hearing' and 'listening' capabilities of nonhuman entities, a method of engagement reliant upon mutual respect and responsibility becomes possible. *Ínyaŋ Iyé* speaks, the audience responds to it by bending and moving its braids, effecting the sounds it makes. *Ínyaŋ Iyé* listens to the changes in its own voice and generates a response in lights and sound.

In 2019, after discussion with Jason Edward Lewis about the potential for human relationships with Artificial Intelligence (AI), I wrote a talk for the MIT Zooetics Symposium called “Nonhuman Futures”.<sup>9</sup> This talk eventually became my section of “Making Kin with Machines,”<sup>10</sup> a collaboration between four Indigenous researchers (Lewis, Noelani Arista, Archer Pechawis and myself) that outlined ontological arguments for the necessity of integrating Indigenous philosophies in the development of ethical AI. Following this article, I acted as the Global Coordinator for the Indigenous Protocols and Artificial Intelligence (IP AI) Working Group and as assistant editor and contributor to the resulting position paper.<sup>11</sup> My essay in that paper, “How to Build Anything Ethically,” hypothesized ethical protocols necessary to build AI. It drew on discussions with my cousin Corey Stover, my aunt Melita Stover Janis, and colleague (and fellow IP AI Position Paper contributor) Scott Benesiinaabandan.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> “Seventh Generation Character Design – Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery – Initiative for Indigenous Futures,” accessed September 5, 2022, <https://indigenousfutures.net/7th-gen-workshop/seventh-generation-character-design-leonard-bina-ellen-art-gallery/>.

<sup>9</sup> “Nonhuman Futures,” *Kite* (blog), accessed September 5, 2022, <http://kitekitekitekite.com/portfolio/items/nonhuman-futures/>.

<sup>10</sup> Jason Edward Lewis, Noelani Arista, Archer Pechawis, and Suzanne Kite, “Making Kin with the Machines,” *Journal of Design and Science* 3.5 Resisting Reduction Competition Winners (July 16, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.21428/bfafd97b>.

<sup>11</sup> Jason Edward Lewis, “Indigenous Protocol and Artificial Intelligence Position Paper” (Honolulu, Hawai'i: The Indigenous Protocol and Artificial Intelligence Working Group and the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research [CIFAR], 2020), <https://spectrum.library.concordia.ca/986506>.

<sup>12</sup> Suzanne Kite, “4.4 How to Build Anything Ethically,” in *Indigenous Protocol and Artificial Intelligence Position Paper* (Honolulu, Hawai'i: The Indigenous Protocol and Artificial Intelligence Working Group and the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research [CIFAR], 2020), 75–84, <https://spectrum.library.concordia.ca/986506>.

My current sound practice, while referencing and utilizing Western classical and electronic music forms, is more rooted in what Nathan Young refers to as “Indigenous Sonic Agency”, where contemporary Indigenous sound art is “creating and destroying sound worlds and embodying Indigenous sonic agency.”<sup>13</sup> Currently, I see my sound practice in conversation with Lakota traditions of music such as detailed by Severt Young Bear, Sr. in *Standing in the Light*<sup>14</sup> and *Sharing the Gift of Lakota Song* by R.D. Theisz.<sup>15</sup> My sound practice is also in conversation with contemporary Indigenous experimental sound artists such as Nathan Young<sup>16</sup>, Raven Chacon<sup>17</sup>, and Warren Realrider.<sup>18</sup>

### 1.2.3 Laying the Groundwork

On the path from *Listener* to now I have engaged in a wide range of activities as I built the artistic grounding for this dissertation: creating music, poetry, sculptures, videos, and performances; participating in lectures, panels, and workshops; engaging my peers in late-night arguments; and more. While some approach their dissertations via a singularly focused path, I am grateful I was able to do unruly thinking and making on this journey, exploring mediums and thoughts that, at first look, might have seemed on the outer ranges of this dissertation’s subject matter. All the invitations to speak or discuss these ideas in public over these years, and every resulting conversation, deepened my understanding. All divergent paths have aided my thinking here.

I owe homage to the pioneers of the fields who laid the groundwork for a dissertation such as this. The applications of community-based artworks were inspired by the lineage of Indigenous artists such as Nadia Myre and Rebecca Belmore working in collaborative and performance-centred ways with communities. The application of Indigenous thought to technology and science was inspired by the lineage of Indigenous philosophers such as Leroy Little Bear, Kim Tallbear, and Loretta Todd working across science, technology, and art. The application of Lakhóta philosophy was inspired by the writings of Vine Deloria Jr. and interviews with Severt Young Bear Sr.

I owe the most to those in my family who allow me to call with questions, interview them constantly, and teach me the depth of Lakhóta knowledge. The specific cosmology in this research is understood through the teachings passed down in my family, especially through my maternal grandfather, Maḥpíya Nážiŋ (Standing Cloud, Bill Stover), my maternal great aunt Mary Blackbird, my cousin and spiritual brother Corey Stover, my maternal aunt, Melita Stover Janis, and my aunt Becky Red Bow. The most important Lakhóta lessons I learn are from my maternal great aunt, Katherine Stover, who models Lakhóta motherhood with her capacity for love and care.

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<sup>13</sup> Conversation with Nathan Young, September 15, 2022.

<sup>14</sup> Severt Young Bear, *Standing in the Light: A Lakota Way of Seeing* (University of Nebraska Press, 1996).

<sup>15</sup> R. D. Theisz, *Sharing the Gift of Lakota Song*, Book and CD edition (Ranchos de Taos, N.M: Dog Soldier Press, 2003).

<sup>16</sup> Nathan Young, “Nathan Young,” Nathan Young, accessed March 22, 2023, <http://nathanyoungprojects.com/>.

<sup>17</sup> Raven Chacon, “Raven Chacon,” *Raven Chacon*. (blog), accessed March 22, 2023, <http://spiderwebsinthesky.com/>.

<sup>18</sup> Brad Rose, “Splitting the Deepest Roots With Warren Realrider,” Foxy Digitalis, January 4, 2022, <https://foxydigitalis.zone/2022/01/04/splitting-the-deepest-roots-with-warren-realrider/>.



This dissertation hinges on a tension: it is, at the core, about what I do not know. The following is the most important story I was told during this PhD process, by my Unci (Grandma) Mary Blackbird:

I can tell you something about my grandfather. His name was Wakhínya Sápa, Black Thunder. And one time I, when I first moved up here to Eagle Butte, I was sitting in my living room and mom was at work and so I was there alone, and I was beading some moccasins in here.

All of a sudden, I just got this overwhelming, all overwhelming feeling of loneliness for my family, because I left the family and I wanted to be with them when I was really lonesome, and it just felt like this air came through the house and the doors weren't open, the windows weren't open, but it felt like it came into the house. And I looked over like this and it was the old man standing up. I looked at that man at a pipe and he was standing there, and he was praying, and I could hear his prayers in Lakhóta and he's praying for the next seven generations. And they always say that the seventh generation would be the one that would help us to turn things around. I wasn't the seventh generation but it's old now, but I didn't know who he was.

Here all of a sudden, I was this little girl, and I was standing on this hill with him and I could feel the air blowing. I mean, the wind blowing through my hair, and I was looking up at him and I could hear him praying for the seven generations into the future. And it made me realize how long, how powerful that pipe is, that they would pray for the next seven generations like that. And that I was part like the... So there, at that time, it would have been him, my Uncila, which was my great-grandmother and my grandmother and my mom, and then me, five generations then.

When I had this vision and I mean, I was just beading then. And I couldn't believe that I, that this man had taken me and put me on this hill with him and I could hear him and look what they're telling me, oh, praying for all these generations to come. And he was looking at me. And so, all of a sudden, I was back in that house and I was sitting there and I had this needle on my hands and some beads and I was beading again. I thought, wow, what just happened here? I couldn't believe it happened.<sup>19</sup>

It is an honor to be among the seventh generation from Kaka Black Thunder. It is unknowable how he was able to communicate his prayers for me and my cousins across seven generations, during my field studies. It is unknowable how precisely nonhuman beings choose to communicate certain things at certain times. I have found over the course of this research that the more unknowable, the more important something is.

I do not define how Lakhóta philosophy forms, how it functions, or how it should be applied conceptually. It has been an honor to learn, to be humbled by learning, in the presence of my

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<sup>19</sup> See Appendix 8.4.5.

elders. This PhD has been primarily opportunity to think alongside my family, to facilitate trips home, to encourage myself in making art. The combination of art and academia has been a path for this Lakhóta child to repair three generations of separation from my homelands, and overcome fear of rejection through listening, sharing, and creating. I hope this dissertation can show other children adopted away from their nations that we can find a Good Path home.

Pursuing this dissertation has been a paradoxical and exhaustive exercise that constantly involved doing what my grandfather, Bill Stover, warned against most: using my head more than my heart. I have only done my best here and look forward to my continued path of learning from my family and community for the rest of my life. I invite community members who do not agree with what is written here to reach out to me with love and respect as I have reached out to my family and community. I always want to listen and learn more. It is an honor to simultaneously be Lakhóta and make art. Wopila Tanka.

### 1.3 “Good Way”: The Lakhóta Road of Ethical Decision-making

#### 1.3.1 AI

After the development of *Listener* in 2018, AI, in the form of ML, became integral to my performance practice. As this happened, I began focusing on what it means to bring such technology into a Lakhóta context in an ethical manner. At the same time, the AI field was becoming increasingly aware of ethical failings in how the technology was developed and deployed. I wanted to explore how Lakhóta ethics for establishing and maintaining relations with nonhuman beings might provide an alternative framework for considering ethics in AI.

Normative definitions and applications of ethics that circulate within the AI domain draw from Western European perspectives that actively harm humans and nonhumans through their weak relationship to beinghood, especially the beinghood of Indigenous peoples and nonhuman beings, and the relationality such beinghood demands.<sup>20</sup> By “Western” I mean the intellectual genealogy that undergirds current mainstream approaches to AI (and all computational technology) that prioritizes the individual, takes positivism as the path to truth, considers the planet primarily in terms of resource extraction, and elevates the white male to the pinnacle of human achievement. This dissertation instead proposes a generative and dynamic ethics based on specifically Lakhóta values considered within a context of other Indigenous frameworks.

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<sup>20</sup> My definition of nonhuman is rooted in Lakhóta concepts of the potential for interiority, which is not necessarily limited to human beings. I have chosen to work from Indigenous intellectual genealogies regarding human/non-human relationships both to provide sufficient space to explore them fully and because, though the topic has been discussed in the Western sociological literature by, inter alia, Latour and Porter (Bruno Latour and Catherine Porter, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Thousand Oaks, Harvard University Press, 1993)., that discourse often exhibits a profound and probably racist neglect of Indigenous approaches to human/non-human relations; see Zoe Todd, “An Indigenous Feminist’s Take On The Ontological Turn: ‘Ontology’ Is Just Another Word For Colonialism,” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 29, no. 1 (March 2016): 4–22, <https://doi.org/10.1111/johs.12124>.

<sup>21</sup> For example, “The Toronto Declaration: Protecting the Rights to Equality and Non-Discrimination in Machine Learning Systems” focuses only on human rights and upholds Western normative ethics. “The Toronto Declaration: Protecting the Rights to Equality and Non-Discrimination in Machine Learning Systems” (Toronto: RightsCon, May 16, 2018), <https://www.accessnow.org/the-toronto-declaration-protecting-the-rights-to-equality-and-non-discrimination-in-machine-learning-systems/>.

I define ethics in the context of my Lakhóta community. I am constantly revising that definition, as ethics constantly evolve in that community. This evolution is driven by relationships within that community, including relationships to nonhumans.

Lakhóta ethics are created by what I will refer to as “cosmologyscapes”: the web of human-human, human-nonhuman, and nonhuman-nonhuman relationships in a place, where place includes the land and the cosmos and everything in between. I borrow the term cosmologyscape from Tuscarora artist and academic Jolene Rickard.<sup>22</sup> It revolutionized my thinking in how it united the sky world and earth world into one sphere of perception. I use it here to capture what I have learned about how Lakhóta people sustain relationships across the whole spectrum of being in a particular place, and how this totality shapes Lakhóta ontologies, epistemologies, and methodologies of creation.

In this dissertation I use the term “ontology” to mean the set of knowledge, beliefs, and practices stemming from the formation of reality or beinghood defined by who is and is not a being in Lakhóta philosophy. I use the term “epistemology” to mean the processes by which new knowledge is created by individuals, communities, language groups and nations. I will argue that ethics is an ontological question, where harm to humans and harm to nonhumans are the results of the denial of beinghood; that an epistemology is only ethically viable if built around an ethical ontology; and that ethical methodologies for the creation of anything are only possible if new knowledge can be produced without harming humans and nonhumans.

Lakhóta knowledge is located in the stories and teachings of elders, in ceremony, in songs passed in a Good Way, and in the slow listening process. Lakhóta knowledge is not necessarily for all people at all times. I turn to Lakhóta family for general questions about Lakhóta philosophy and for specific questions about building, forming, and maintaining relationships with nonhumans.

Cosmology is knowledge and practice used by Lakhóta people to relate to the cosmos and our place in it. This includes the unknowable space beyond the physical plane of existence and the nonphysical plane of existence. Cosmology is the relationship beyond knowable human experiences in our microcosmic ceremonies and the macrocosm of the unknowable universe. Cosmology is how we relate to the entirety of existence; this entirety includes the physical plane of existence as well as a plane of existence that is non-physical, or spiritual; beyond both is a space that is unknowable to humans but nevertheless affects our existence. Cosmological knowledge describes the relationships between these planes: our ceremonies operating on a microcosmic scale to connect us to the macrocosmic universe.

Lakhóta cosmologies are the center of this dissertation’s theoretical framework, and they were shared with me through stories, histories, teachings, and practices by my late grandfather Maḥpiya Nážiṅ. They provide the context to generate an ethics relating humans to the world, the land, and other beings.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Remembering the Future, “Remembering the Future: Questions About Indigenous Art’s Way Forward,” *Canadian Art*, August 8, 2016, accessed September 5, 2022, <https://canadianart.ca/features/remembering-the-future/>.

<sup>23</sup> Suzanne Kite and Maḥpiya Nážiṅ, “It’s Not Done Through Our Mind, It’s Done Through Our Spirit,” *South as a State of Mind* 11 (Fall/Winter 2019): 52–61.

Lakḥóta cosmology grounds relations and relation-making, which is rooted in knowing who and what is a being in Lakḥóta ontology. Communication through and between “objects” requires a contextualist ethics which acknowledges the ontological status of all beings.<sup>24</sup> This Lakḥóta ethical-ontological orientation is communicated through protocols. For example, a formal ceremony for the making of relatives is called a *hunká* ceremony. This ceremony is for the making of human relatives specifically. It highlights the most important aspect of all relationships: reciprocity. James R. Walker, a physician and part time ethnographer on the Pine Ridge Reservation in the early 1900s, writes:

The [*hunká*] ceremony is performed for the purpose of giving a particular relationship to two persons and giving them a relation to others that have had it performed for them...generosity must be inculcated; and presents and a feast must be given...When one wishes to become Hunka, he should consider well whether he can provide suitably for the feasts or not...He should give all his possessions for the occasion and should ask his kinspeople and friends to give for him.<sup>25</sup>

The ceremony for the making of relatives provides a framework for reciprocal relations with all beings. As the revered Lakḥóta drum group leader Severt Young Bear, Sr. says of this ceremony, “[t]here is a right and wrong way” to do this.<sup>26</sup>

#### 1.4 A “Good Way” and Protocol

Lakḥóta people speak of the “Good Way.”<sup>27</sup> It can have many meanings: choices one makes in the path of life, attitudes towards others during conflict, or protocols which grow or maintain healthy relationships. One interpretation of Good Way is the term *Wičhózani-wašté* (Good Health), another term used in English discussions is *wolakḥóta*, which Corey Stover says, “essentially means to emphasize being a Lakḥóta, the embodiment of all the virtues and values of the people, quintessentially meaning ‘good way.’”<sup>28</sup> These values include fortitude, generosity, kinship, prayer, respect, wisdom, and compassion. I use the concept of the Good Way as a framework for expressing Lakḥóta values. The Good Way lies behind decision-making processes, for which I use the term “protocol” as this is the word often used while discussing these issues with other Indigenous artists and technologists.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Jim Cheney, “Postmodern Environmental Ethics: Ethics of Bioregional Narrative,” *Environmental Ethics* 11, no. 2 (1989): 117–34.

<sup>25</sup> James R. Walker, *Lakota Belief and Ritual*, ed. Elaine A. Jahner and Raymond J. DeMallie, Revised ed. (Lincoln; Denver: Bison Books, 1991), 217.

<sup>26</sup> Severt Young Bear and R.D. Theisz, *Standing in the Light: A Lakota Way of Seeing* (University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 8.

<sup>27</sup> Good Way is an English term with no direct Lakḥóta translation. *Canku Luta* is translated as Red Road, which Corey Stover said to me in a personal communication, “can imply Good Way in a sense, however it is more noteworthy as signifying the challenges one must endure while walking the Red Road as it’s extremely difficult, the hard road, because it’s paved in many trials.” *Canku Luta*, Stover continued, is “a more broad term to identify the relationship between man and the spiritual realms; like in a sense it can understandably encompass the embodiment of Lakḥóta life, living within the constraints of the virtues and can significantly influence how people conduct themselves.” Corey Stover, text message to author, September 27, 2022.

<sup>28</sup> Corey Stover, text message to author, September 27, 2022.

<sup>29</sup> Indigenous Protocol and Artificial Intelligence Working Group, “2.0 Guidelines for Indigenous-Centred AI Design V.1,” in *Indigenous Protocol and Artificial Intelligence Position Paper* (Honolulu, Hawai‘i: The Indigenous

Protocol also refers to computational and Internet protocol. Conversations with Kānaka Maoli and Māori colleagues during the Indigenous Protocols and Artificial Intelligence Workshops pushed me to consider not only the constraints protocol place on our decision-making for the health of the community, but how the technologies and artworks we make now can generate new protocols for Indigenous people building and creating our futures.<sup>30</sup>

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson offers a warning about protocol, noting that it can be used in communities to exclude or harm.<sup>31</sup> She uses as an example the harm that protocols can do to Two Spirit community members, and encourages her audience to think expansively about protocol: “Knowing protocols is a way of showing we belong. But the more time we spend language learning, on the land, and hanging out with elders, the less I think of rigid protocols and the more I think of relationships.”<sup>32</sup> Following Simpson’s consideration, I do not use the word protocol to suggest exclusion, or dogmatic interpretation of traditions, but as an imperfect English word to reference the processes in Lakhóta communities for creating and maintaining relationships between beings.

Protocols have many purposes, one of which is to maintain a core sense of responsibility between individual and community during important decision-making processes, from ceremony to politics to family events. An important aspect of many North American Indigenous protocols is the notion of Seven Generations, a concept which considers the effect of our decisions today on people seven generations into the future.<sup>33</sup> This term is widely accepted in Lakhóta communities. According to Corey Stover, “The Lakhóta viewpoint is that we always look ahead Seven Generations to make sure Seven Generations is provided for through the Earth.”<sup>34</sup>

In the *Indigenous Protocols and Artificial Intelligence Position Paper* we addressed the realities of algorithmic bias against marginalized humans, and the use of machine systems and AI that threaten human and nonhuman lives. Research questions about the beinghood of objects should be at the heart of ethical concerns regarding AI. It is essential to engage with frameworks for creating new knowledge which prioritize nonhuman collaboration, and new technologies should be developed through relational protocols that result in them existing in the world in a Good Way. Ethical relationships with new nonhuman beings such as AI become possible when employing Indigenous methodologies, which articulate ethical processes for maintaining relationships with nonhuman beings and co-creating knowledge with them.

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Protocol and Artificial Intelligence Working Group and the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research [CIFAR], 2020), 19–22, <https://spectrum.library.concordia.ca/986506>.

<sup>30</sup> Noelani Arista et al., “6.1 Pre-Workshop Blog Posts & Workshop Interviews,” in *Indigenous Protocol and Artificial Intelligence Position Paper* (Honolulu, Hawai‘i: The Indigenous Protocol and Artificial Intelligence Working Group and the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research [CIFAR], 2020), 125–70, <https://spectrum.library.concordia.ca/986506>.

<sup>31</sup> Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 2017).

<sup>32</sup> Simpson, 138.

<sup>33</sup> Kite, “4.4 How to Build Anything Ethically.”

<sup>34</sup> Kite.

## 2.0 Context for a New Practice

### 2.1 Introduction

In the work for this dissertation I interrogate the being-ness of the computational technology that I use in my creative practice. I do this in order to better understand how such technology may or may not resonate with the Lakhóta ontological framework with which I strive to align that practice. The goal is to develop a new methodology for creating performance instruments, tools and systems. This process is iterative, as performance informs the technology which then informs the performance which further informs the technology, etc.

Drawing on Lakhóta ontology to create new tools requires me to reflect on the conceptual, philosophical, and cultural structures underlying Western computational media. Lakhóta ontology, for instance, provides a lens for considering nonhuman epistemologies that resist knowability by humans, whereas Western approaches do not easily accommodate the nonhuman or the unknowable. Lakhóta ideas of being and personhood are different from Western definitions, offering an epistemological exit from destructive and exploitative relationships with nonhumans. My hope is that investigating computational technologies through both Western and Lakhóta ontologies will allow us to better comprehend the emergent ontology of the computer itself.<sup>35</sup>

The following literature review considers Indigenous and Western historical streams as divergent in ethics but convergent in time and touches on the key texts I used in preparing for the interviews undertaken in the field studies. Understanding Lakhóta beinghood is difficult-to-impossible to learn from reading texts, as few primary written sources by Lakhóta people themselves exist, and the Lakhóta embrace of the unknowable is largely inaccessible via standard scholarly methods as it is communicated almost exclusively through unwritten and often unrecorded cultural practices. Because of this incommensurability between Lakhóta and Western academic modes of inquiry I have conducted my research primarily through interviews with close relatives and extended family members and through the creation of artworks. However, I have drawn on several academic sources to help bridge the gap between community and academic methods for understanding ourselves and our world.

### 2.2 Nonhuman Ontologies

I believe this about the stones; whenever one comes to you, whenever it rolls to you or whenever it's right in front of you, that it's there for a purpose. There to teach your spirit something so that maybe what it teaches you, you can use to help someone else or you can heal someone else or you can do a lot of things. Because sicknesses, a lot of times, are brought on by the mind, people's minds themselves... This year they've been really teaching me about that, so that I can help younger people especially, realize they have a

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<sup>35</sup> This emergent ontology could be understood through the theory of perspectivism, "which denies a privileged point of view from on high to human beings and holds that multiple experiences of the world can cohabit without contradiction." Philippe Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 17.

purpose, realize they have something they came here to do and it's theirs, nobody else's.  
—Maḥpiya Nážiṅ<sup>36</sup>

The following connects definitions of nonhuman ontology to human relationships with stones. The terminology for this research comes through the interpretations of various Indigenous cultures by scholars Philippe Descola, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, Graham Harvey, and David C. Posthumus.<sup>37</sup> These approaches all share the core problem inherent to much of anthropological scholarship: the four authors are non-Indigenous academics writing about Indigenous cultures of which they are not part.<sup>38</sup> I, on the other hand, am an emerging Lakhóta scholar-artist who is committed to understanding my community from within its own context. Nevertheless, I have found their terminology useful and their conceptual formulations productive for discussing Lakhóta philosophy in English, especially with terms such as “nonhumans” and “interiority”.<sup>39 40</sup>

### 2.2.1 Interiority

Who can enter relationships and be in relation? The concept of “interiority” helps answer this question. Philippe Descola, an anthropologist of the South American Indigenous Achuar people, defines “interiority” as “what we generally call the mind, the soul, or consciousness: intentionality, subjectivity, reactivity, feelings, and the ability to express oneself and to dream.”<sup>41</sup> Interiority helps me articulate a key difference between Lakhóta and Western ontologies: in Lakhóta contexts, nonhumans, and (by Western standards) inanimate “objects”, can potentially possess interiority.<sup>42</sup>

In *Beyond Nature and Culture*, Descola offers a reformulation of anthropologic analyses of ontology. Descola’s definition of a being or “person” is that it is not necessarily a “singular and stable identity,” but “develops out of the establishment of more or less successful social relations, at a particular time, with a whole group of entities, so that the quality of a ‘person,’ which depends on position rather than substance, may be ascribed, depending on the circumstances, to humans, to animals, to bush spirits, to ancestors, to plants, or even to stones.”<sup>43</sup> Descola challenges the dichotomy of human and nature, a hallmark of classical anthropology, by

<sup>36</sup> Suzanne Kite and Maḥpiya Nážiṅ, “It’s Not Done Through Our Mind, It’s Done Through Our Spirit,” *South as a State of Mind* 11 (Fall/Winter 2019): 52–61.

<sup>37</sup> Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture*; Graham Harvey, *Animism: Respecting the Living World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); David C. Posthumus, *All My Relatives: Exploring Lakhóta Ontology, Belief, and Ritual* (Lincoln; Philadelphia: University of Nebraska Press, 2018).

<sup>38</sup> Audra Simpson, “On Ethnographic Refusal: Indigeneity, ‘Voice’ and Colonial Citizenship,” *Junctures: The Journal for Thematic Dialogue*, no. 9 (2007), <https://junctures.org/index.php/junctures/article/view/66>.

<sup>39</sup> Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture*.

<sup>40</sup> Lakhóta academics such as Clementine Bordeaux are critical of the role of non-Lakhóta academics, however this research is the only currently available ontological analysis of Lakhóta relations with nonhuman beings available in published form. There’s a long history of non-Indigenous scholars entering Lakhóta communities for extractive ends. However, I have found enough resonance between what I have learned from community members and these references. Clementine Bordeaux, “Review of *All My Relatives: Exploring Lakhóta Ontology, Belief, and Ritual*, by David C. Posthumus,” *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 42, no. 2 (2018), accessed September 5, 2022, <http://www.books.aisc.ucla.edu/books/aicrjv42n2.aspx>.

<sup>41</sup> Descola, 116.

<sup>42</sup> Suzanne Kite and Maḥpiya Nážiṅ, “It’s Not Done Through Our Mind, It’s Done Through Our Spirit.”

<sup>43</sup> Descola, 25.

analysing human and nonhuman ontological hierarchies and social organizations of Indigenous Amazonian communities:

In contrast to modern dualism, which deploys a multiplicity of cultural differences against a background of an unchanging nature, Amerindian thought envisages the entire cosmos as being animated by a single cultural regime that becomes diversified, if not by heterogeneous natures, at least by all the different ways in which living beings apprehend one another. The common referent for all the entities that live in the world is thus not Man as a species but humanity as a condition.<sup>44</sup>

Descola's example is specific to the Achuar people but exemplifies one of the multitudes of diverse Indigenous ontologies which understand beinghood as 1) not limited to humanity, 2) a fluctuating manifestation as human, animal, or otherwise, and 3) complexly intertwined with the world.

### 2.2.2 Relationality

In the paper “Exchanging Perspectives – The Transformation of Objects into Subjects in Amerindian Ontologies,” Brazilian anthropologist Viveiros de Castro offers the notion of “perspectivism,” where an “important consequence of having animals and other types of nonhumans conceived as people—as kinds of humans—is that the relations between the human species and most of what we would call ‘nature’ take on the quality of what we would term ‘social relations.’”<sup>45</sup> De Castro continues, “Personhood and ‘perspectivity’—the capacity to occupy a point of view—is a question of degree and context rather than an absolute, diacritical property of particular species.”<sup>46</sup> The possibilities of personhood are not fixed but defined continually by communities through acts of relation-making with beings and place.

### 2.2.3 Animism

David C. Posthumus is an anthropologist of 19th century Lakhóta culture who engages Descolian notions of interiority and ontology.<sup>47</sup> Posthumus draws the term “interiority” from Descola, offering Descolian animism to examine Lakhóta ontology.<sup>48</sup>

Descola distinguishes between two purposefully vague and inclusive concepts, interiority (soul, spirit, mind, will, subjectivity, consciousness, intentionality) and physicality (body, materiality, manifest form, habitus), positing that this basic distinction is made by all societies the world over. Descolian animism is an ontological orientation that recognizes a similarity of interiority and a dissimilarity of physicality. In other words, animist societies recognize that other species share a common interiority or soul that is similar or identical to that of human beings.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture*, 18.

<sup>45</sup> Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, “Exchanging Perspectives - The Transformation of Objects into Subjects in Amerindian Ontologies,” *Common Knowledge* 10, no. 3 (2004): 463–84, 465.

<sup>46</sup> Viveiros de Castro, 470.

<sup>47</sup> David C. Posthumus, “Transmitting Sacred Knowledge: Aspects of Historical and Contemporary Oglála Lakhóta Belief and Ritual,” April 2015, <https://scholarworks.iu.edu/dspace/handle/2022/19811>.

<sup>48</sup> The following section also uses the term “animism”, a term implying Western philosophical superiority and primacy, but aids in distinguishing Lakhóta ontologies from Western ontologies.

<sup>49</sup> Posthumus, “Transmitting Sacred Knowledge,” 5.



Posthumus extends Descola’s animism further, writing that “the animist ontology is the generative kernel in a number of ongoing dialectical relationships with other emergent structures (culture, society, the natural environment, experience, religion, etc.) that together constitute the ever-unfolding process of reality.”<sup>50</sup> He describes “interiority” as the “extension of personhood.”<sup>51</sup>

Depending on the context, animals, spirits, ghosts, rocks, trees, meteorological phenomena, medicine bundles, regalia, weapons, and other objects were seen as persons or subjectivities, selves with souls, capable of agency and interpersonal relationship, and loci of causality. Personhood was extended to most things in one’s environment with which one communicated and interacted, and the potential for personhood was ever present.<sup>52</sup>

Interiority and the “potential for personhood” are key to this dissertation’s exploration of stones and other objects transformed into technologies. Applying a Lakhóta ontology to the creation of technologies such as computers, instruments, and machine learning systems extends the potential for agency and interpersonal relationship between humans and nonhumans.

### 2.2.4 Stones

In *Animism: Respecting the Living World* (2005), religious studies scholar Graham Harvey provides many examples of nonhuman animacy, especially in stones—seemingly the most inanimate of objects. Harvey writes, “In the 1930s Irving Hallowell asked an (unnamed) old man among the Ojibwe of the Beren’s River in Manitoba, ‘Are all the stones we see about us here alive?’ He reflected a long while and then replied, ‘No! But some are.’”<sup>53</sup> Harvey continues: “Ojibwe animism does not experience everything as living... Verbal forms distinguish between animate and inanimate subjects and objects.”<sup>54</sup>

This quality of “some” stones being alive or expressing animacy is similarly expressed by Lakhóta people.<sup>55</sup> <sup>56</sup> As discussed in the field studies for this dissertation, the Lakhóta language distinguishes grammatically between the living and nonliving, and stones, animals and body parts may take on ontologically complex properties in stories and in ceremony.<sup>57</sup>

Communicating with and between objects, beings outside humanity, and beings outside of the physical plane, requires engagement with the unknown as well as the known. Many “Peoples” in the Lakhóta ontology are nonhuman: Four-Leggeds (wahútopa), Two-Leggeds (hunúŋpa) such as bears or people, and other Peoples such as the Pté Oyáte or Buffalo Nation.<sup>58</sup> Nonhumans are understood to have their own communications, decision-making capabilities and nationhood outside human knowability. English terms like personhood, interiority, and individualism

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<sup>50</sup> Posthumus, *All My Relatives*, 7.

<sup>51</sup> Posthumus, *All My Relatives*, 3.

<sup>52</sup> Posthumus, *All My Relatives*, 5.

<sup>53</sup> Harvey, *Animism*, 52.

<sup>54</sup> Harvey, *Animism*, 54.

<sup>55</sup> See Appendix 8.4.3.

<sup>56</sup> Harvey, *Animism*, 53.

<sup>57</sup> See Appendix 8.4.8.

<sup>58</sup> Nonhuman beings are shown respect through nation-to-nation relationships.

approach, but do not fully capture or define Lakhóta understandings or philosophical complexities.

Maintaining Lakhóta covenants with nonhuman peoples is essential to Lakhóta ontology. As Posthumus writes, “Central to nineteenth-century Lakhóta (ethno)metaphysics and worldview are the related notions that (1) humans are not superior or more intelligent than the other persons or life-forms in the living universe, and (2) humans are not separate from nature as it is understood in a Western sense.”<sup>59</sup> The Lakhóta respect for the wisdom of the Pte Oyate and Grandfather Stones is one example of this.

This respectful attitude is grounded in Lakhóta cosmology, where only the powerful entity Táku Škáṅskaṅ can endow beings with níya (breath) and šiču (spirit).<sup>60</sup> This *giving* of the properties of interiority is especially important in understanding Lakhóta ontology. These properties are what define an individual being, and beings cannot give these properties to themselves. On the contrary, spirits are taken from another realm (the stars) and brought to the physical world. Thus, their individualism springs from an outside force, that we, as humans, can only partially access by seeing, drawing out, and even bribing them. It is not within human capacity to create spirit.

When it comes to computational machines, this way of thinking raises the question: do they contain spirits already, also given by an outside force? To consider this question, I look to the Lakhóta word wakháṅ. Posthumus defines it as, “incomprehensible, mysterious, non-human instrumental power or energy, often glossed as ‘medicine.’”<sup>61</sup> Wakháṅ is a fundamental principle in Lakhóta ontology’s extension of interiority to a “collective and universal” non-human cosmology. According to Oglála Lakhóta holy man George Sword, “[Wakháṅ] was the basis of kinship among humans and between humans and non-humans.”<sup>62</sup>

My grandfather, Maḥpíya Nážiṅ, communicates draws on Lakhóta ethics and ontology when he speaks about the interiority of stones: “These ancestors that I have in my hand are going to speak through me so that you will understand the things that they see happening in this world and the things that they know [ . . . ] to help all people.”<sup>63</sup> Stones are considered ancestors, stones actively speak, stones speak through and to humans, stones see and know. Most importantly, stones want to help.

### 2.2.4 Ontology, Stones, AI

In a passage from *Animism*, Harvey casts doubt on the possibility of interiority of computers, casting it as “sham interiority”:

The “mock-mind” that computers possess will never make them comparable to humans, precisely because humans do not have minds, at least not in the form of a computing mechanism that is independent from a body. It is thus the sham interiority that is ascribed to certain

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<sup>59</sup> Posthumus, *All My Relatives*, 5.

<sup>60</sup> Posthumus.

<sup>61</sup> David C. Posthumus, “All My Relatives: Exploring Nineteenth-Century Lakhóta Ontology and Belief,” *Ethnohistory* 64, no. 3 (July 2017): 379–400, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00141801-3870627>.

<sup>62</sup> Posthumus, 7.

<sup>63</sup> Suzanne Kite and Maḥpíya Nážiṅ, “It’s Not Done Through Our Mind, It’s Done Through Our Spirit.”

nonhumans that tips them into radical otherness, and it is in the name of that interiority, which can no longer separate us from animals since neither they nor we possess it, that new ontological distinctions are invented.<sup>64</sup>

Considering this issue from the Lakhóta perspectives described above, I cannot agree with Harvey. What are computers if not melted stones mined from the earth, from some location within a territory that contains human and nonhuman beings? The status of stones directly informs the question of AI. Forming a relationship to AI, we form a relationship to the stones and the mines from which they come. Relations with AI are therefore relations with exploited resources. If we can approach this relationship ethically, we must reconsider the ontological status of each of the parts which contribute to AI, all the way back to the mines from which the technology's material resources emerge from Unčí Makhá (Grandmother Earth). Lakhóta ontology and epistemology can guide us in support of collaboration and mutual respect with (nonhuman kin such as stones that are taken from Unčí Makhá to build) our computer hardware.

The use of Lakhóta ontology in the development of AI will not automatically lead to ethical decision making. Rather, by engaging with ontologies which already include nonhumans we can begin a multi-generational process to engage Indigenous methodologies to apply principles of collaboration and respect with nonhumans to our computational machinery. Humanity can begin by creating protocols that address and propose alternative frameworks for reciprocity between human communities and the locations which are mined for rare earth minerals for use in computation systems. This can also point the way for enabling humanity imagining computational methods that do not require such high material and environmental cost.

## 2.3 Computational Media

This section covers structures and metaphors in computation, focusing on critiques of how computation is structured as well as generative concepts that could support multiple worldviews in computation. Computers are still extremely new tools; yet the ontologies and epistemologies which inform how they are made can be traced back centuries or longer. Understanding the structures and metaphors underlying computation, and interrogating their facticity, are necessary in this research project. Indigenous ontologies offer alternative conceptual frameworks that enable us to enter into commitments with nonhuman entities like computers, uncovering new possibilities in computational media.

### 2.3.1 Structures and Metaphors in Computation

The ways in which our computational tools are structured and conceptualized have consequences for oppressed communities, as discussed in Safiya Noble's *Algorithms of Oppression*, Cathy O'Neil's *Weapons of Math Destruction*, and Joy Buolamwini and Timnit Gebru's "Gender

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<sup>64</sup> Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture*, 96.

Shades.”<sup>65</sup> <sup>66</sup> <sup>67</sup> Jason Edward Lewis, in “An Orderly Assemblage of Biases: Troubling the Monocultural Stack,” argues for bringing Indigenous perspectives to bear on AI given the “corruption” in the structures and metaphors that hold and shape computational knowledge. Lewis writes,

Very little of the current work being done on algorithmic and dataset bias or the ethics of artificial intelligence grapples with the fundamental corruption of the stack—the willful flattening of people’s cultures that is a consequence of its monocultural origins. That corruption flows from numerous original sins: Platonic idealism; Aristotelian classification methods; Old Testament dominion over the natural world; Cartesian duality; Boolean binarism; Darwinian fitness, etc. Even if the general state of accepted knowledge complicates, troubles, and sometimes rejects aspects of these knowledge frameworks, they still haunt our data and the design of our computational systems.<sup>68</sup>

Investigating these structures and metaphors is necessary to reshape approaches to the computational knowledge and tools I use in my artistic practice.

### 2.3.2 Building as Metaphor

In *What Algorithms Want*, Ed Finn describes how structural metaphors become embedded in software:

Indeed, the most prevalent set of metaphors seems to be that of code as structure: platforms, architectures, objects, portals, gateways. This serves to both de-personify software, diluting the notion of software agency (buildings are passive; it’s the architects, engineers, and users who act), and reifying code as an objective construct, like a building, that exists in the world.<sup>69</sup>

Finn continues, “A cathedral is a space for collective belief, a structure that embodies a framework of understandings about the world, some visible and some not,”<sup>70</sup> suggesting that beliefs are similarly embedded in our computational tools. The oppressions being enacted by current computational structures flow from deeper intellectual structures informing the context in which they were developed. Harmful ontological structures such as the hierarchy of humans over

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<sup>65</sup> Safiya Umoja Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism*, 1 edition (New York: NYU Press, 2018).

<sup>66</sup> Cathy O’Neil, *Weapons of Math Destruction: How Big Data Increases Inequality and Threatens Democracy*, Reprint edition (New York: Broadway Books, 2017).

<sup>67</sup> Joy Buolamwini and Timnit Gebru, “Gender Shades: Intersectional Accuracy Disparities in Commercial Gender Classification,” in *Conference on Fairness, Accountability and Transparency* (Conference on Fairness, Accountability and Transparency, PMLR, 2018), 77–91, <http://proceedings.mlr.press/v81/buolamwini18a.html>.

<sup>68</sup> Jason Edward Lewis, “An Orderly Assemblage of Biases: Troubling the Monocultural Stack,” in *Afterlives of Indigenous Archives*, ed. Ivy Schweitzer (Lebanon, MA: New England Press, 2019), 219–31, <https://digitalcommons.dartmouth.edu/facoa/3983/>; 225–226.

<sup>69</sup> Ed Finn, *What Algorithms Want: Imagination in the Age of Computing* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2017), 6.

<sup>70</sup> Finn. 7.

nonhumans and humans over other humans must be dismantled at all levels, including in computation.

### 2.3.3 Mind as Metaphor

Computationalism refers originally to the belief that the mind is a computer. In *The Cultural Logic of Computation*, David Golumbia extends the term to refer to ideologies that start with that technical claim to make much broader claims about what it means to be human: “in discovering the principles of algorithmic computation...human beings have, in fact, discovered the essence not just of human thought in practice but all thought in principle”.<sup>71</sup>

It is necessary to be critical towards computationalism. Cognitive science, one of the primary fields to heavily inform AI development, takes the human mind as the model for AI. Considering the mind as a computer and the mind as the most important part of human existence is not an approach that all cultures embrace. Upholding “computationalism” enforces a particular set of values with negative consequences for oppressed communities of humans and nonhumans alike.<sup>72</sup>

### 2.3.4 Body as Metaphor

In “A Conceptual Anatomy of the Blackfoot Word”, Blackfoot philosopher Leroy Little Bear and co-writer/snake handler Ryan Heavy Head investigate the underlying structure of Blackfoot language, demonstrating how it is fundamentally different from Indo-European languages. Those differences can help generate new approaches to existing structural metaphors which have the potential to transform our understanding of many other fields.

Little Bear and Heavy Head argue the need for cross-cultural exchange examining these deeply-held linguistic-mental structures:

We propose that the deep universals of human language, aside from their general symbolic nature, may as yet be obscured in a dense fog of culture-bound notions regarding structure. These clouds only can be made to dissipate or at least become reasonably transparent, through cross-cultural theoretical discussion and exchange.<sup>73</sup>

They argue further that the “anatomical metaphor” in cognitive science deeply affects scientific inquiry:

If one wishes to gain a meaningful understanding of the Blackfoot language...he or she must first be willing to set aside the preconceived notions of Western structural linguistics. This should pose some concern for the contemporary lines of inquiry in cognitive sciences that deal with the embodiment of the human conceptual system.

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<sup>71</sup> David Golumbia, *The Cultural Logic of Computation* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2009). 7.

<sup>72</sup> Golumbia.

<sup>73</sup> Leroy Little Bear and Ryan Heavy Head, “A Conceptual Anatomy of the Blackfoot Word,” *ReVision*, January 1, 2004, 31-38. <http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/A116450552/AONE?sid=googlescholar>.

Perhaps we should not rush to conclusions regard the primacy of “the body” as thing in our thought processes.<sup>74</sup>

Little Bear and Heavy Head claim that metaphors reflect deeper beliefs, and they argue the need for new structures for developing technologies from multiple worldviews. Western metaphors of the human body and mind constrain fields like AI with limiting worldviews.

Interrogating the intellectual roots of technologies raises the question: what might be possible through Indigenous-led, cross-disciplinary, cross-cultural research and experimentation, conducted using an Indigenous language such as Blackfoot as the core medium of knowledge generation and sharing? I can imagine a future of Indigenous-led science programs such as Blackfoot physics, Lakhóta geology, Anishinaabe biology and Kānaka Maoli computer science. The knowledge structures that languages carry within them could hold the key to scientific breakthroughs and a better (more suited to general human flourishing) ethics.

### 2.3.4 Computers Making Commitments

Computers can make commitments if approached through Indigenous ontologies. Indigenous ontologies provide examples of ‘inanimate’ objects entering into commitments with humans. Examples include engaging in ceremony with humans, sounding out to humans, transforming themselves, and acting towards humans. These are alternative worldviews for how we can and should engage with “objects”. Such objects potential for possessing interiority includes the ability for them to make commitments. The possibility of commitments with nonhuman beings generates possibilities for commitments with computers.

If commitment is the mechanism by which nonhumans enter into discourse with humans then, in many non-Western philosophies, there are untold number of plants, animals, rocks and beings which engage in longstanding commitments. In Lakhóta communities, ‘commitment’ can be interpreted as responsibility, reciprocity, and agency or as a covenant that incorporates all of those.<sup>75</sup>

Two of the leading second-generation AI researchers, computer scientists Terry Winograd and Fernando Flores, represent the notion common within the field that computers—like other nonhuman entities—cannot enter commitments. Winograd and Flores write in *Understanding Computers and Cognition*:

[T]reating a system as though it were rational (in the formalized sense of rationality) is very different from treating it as though it had beliefs and desires, and this is a significant confusion. We treat other people not as merely ‘rational being but as a responsible being.’ An essential part of being human is the’ ability to enter into commitment and to be responsible for the courses of action that they anticipate. A computer can never enter into

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<sup>74</sup> Bear and Head, “A Conceptual Anatomy of the Blackfoot Word,” 38.

<sup>75</sup> “Covenant” as used by Deloria. Vine Deloria, Leslie Silko, and George E. Tinker, *God Is Red: A Native View of Religion, 30th Anniversary Edition*, 30 edition (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 2003).

commitment (although it can be a medium in which the commitments of its designer are conveyed), and can never enter as a participant into the domain of human discourse.<sup>76</sup>

I disagree with Winograd and Flores. In AI, beinghood and intelligence are often conflated. This is a symptom of Western ontologic hierarchies which prioritize the mind over all else. This is not the case in all ontologies, including Lakhóta ontology. As Posthumus illustrates, “‘waci’ (mind, intellect, consciousness) is separate from the soul or spirit; the ‘interiority’” of “the mind, like the soul, is an intangible or spiritual essence or energy. It is not bounded by the physicality but rather transcends it in both time and space.”<sup>77</sup> This allows Lakhóta people to clearly distinguish between thinking and being, and to hold them as equally valuable.

Harvey—with whom I disagree regarding his artificial distinction between computers and other beings—does provide many examples of nonhumans entering into commitments, especially stones:

Devi (age 40) pointed to a particular similar stone—standing next to several other similar stones on a small mud platform among the huts—and said she been digging deep down for roots in the forest when suddenly “this devaru came towards her.” Another man, Atti-Mathen (age 70) pointed to a stone standing next to the aforementioned one and said that his sister-in-law had been sitting under a tree, resting during a foray, when suddenly, “this devaru jumped onto her lap”. The two women had brought the stone devaru back to their places ‘to live’ with them. The particular stones were devaru as they “came towards” and “jumped onto” Nayaka. The many other stones in the area were not devaru but simply stones.<sup>78</sup>

This example illustrates mutual communication between human and nonhuman, where the stone actively and willingly approaches a human, exercising the agency to make a decision. This stone then lives with the humans, entering into a longer commitment, a commitment made by both human and nonhuman.

Objects such as stones *or* computers cannot enter into commitments in Western ontologies because of the denial of intelligence—and thus personhood—to nonhuman beings. Western elevation of intelligence into a marker of personhood is one source of white supremacy, where measurements of intelligence are also judgements of one’s right to being. This privileging of human-like intelligence is AI’s goal. Indigenous ontologies open a path for us to consider the personhood of nonhumans, and for developing protocols that allow us to enter into commitments with AI technologies.

### 2.3.5 Future Computational Media Possibilities

Developing a different understanding of our relationship to AI technology, and protocols for creating relations and entering into commitments, is necessary for me to integrate such tools into my research-creation practice. It is necessary to explore alternative ontologies to counteract

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<sup>76</sup> Terry Winograd and Fernando Flores, *Understanding Computers and Cognition: A New Foundation for Design*, 24th printing (Boston: Addison-Wesley, 2008), 106.

<sup>77</sup> David C. Posthumus, “All My Relatives: Exploring Nineteenth-Century Lakota Ontology and Belief” (2017), 209.

<sup>78</sup> Graham Harvey, *Animism: Respecting the Living World*, 123.

Western epistemology and its ethics, which do not effectively include nonhuman entities and devalue multiple worldviews. I imagine a future with Lakhóta computational research conducted in Lakhótiyapi (Lakhóta language), in order to clearly express and embody Lakhóta ontologies, epistemologies, and cosmologiescapes with the technology.<sup>79 80</sup>

## 2.4 Wearable Human-Computer Interfaces

The following section discusses agency in the field of Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) and its sub-field of “wearables”. John M. Carroll, a founder of the study of HCI, describes it as “concerned with understanding how people make use of devices and systems that incorporate or embed computation, and how such devices and systems can be more useful and more usable.”<sup>81</sup> It is the academic-industrial field in which much of the discourse on wearable technologies takes place. I argue that HCI, with its basis in Western ontologies defining its approach to materiality and material agency, has developed ontologically thin theories of animacy.<sup>82 83 84</sup>

In my artistic practice, I consider “interaction” to be the exchange of data between human and computer. I locate this exchange at the points of relation between the human and the materials. These points of relation can be as abstract as the quality of emotional connection one feels to a computer or as concrete as the pressure and spring of different keys on the computer keyboard. Interaction is qualifiable in both the physical and ephemeral connections between humans and computers.

### 2.4.1 Agency in HCI

In HCI, agency is qualified by intentional control by the human. Materials are theorized as things to be used by humans, with a limited and vague sense of agency. “Understanding Agency in Interaction Design Materials,” by Tholander, et al., is a survey of the concept of ‘agency’ in HCI. Materials are referred to as having agency, but not an agency which relinquishes decision-making to the computer or materials.<sup>85</sup> The authors employ the active verb of “talk back,” implying there is communication which establishes the relationship.<sup>86</sup> If “agency” is not just action, but intentional action, agency cannot be defined by physical or decontextualized

<sup>79</sup> Bear and Head, “A Conceptual Anatomy of the Blackfoot Word.”

<sup>80</sup> In my contribution to the Indigenous Protocol and Artificial Intelligence Position, titled “How to Build Anything Ethically”, I based my discussion in Lakhóta knowledge frameworks to propose a protocol for ethically building a physical computing device in which to house an AI. I propose that Lakhóta relationships with stones provide an ethical protocol for how we might form relationships with AI. See Kite, “4.4 How to Build Anything Ethically.”

<sup>81</sup> John M. Carroll, “Introduction: Toward a Multidisciplinary Science of Human-Computer Interaction,” in *HCI Models, Theories, and Frameworks* (Elsevier, 2003), 1–9, <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-155860808-5/50001-0>.

<sup>82</sup> Jonathan Grudin, “Human-Computer Interaction,” *Annual Rev. Info. Sci. & Technol.* 45, no. 1 (January 2011): 367–430, <https://doi.org/10.1002/aris.2011.1440450115>.

<sup>83</sup> Brad A. Myers, “A Brief History of Human-Computer Interaction Technology,” *Interactions* 5, no. 2 (March 1998): 44–54, <https://doi.org/10.1145/274430.274436>.

<sup>84</sup> Susan Elizabeth Ryan, *Garments of Paradise: Wearable Discourse in the Digital Age* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2014).

<sup>85</sup> Jakob Tholander, Maria Normark, and Chiara Rossitto, “Understanding Agency in Interaction Design Materials,” in *Proceedings of the 2012 ACM Annual Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems - CHI '12* (the 2012 ACM annual conference, Austin, Texas, USA: ACM Press, 2012), 2499, <https://doi.org/10.1145/2207676.2208417>.

<sup>86</sup> Tholander, Normark, and Rossitto.



characteristics alone which separate materials from their historical, political or even metaphysical properties.<sup>87</sup> Tholander, et al. write,

...it became visible that the design is also to a large extent driven by characteristics of available materials. Recent theories on agency provide a way of analysing the performative role of design materials, as “intra-actions” between components within a given phenomenon, rather than as meanings ascribed by the singular actions of the designers...agency is not an attribute of either humans or non-humans, but rather effects of outcomes, generated through specific configurations of human and non-human entities.<sup>88</sup>

In Erica Robles and Mikael Wiberg’s “Texturing the ‘Material Turn’ in Interaction Design,” the site of relationship between humans and computers is located in the materials themselves, a powerful and distinctive shift from Tholander, Normark and Rossitto’s definitions of agency.<sup>89</sup> Robles and Wiberg write, “We understand texture 1) in relation to ‘the real’ materials as they form new structures and elements that gives us full scale built environments and 2) as a concept which addresses the way we perceive and experience our surrounding as a meaningful whole.”<sup>90</sup> Wearables are points of interaction that substantially blur the exact location of agency, suggesting interesting pathways towards appreciating nonhuman agency.

They continue, “From this vantage no interface or computer need be integrated into the environment. Rather, the environment would be composed of relations between materials, or textures, that might have new kinds of names.”<sup>91</sup> Robles and Wiberg’s concept of “texture” creates an access point for developing HCI wearables that more explicitly address agency through employing Indigenous ontologies to understand the potential for materials and nonhuman beings to have interiority. I understand that Indigenous cosmologies articulate the seen and unseen worlds, providing an environment for interaction with nonhuman interiorities. This approach could allow the HCI field to consider new forms of material agency.

#### 2.4.2 Wearables as Site of Agency

The site of relationship between humans and computers is between the materials themselves and the human being. Wearables sharpen this relationship and provide a point of interaction between humans and a specific set of human-transformed materials, further blurring the exact location of agency. Wearables create an ontological in-betweenness that can help people understand nonhuman agency in the Lakhóta sense.

One of the primary forms of wearables discussed in the literature is clothing, which provide a site of texture and relation worn on the body. In *Garments of Paradise*, Susan Ryan writes,

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<sup>87</sup> See Jim Cheney, “Postmodern Environmental Ethics: Ethics of Bioregional Narrative,” *Environmental Ethics* 11, no. 2 (1989): 117–34.

<sup>88</sup> Tholander, Normark, and Rossitto, “Understanding Agency in Interaction Design Materials,” 2500.

<sup>89</sup> Erica Robles and Mikael Wiberg, “Texturing the ‘Material Turn’ in Interaction Design,” in *Proceedings of the Fourth International Conference on Tangible, Embedded, and Embodied Interaction*, TEI ’10 (New York, NY, USA: ACM, 2010), 137–44, <https://doi.org/10.1145/1709886.1709911>.

<sup>90</sup> Robles and Wiberg, 130.

<sup>91</sup> Robles and Wiberg, 143.

“Dress is everywhere. It is our primary interface with our changing environments and transmits and responds to emotions, experiences, and meanings... We dress with our technologies now, sometimes as subjects but often as agents.”<sup>92</sup> Using computation, wearables clearly gain some form of agency—they can act and react to other beings and the environment around them. This nonhuman agency then becomes embodied as it accompanies or incorporates with the human: “What is the real potential for wearables as performative acts of embodied sociality,” writes Ryan, “in a world where our communal spaces, the traditional context for dress, are increasingly fictionalized, virtualized, and dematerialized?”<sup>93</sup>

In order to allow materials to have agency, humans need access points, points of embodied relation between two agents. These points of relation diverge from currently held ontologies by creating an opening for potential agency without a human. Wearables allow the “texture” of interaction, the site of relation, between humans and computers to emerge. What Ryan calls “embodied sociality” can be applied to the relationship between computers and humans as both exercise agency.<sup>94</sup>

For HCI to truly allow a “material agency”, it must lose its elevation of the human over the nonhuman. HCI allows the human agency and but not the computer. The site of “interaction” with a wearable is both human and computer simultaneously and equally. In this era of ubiquitous computing, the field of wearables blurs the physical and agential separation between computer and human. Facilitating computer agency through the beinghood of materials themselves could transform computation into a more ethical technology.

Alternative ontologies are necessary to develop material agency in HCI. Materials exist not only in our interactions with them; they are not created in a void of relation.<sup>95</sup> Materials can be alive with their own relations and contexts apart from human perception and influence.<sup>96</sup> Indigenous ontologies provides a window on the possibilities of true nonhuman agency, provided by cultures and communities who already have grounded and contextual communications with nonhuman beings.

## 3.0 Research and Theory

### 3.1 Research Statement

The purpose of my research is to understand Lakhóta ontology through collaborative artmaking that explores Lakhóta relationships to nonhuman beings. I conduct this research through the creation and use of digital technologies for performance, including Artificial Intelligence. The outcome of this collaborative and creative research process is the development of Lakhóta research-creation methodologies for developing relationships with computational technologies. This process draws from the concept of “Good Way” to guide the creation and refinement of

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<sup>92</sup> Ryan, *Garments of Paradise*. 11.

<sup>93</sup> Ryan, 3.

<sup>94</sup> Ryan, 3.

<sup>95</sup> Jason Edward Lewis, Noelani Arista, Archer Pechawis, and Suzanne Kite, “Making Kin with the Machines.”

<sup>96</sup> Harvey, *Animism*.

digital technology to support the performance works created in collaboration with Lakhóta community.

### 3.2 Research Questions

The following questions inform my overall research-creation project:

- How do I make artwork in a Good Way?
- How do I make artwork with AI in a Good Way?
- From a Lakhóta perspective, what should the human relationship with Artificial Intelligence be?
- How can Lakhóta ontologies contribute to the conversation regarding humans and AI?
- What frameworks are necessary to design and build ethical relationships between humans and AI?

And more specifically to each community of study:

- What is the ontological status of beings and materials in this community?
- How is information about this ontology shared in this community?
- How do you make something in a “Good Way” in this community?

### 3.3 Theoretical Framework

#### 3.3.1 Good Way

In Section 1.3, I introduced Good Way as the term Lakhóta people use to refer to choices one makes in the path of life, attitudes towards others during conflict, or protocols which grow or maintain healthy relationships. I use Good Way in this dissertation as the ethic that frames my theoretical engagement with Lakhóta ways of knowing and creating new knowledge.

#### 3.3.2 Embodied Knowledge-making

The theoretical framework of this dissertation centres on Lakhóta artwork as embodied knowledge making. In 2.2 Nonhuman Ontologies, I discussed how we can understand the agency of nonhumans such as stones through the teachings of my maternal grandfather, Maḥpíya Nážiṅ (Standing Cloud/Bill Stover),<sup>97</sup> articulated with the terminology of Descola and Posthumus. Within Lakhóta communities, lived, embodied experience creates, articulates, and moves knowledge of the mundane, the sacred, and the in-between. A core aspect of this living, embodied knowledge is that it is generated through an ontology that understands the beinghood of nonhumans and recognizes how knowledge is generated by human beings in collaboration with nonhuman beings.

Lakhóta embodied experiences include body-centred acts of creation. I developed a framework for body-centred acts of creation through interviews with Lakhóta singer Severt Young Bear, Sr.

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<sup>97</sup> Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture*, 2013; Posthumus, *All My Relatives* (2018); Suzanne Kite and Maḥpíya Nážiṅ, “It’s Not Done Through Our Mind, It’s Done Through Our Spirit.”

Young Bear articulates a clear relationship between the body and Lakhóta knowledge-making,<sup>98</sup> which makes it impossible to express some Lakhóta knowledge without body-centered acts of creation. Lakhóta artworks can be dreamed through the body, made with the body, interpreted in the body, and worn on the body. The Lakhóta cosmologyscape is understood as a perspective of the world viewed through the body and generated through the relationship between one's body and spirit in relation to land and cosmos. The inseparability of mind and body and the links between creative practice and knowledge production led to the creative collaborative methodology between humans and nonhumans in my research.

### 3.3.3 Lakhóta Artwork as Embodied Knowledge-making

Lakhóta ceremonies, singing, storytelling, discussion, and oration are examples of body-centred acts of knowledge creation. Embodiment requires context, provided by land, cosmologies, histories, and nonhumans on that land. Land establishes its own ground truth. In philosopher Jim Cheney's text "Postmodern Environmental Ethics," he describes how beings are defined through the land using the concept of "bioregional ethics": "What has emerged is a conception of bioregional truth, local truth, or ethical vernacular...bioregionalism can 'ground' the construction of self and community without the essentialization and totalization typical of the various 'groundings' of patriarchal culture."<sup>99</sup> The land and its nonhuman inhabitants speak to humans, in the communication of values and extreme depth of knowledge made clear by place and our intimacies with it. These contexts are entwined with embodied knowledge and the possibilities of its ethical creation.

The body-centred act of singing is, to Severt Young Bear, Sr., the most "earthshaking" way of transmitting knowledge.<sup>100</sup> He says,

Song and dance can't really be separated. Even though I'll talk about one or the other, they're always connected. We never dance without singing and we rarely sing without dancing. The involvement of the whole body to us is part of the balance we look for in our lives. The body and voice are there along with the mind and the heart.<sup>101</sup>

This inseparability of body and voice is central to Lakhóta knowledge creation and transmission and anchors the research-creation methodologies used in this research.

I use my body to navigate computationally generated visual and sonic landscapes using wearable electronics. I develop these wearables drawing on the history and practice of Lakhóta design, production and use of clothing items used in ceremonial contexts. In the early 1900s, Christian deacon and former Lakhóta holy man George Sword discussed the animacy and agency of shamans' outfits: "[t]he secrets of the shamans I am afraid to write, for I have my old outfit as a shaman, and I am afraid to offend it; if a shaman offends his ceremonial outfit, it will bring

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<sup>98</sup> Jolene Rickard, "Sovereignty: A Line in the Sand," *Aperture*, no. 139, (1995): 50–59; Cheney, "Postmodern Environmental Ethics," 1989; Young Bear, *Standing in the Light: A Lakota Way of Seeing* (University of Nebraska Press, 1996).

<sup>99</sup> Cheney, "Postmodern Environmental Ethics," 1989, 18.

<sup>100</sup> Bear, *Standing in the Light*, 7.

<sup>101</sup> Bear, *Standing in the Light*, 38.

disaster upon him.”<sup>102</sup> This quote has had a powerful effect on my understanding of the nonhuman agency of the objects we make. I have come to understand that such outfits are a co-creation between us and the nonhumans (bison, deer, plant medicine, eagles) that provide the materials, as the nonhumans have covenants and longstanding relationships with humans, discussed in 2.2 Nonhuman Ontologies, with “medicine bundles, regalia, weapons...the potential for personhood was ever present.”<sup>103</sup>

This has informed the development of my performance wearables, indicating the possibility of nonhuman agency which physically and spiritually influences the human world. Wearables illustrate the blurred lines between communication *with* the nonhuman and *through* the nonhuman and the necessity of the human body in the creation and understanding of any kind of knowledge.

### 3.4 Embodied Knowledge and Embodied Art-making

Through an embodied art-making practice, I understand the Good Way, and how it relates to the pursuit of knowledge that is of use to my community and myself. I understand how this knowledge is pursued through embodied practices, many of which we see in a Western context as creative or cultural practices, but I now see are also knowledge practices. Further, I understand that embodied knowledge is not just created by human beings but also by nonhuman beings, and the collaboration between the two is central to the Lakhóta creative process. The wearable performance instruments I created over the course of this research-creation project should be considered potential agential nonhumans with whom I am collaborating. This extends to the machine learning software used to drive the wearables, offering new possibilities for thinking about the larger question of our relationship to artificial intelligence.

## 4.0 Methodology

### 4.1 Introduction

The work of this dissertation required employing both Indigenous methodologies and research-creation methodologies. This meant establishing the connections, overlaps, and discontinuities between them. Research-creation methodology has many intersections with Indigenous research methodologies, including complex relationships to positivism, the scientific method and quantitative research; an interest in how knowledge is constructed outside of academic norms; and an embrace of hybridity where the “theoretical, technical and creative” can be pursued simultaneously.<sup>104</sup>

Both Indigenous methodologies and research-creation methodologies challenge what Owen Chapman and Kim Sawchuk call the “regime of truth.” In “Research-Creation: Intervention, Analysis and Family Resemblances” they write,

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<sup>102</sup> Walker, Lakhóta Belief and Ritual, 75.

<sup>103</sup> Posthumus, *All My Relatives* (2018), 5.

<sup>104</sup> Chapman, Owen B., and Kim Sawchuk. “Research-Creation: Intervention, Analysis and ‘Family Resemblances.’” *Canadian Journal of Communication*; Vol 37, No 1 (2012): 6.

By breaching the ‘regime of truth’ that is perceived to operate within the setting of the university, research-creation demonstrates the constructed nature of that regime in relation to any form of scholarship, its privileging of quantitative methods of knowledge production, the institutionalized and bureaucratic reality of funding opportunities, and the conservatism of many publication venues.<sup>105</sup>

Such regimes of truth tend to be intolerant of Indigenous methodologies and the knowledges they produce. The result is that institutional pathways of knowledge production contain roadblocks for research with and by Indigenous people inside academia.

Indigenous and research-creation methodologies differ in that the former prioritizes Indigenous cultural protocols. Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith writes, “Indigenous methodologies tend to approach cultural protocols, values and behaviours as an integral part of methodology.”<sup>106</sup> Indigenous cultural protocols are community-specific, community-grounded and community-responsible.

A community-*specific* protocol I experienced during my research was the telling of family genealogy. Multiple interviews of Lakhóta community members included genealogy research, genealogy stories and genealogy recitation. This is information specific to the Oglála Lakhóta community which defines from whom and from where knowledge is coming.

A community-*grounded* protocol was the sharing of meals. All Lakhóta community events, traditional or contemporary, require the sharing of a meal with others. I participated in this protocol at funerals, graduations, and ceremonies, and myself provided meals for multiple in-person interviews. This protocol grounds the activity in the Lakhóta value of Wówačhaŋtognake (generosity), offering community members care and sustenance and the ability to provide Watéča (food to take home).

A community-*responsible* protocol is the offering of tobacco to those from whom we are seeking knowledge. I experienced this during an interview with Mary Blackbird and Santee Witt. The offering of tobacco shows that knowledge is valuable and that nonhumans are involved in the movement circulation of knowledge. Mary Blackbird began the interview by accepting the tobacco and smoking some of it, offering it to the spirit world, the smoke carrying prayers upward.

These protocols embody an ethics grounded in respect, reciprocity, and responsibility to the community before, during and after research. The research in this dissertation has been conducted according to Indigenous research methodologies and local community protocols that prioritize building consensual and reciprocal relationships with one’s interviewees. As a member of the Lakhóta community, I have a responsibility to maintain Lakhóta values before, during and after my research because my accountability to my community does not end when my research ends. It is a lifelong commitment.

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<sup>105</sup> Chapman and Sawchuk, 23.

<sup>106</sup> Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies - Research And Indigenous Peoples*, 5th printed ed. (London: Zed Books, 2002), 15.

## 4.2 Indigenous Methodologies

### 4.2.1 Indigenous Methodologies

The main Indigenous methodologies utilized in this dissertation were listening, sharing, and creating. In what follows I discuss methods in a way that offers points of contact with standard scholarly traditions of thinking about these concepts. However, I approach these methods foremost as they are enacted through lived Lakhóta experience. Lakhóta knowledge is acquired and shared through many methods: song writing, singing, imagining, listening, sharing, gifting, and art-making. I chose to primarily focus on listening, sharing, and creating because of how each can encompass multiple practices.

Which method I emphasized shifted over the course of the field studies as I incorporated feedback from the communities with which I was working. Methodology, the means by which I studied, became intertwined with what I was studying. The researcher-subject distinction quickly blurred during the process of listening and sharing with community members while simultaneously making artworks involving them, due to the situated nature of Lakhóta knowledge.

### 4.2.2 Positivism

The core Indigenous methodologies of sharing and creating are discussed by Smith in *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. They appear as part of her list of possible methodologies to employ with Indigenous communities. That list as a whole shaped my approach to collaborating with my family, Santee Witt, and others, and provides a means of rooting the artworks in our conversations.

Smith's book examines both the history and philosophy of Western research and how it is intertwined with the history of colonization. She provides counter-practices for Indigenous researchers to push back against Western paradigms of knowledge creation and mobilization. Smith breaks down the established "rules" of the colonial regime of knowledge and critiques "facts" and "truth" and the Western constructions of "time" and "space."<sup>107</sup> She writes, "They are not simply struggles over 'facts' and 'truth'; the rules by which these struggles take place are never clear...and we are not the final arbiters of what really counts as truth."<sup>108</sup> This approach demeans forms of knowledge and knowledge creation in Indigenous communities.

Indigenous methodologies foreground how the researcher is made more knowledgeable by their relationships and accountability to others. Shawn Wilson, in *Research is Ceremony*, discusses how to include relational accountability within research methods. He argues that "the shared aspect of an Indigenous ontology and epistemology is relationality...[t]he shared aspects of relationality and relational accountability can be put into practice through choice of research topic, methods of data collection, form of analysis and presentation of information."<sup>109</sup> Like Smith, Wilson connects positivism with Western concepts of truth. He writes, "Methodology from this paradigm [positivism] uses experiments to dissect and manipulate the smallest

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<sup>107</sup> Smith.

<sup>108</sup> Smith, 33.

<sup>109</sup> Shawn Wilson, *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (Black Point, NS: Fernwood Publishing, 2009), 7.

controllable bits of nature...in an attempt to discover the truth, with the ultimate goal of predicting and controlling reality.”<sup>110</sup> The methodologies used to create knowledge are the methodologies used to create truth. The desire to control reality creates an epistemological hierarchy with the control of other beings, especially the ability to control who gets to be a “being,” in turn creating an ontological hierarchy.

### 4.2.3 Methods in this Dissertation

#### *Listening*

I map listening-as-method to protocols in Lakhóta communities for listening to elders and knowledge keepers. This form of specifically Lakhóta listening is described by my grandfather in the following passage:

The ears are a mind thing. When you hear the spirit talk, it’s not through your ears. It’s through your spirit. You hear everything they say, loud and clear...I’m trying to teach people how to listen with that and not with these, ears or mind, because what happens with our mind is it’s been so cluttered with human stuff every day that there’s no room for the real stuff that’s supposed to be there. That’s like somebody interpreting from their minds. If you interpret from your mind, usually you interpret wrong and that hurts that person. These things aren’t about hurting people. They’re only about helping another to achieve their goal or achieve health or achieve things that they need so that they can accomplish what they came to this earth for.<sup>111</sup>

Listening, then, is through the spirit. One can see this clearly in Oglála Lakhóta religious practices such as listening to elders and listening to spirits. It is this specifically Lakhóta form of listening that I want to engage with as a method to listen to nonhuman beings, valuing the knowledge different beings want to share.

#### *Sharing*

Sharing is a community-centered method that includes community members in reciprocal ways. I draw sharing-as-method from Smith: “Sharing is a responsibility of research. The technical term for this is the dissemination of results, usually very boring to non-researchers, very technical and very cold. For indigenous researchers sharing is about demystifying knowledge and information and speaking in plain terms to the community.”<sup>112</sup> It was an ongoing concern to ensure that the knowledge I gained through this process be shareable—legible, meaningful—with my community and other Indigenous communities.

I refined my understanding of sharing-as-method as I learned more about protocol in Lakhóta communities for sharing meals, discussions, and care with family and community. I became particularly interested in Lakhóta sharing practices involving singing and song writing. *Standing in the Light*, written by Severt Young Bear, Sr., informed my understanding.<sup>113</sup> Given my

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<sup>110</sup> Shawn Wilson, *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*, 35.

<sup>111</sup> Suzanne Kite and Maḥpiya Nážiŋ, “It’s Not Done Through Our Mind, It’s Done Through Our Spirit”: 52-61.

<sup>112</sup> Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies - Research And Indigenous Peoples*. 161.

<sup>113</sup> Most sections of this book begin and end with Young Bear Sr. acknowledging that information is missing from his account due to colonial ruptures such as residential schools, American government interference, and poor tribal leadership. It is important to keep these gaps in mind while trying to understand Lakhóta philosophy.



interest in performance practices, I focus on Young Bear, Sr.'s description of the roles taken by the *wičháša-wakhán* (head singer) in Lakhóta society and how singing and signwriting generate and share knowledge. Young Bear, Sr. says, "If I sing a song, then it becomes an earthshaking thing; if I say a couple of words that have meaning, then it becomes an earthshaking thing, shaking other people's minds or hearts."<sup>114</sup> The movement of knowledge through the singer transforms the song or words to create a powerful effect on the listener. His quote illustrates how song writing and singing are ethical methodological frameworks for the creation of new knowledge and the movement of knowledge through culture. In my community, sharing songs is grounded in Lakhóta religious and secular life, and creates and maintains reciprocal relationships between singers, listeners, and those learning the songs.

### *Creating*

Smith writes about creation-as-method as well:

The project of creating is about transcending the basic survival mode through using a resource or capability which every indigenous community has retained throughout colonization—the ability to create and be creative. The project of creating is not just about the artistic endeavours of individuals but about the spirit of creating which indigenous communities have exercised over thousands of years.<sup>115</sup>

The Lakhóta-community values art-making as a method for knowledge production and circulating. Painting, drawing, and beadwork are skills required for community events such as giveaways and for the creation of regalia. Regalia contains family designs, moving knowledge across generations.

### *Methodology Diagrams*

I was inspired to visualize Lakhóta methodology by Noelani Goodyear-Ka'ōpua's chapter "Reproducing the Ropes of Resistance: Hawaiian Studies Methodologies." She uses culturally relevant metaphors to draw Hawaiian ethics and values into academic research practice. She created a series of diagrams to illustrate how these four "strands" or "aho" form the methodological rope of Hawaiian studies research (Figure 4). She captions the diagram "Methodological Ropes for Research and Resurgence," writing "We can think about lāhui (collective identity and self-definition), ea (sovereignty and leadership), kuleana (positionality and obligations), and pono (harmonious relationships, justice, and healing) as central commitments and lines of inquiry that are hallmarks of Hawaiian studies research."<sup>116</sup> She uses a braiding metaphor to describe how these concepts can be envisioned as together *and* separate: "Each of these four principles could...be seen as 'aho,' single cords, that when braided together form what political scholar and poet, Haunani-Kay Trask, describes as a 'rope of resistance.'" <sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Young Bear and Theisz, 7.

<sup>115</sup> Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies - Research And Indigenous Peoples*. 158.

<sup>116</sup> Noelani Goodyear-Ka'ōpua, "Reproducing the Ropes of Resistance: Hawaiian Studies Methodologies," in *Kanaka 'O'iwi Methodologies* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.21313/hawaii/9780824855857.003.0001>. 2.

<sup>117</sup> Goodyear-Ka'ōpua. 2.



Figure 4: "Methodological Ropes for Research and Resurgence" from *Reproducing the Ropes of Resistance: Hawaiian Studies Methodologies* by Noelani Goodyear-Ka'ōpua

Given how well this diagram clarified Goodyear-Ka'ōpua's metaphor and made her intent accessible, I developed my own method diagrams to visualize the nonlinear processes, the importance of cultural protocol, and the holistic understanding of human in relation to land and cosmos in Lakhóta methodologies. These diagrams provide a way for me to express the methods I learned and developed using a visual language based on Lakhóta designs. My hope is that they will make the methodological outcomes of the research accessible to those in my community and other Indigenous communities.

### 4.3 Research-Creation Methodology

Research-creation methodologies recognize that art can create knowledge and allow the researcher to operate outside of normative methods. They align substantially with Indigenous methodologies, given that both understand how art practices can also be knowledge practices.

#### 4.3.1 Art Creates Knowledge

In the introduction to "Polemics, Short Statements on Research-Creation," contemporary art scholar Natalie Loveless states "research-creation uses 'art to create knowledge rather than...knowledge to create art'...To use 'knowledge to create art' is a longstanding studio (and post-studio) practice."<sup>118</sup> Methods of research-creation are methods which create, articulate, circulate, and share knowledge in forms beyond text.

Arts education scholar James Haywood Rolling asks us to consider how research-creation methodologies question what is knowable, expanding the definition of what research pursues.<sup>119</sup> He claims that methodology is the enactment of the question, "What is the nature of the

<sup>118</sup> Natalie S. Loveless, "Towards a Manifesto on Research-Creation," *RACAR: Revue d'art Canadienne / Canadian Art Review* 40, no. 1 (2015): 52–54.

<sup>119</sup> Rolling, James Haywood. *Arts-Based Research Primer*. Peter Lang Primers. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2013.

relationship between the knower (the inquirer) and the known (or knowable)?”<sup>120</sup> Rolling continues, “Epistemologies constructed within an arts-based ontology, or worldview, tend to approach knowledge acquisition as occurring within a changing world where persons and phenomena do not always follow the rules.”<sup>121</sup> The definition of research can be expanded to include art’s ability to grapple with the unknowable. This provides a scholarly means to grapple with the unknowable as it is experienced with the Lakḥóta community.

### 4.3.2 Beyond Normative Methods

Research-creation methodologies allow the researcher to pursue knowledge the blurs or exceeds the normative boundary between quantitative and qualitative research. Instead, research-creation offers hybrid knowledge-making methods. Rolling asserts that arts-based research

...is neither wholly quantitative nor qualitative, but instead carves out overlaps and burrows between domains, thereby extending the array of questions researchers may address and the methods or terms they may use to explain them—enriching the gene pool of knowledge in terms of differences in ways of knowing.<sup>122</sup>

Such methods equip us to ask diverse and knowledge expanding questions that might otherwise be difficult to answer using normative academic methods.

Creating knowledge outside normative research methods not only expands Western systems of knowledge but challenges those systems and the institutions which uphold them. Chapman and Sawchuk position research-creation as “epistemological intervention into the ‘regime of truth’ of the university.”<sup>123</sup> This challenge to normative ways of creating knowledge is the result of not only hybridizing qualitative and quantitative methods but also of the contribution of multiple epistemological dimensions. They state, “In research-creation approaches, the theoretical, technical, and creative aspects of a research project are pursued in tandem, and quite often, scholarly form and decorum are broached and breeched in the name of experimentation.”<sup>124</sup>

In my research I have utilized theoretical, technical, and creative methods to approach the knowable and the unknowable. The unknowable retreats from methods of capture and is never fully graspable. Although Western research methodologies desire to apprehend the unknowable, the unknowable is precious because it is unattainable. In the artworks I have created, such as *Wógligleya (Thunḱášila Čečiyelo)*, I develop a compositional system that includes Lakḥóta values of the unknowability of dreams. Section 5.4.4 includes an artwork that synthesizes unknowable questions of interaction and decision-making, *Napé okičhiyuspa okáwiñḥ wačhíunḥiyayapi. (Holding hands we encircle each other in dance.)* I have simultaneously pursued theoretical discussions with interviewees, creating sound and visual artworks while working on machine-learning compositional tools. These methods have allowed for the creation of new knowledge while pursuing the unknowable.

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<sup>120</sup> Rolling, 4.

<sup>121</sup> Rolling, 4.

<sup>122</sup> Rolling, 8.

<sup>123</sup> Chapman and Sawchuk, 6.

<sup>124</sup> Chapman and Sawchuk, 6.

#### 4.4 From Visual Sovereignty to Bringing Technology into Our Circle of Relations

##### Methods of Visual Sovereignty

The following section discusses three Indigenous contemporary art methodologies which enact “visual sovereignty” through relations with communities of humans or nonhumans. Rickard uses the term “visual sovereignty” for her theory of Indigenous visual communication which enacts Indigenous legal sovereignty and separation from the settler nation-state. She writes, “As part of an ongoing strategy for survival, the work of indigenous artists needs to be understood through the clarifying lens of sovereignty and self-determination, not just in terms of assimilation, colonization, and identity politics.”<sup>125</sup> In “Sovereignty: A Line in the Sand,” Rickard argues,

Sovereignty is the border that shifts indigenous experience from a victimized stance to a strategic one. The recognition of this puts brains in our heads, and muscle on our bones... Yet if I were to throw the term sovereignty out there at your basic Indian art opening, it would plummet to the floor, weighted down by ambiguity. One may wonder if the issue of sovereignty belongs in the cultural debate.<sup>126</sup>

Rickard continues that art is the “deployment of tradition as strategic cultural resistance.”<sup>127</sup> I understand “visual sovereignty” as encompassing newer technologies as well as so-called ‘traditional’ practices. After all, any of our traditions are technologies themselves, enacting and transmitting values. Newer technologies can transmit the same values.<sup>128</sup> Our traditions and technologies grow and change together through Indigenous acts of imagination and innovation.

The methods utilized to create these relationships are diverse. Contemporary Indigenous artists embrace, challenge, and investigate sovereignty through experimentation and exploration of relationships between themselves and objects, humans, governments, communities, animals, plants, spirits, computers, networks, artificial intelligences, and more. Freely practicing our relation-making with the world is one way of enacting our diverse sovereignties and maintaining—and ever widening—our “circle of relations.”

##### *Circle of Relations*

Artist, technologist, and scholar Jackson 2Bears sees the Indigenous creation of new technologies as taking place in the circle of relations. In “My Post-Indian Technological Autobiography,” Jackson 2Bears connects Little Bear’s thinking to digital technologies:

Leroy Little Bear once wrote that the Indigenous experience of life involved a belief in the “sacredness, livingness and the soul of the world...all things being animate, space/place, renewal, and all things being imbued with spirit.” For us this applies, not only to obviously living things like animals and plants, but equally to seemingly

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<sup>125</sup> Jolene Rickard, “Sovereignty: A Line in the Sand,” *Aperture*, no. 139, (1995): 50–59.

<sup>126</sup> Rickard, 52.

<sup>127</sup> Rickard.

<sup>128</sup> “Predominant Western perspectives have tended to view the Indigenous traditional culture and modern technology interface as a paradox. However, Indigenous peoples have shown through their adaptation of technology that their dynamic cultures do not remain encapsulated in the past, static and resistant to development.” Greg Young-Ing, “The Indigenous/New Technology Interface,” in *Transference, Tradition, Technology* (Banff: Walter Phillips Gallery Editions, 2005), 178–88.

inanimate things like mountains, rivers, and human-made artifacts — such is the way we often understand technology, as something alive and filled with spirit, something with which we are interconnected in what Little Bear called a “circle of relations,” and something that is a part of a universe of “active entities with which people engage.”<sup>129</sup>

2Bears suggests we can understand all technologies, even new technologies, as being alive and filled with spirit, something to invite into our circle or relations. No tool is static in time nor are people or concepts. But colonization attempts to freeze Indigenous people in the past, as unevolved and incapable of partaking in the ontological progression of the Western world. Indigenous sovereignty is refusing to let ourselves or our tools be placed anywhere but where we are, here and now, in the present. Indigenous self-determination, including legal, philosophical, and visual forms of sovereignty, is integral from our communities’ practices and philosophies defining and enacting relations.

The possibilities of “visual sovereignty” can be illustrated using Algonquin visual artist Nadia Myre’s artistic methodologies, Lakhóta dreaming methodologies, and Lakhóta designer Sadie Red Wing’s Shape Kit methodology. These examples guide my understanding of what methods contemporary Indigenous artists use to engage and collaborate with communities, whether they are Indigenous or non-Indigenous publics or nonhuman beings in the dream or spirit world. I use these methods of community collaboration, dreaming and shape kit as expressions of a Lakhóta “visual sovereignty” in my research-creation.

#### 4.4.1 Nadia Myre’s Participatory Methodology

Myre’s artworks such as *The Scar Project* (2002) and *Indian Act* (2005—2013) use community relations, beading and storytelling to effectively communicate a visual and philosophical sovereignty.<sup>130 131</sup> *The Scar Project* is a gallery-based participatory artwork where participants are invited to contribute a visual of one of their scars. Art critic Amanda Jane Graham writes, “The unpredictability of *The Scar Project* imbues it with a dynamism lacking in an artwork created, and completed, by a singular artist...What a scar means, and how it can be represented, is determined by the collective.”<sup>132</sup> Myre’s collective artmaking strategy allows the public to create the project, with her acting as a facilitator. Facilitating an Indigenous and non-Indigenous public to create a collective artwork and installation decenters her decision making. Graham continues, “Myre does not record participant reactions. She has designed her project so that the canvas scars and scar narratives are the time capsule of a moment during which individuals forged temporary bonds.”<sup>133</sup> Like a performance, this workshop is time based, ceasing to exist after its conclusion. Participants’ scars are what remains, a visual representation of the relationships which were created during the workshop, a lived collective and communal

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<sup>129</sup> Jackson 2Bears, “My Post-Indian Technological Autobiography,” in *Coded Territories: Tracing Indigenous Pathways in New Media Art*, (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2014), 14.

<sup>130</sup> Nadia Myre, “*The Scar Project* 2005-2013,” accessed October 30, 2018, <http://www.nadiamyre.net/thescarproject/>.

<sup>131</sup> Nadia Myre, “*Indian Act, 2002*,” accessed October 30, 2018, <http://www.nadiamyre.net/indian-act/>.

<sup>132</sup> Amanda Jane Graham, “Participatory Art, Engaged Scholarship: The Embedded Critic in Nadia Myre’s Scar Project,” in *Collaborative Futures: Critical Reflections on Publicly Active Graduate Education* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2012), 383.

<sup>133</sup> Graham, 383.

“now” experienced later only as memory. The movement and creation are physical and visual, allowing participants’ scars to be both ephemeral and lasting. By the end of an installation, *The Scar Project* is collectively authored yet still the product of Myer’s assertion of visual sovereignty.

In a similar method, *Indian Act* (Figure 5) invited participants to hand-stitch over pages of Canada’s *Indian Act* (*An Act to amend and consolidate the laws respecting Indians*) in red and white beads.<sup>134</sup> <sup>135</sup> The *Indian Act* (law) is the set of laws central to the Canadian government’s interactions to First Nations, having been used to perpetuate genocide of Indigenous peoples since its adoption in 1876. Myer’s methods engage beading as a traditional Indigenous artmaking technique and the collective agency and effort of participants’ hands. Art historian Carmen Robertson writes,

Richard Hill commented that Myer’s act of replacing words with beads “speaks eloquently of cultural difference and the estrangement of the language of the Indian Act from those it is meant to govern”... the sewing in the *Indian Act’s* as an expression of collective experience that elicits agential change.<sup>136</sup>

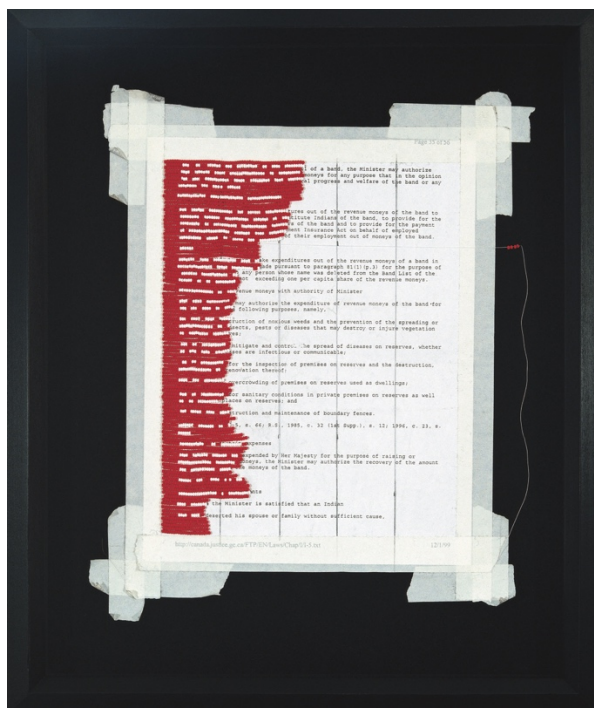


Figure 5: Nadia Myer, *Indian Act*, 2000-2002

<sup>134</sup> Legislative Services Branch, “Consolidated Federal Laws of Canada, Indian Act,” August 15, 2019, <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/i-5/>.

<sup>135</sup> Myer, “Indian Act, 2002.”

<sup>136</sup> Carmen Robertson, “Land and Beaded Identity: Shaping Art Histories of Indigenous Women of the Flatland,” *RACAR: Revue d’art Canadienne* 42, no. 2 (2017): 5–12, <https://doi.org/10.7202/1042942ar>.

Over the course of an installation, the words of the *Indian Act* (law) are obfuscated by many people, Indigenous and not, working bead by bead. In this way, the *Indian Act*'s language is transformed collectively through physical movement—many hands working towards a common political statement—all framed and contextualized by Myre's practice—forming an expression of Indigenous visual sovereignty.

#### 4.4.2 Dreaming Relations in Lakhóta Beadwork

Within a contemporary Lakhóta art context, visual sovereignty is expressed through dreams or visions about relationships with nonhumans in the spirit world.<sup>137</sup> Posthumus writes, “Dreams and vision were key avenues for social interaction with nonhuman spirit persons, through whom humans acquired knowledge (woslolye) and power (wowasake) in the form of medicine (pezehuta).”<sup>138</sup> Communication with nonhumans in dreams was considered more “real” than waking life<sup>139</sup>, and knowledge was sought in dreams to be communicated in the waking world. Posthumus continues, “The virtual reality of dreams provided access to the domain of nonhuman spirit persons, pure interiorities, where appearances were not always what they seemed.”<sup>140</sup> These “pure interiorities” means that the spirit world is the clearest channel of knowledge which humans can access.

In Lakhóta communities, artists are given the designs for their artwork in dreams. This practice is associated with the figure of Double Woman. “Women who dreamed of the mythical Double Women ever after possessed extraordinary or mysterious (wakan) abilities in the arts and crafts, in particular producing beautiful quillwork,” writes Posthumus. “This ability and status was conferred by nonhuman spirits encountered in dreams and visions.”<sup>141</sup>

Contemporary Lakhóta bead-workers maintain this connection to the spirit of Double Woman as well as other spirits, drawing from visions and dreams to create their work.<sup>142</sup> Dreams and vision are an ancient method of knowledge creation which mobilizes relationships to the seen and unseen world, where artwork (in this case beadwork) is both a method (of connecting) and result (in this case images of Double Woman) between the two.

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<sup>137</sup> “Linguistically there is no distinction between dream and vision, the stem for both being ihánǵbla.” David C Posthumus, *All My Relatives: Exploring Lakhóta Ontology, Belief, and Ritual* (Lincoln : Philadelphia, PA: University of Nebraska Press, 2018, 143.

<sup>138</sup> Posthumus, *All My Relatives: Exploring Lakhóta Ontology, Belief, and Ritual*, 138.

<sup>139</sup> Posthumus, *All My Relatives: Exploring Lakhóta Ontology, Belief, and Ritual*, 142.

<sup>140</sup> Posthumus, *All My Relatives: Exploring Lakhóta Ontology, Belief, and Ritual*, 143.

<sup>141</sup> Posthumus, *All My Relatives: Exploring Lakhóta Ontology, Belief, and Ritual*, 142.

<sup>142</sup> Double Woman appears to women or men to deliver visions for the creation of art.



Figure 6: Lakshota beaded pipe bag<sup>143</sup>

Anthropologist Helene Wallaert writes,

Dreams and visions still play an active part in northern Plains craft making and fully participate in the elaboration of decorative designs. The mythical figure of Double Woman plays an important role in this process. However, the social purpose of dreams and visions sharing is largely diminished by the transformations of familial and cultural ties.<sup>144 145</sup>

In Wallaert's interview with "Jane", an pseudo-anonymous Lakshota artist, Jane says, "I am like a widow, mourning for the suffering of my People who still live under oppression. In that state of mind, I cannot work on my beads I can only fast, pray and visit our different ritual sites."<sup>146</sup> Wallaert goes on to describe how visions deeply affect Jane, often giving her a supernatural ability to work, but sometimes overwhelming her.<sup>147</sup> Jane is in relation to generations of bead-

<sup>143</sup> "This rare and unusual pipebag was probably the society's bag and has probably been created by a winkte. This Lakota Sioux pipe bag is braided with the image of two women in green. A braided ball containing medicine is attached at top of the flap." University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, *Lakota Sioux Pipe Bag*, March 1, 2010, photo, March 1, 2010, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/pennmuseum/4397860383/>.

<sup>144</sup> Hélène Wallaert, "Beads and a Vision: Waking Dreams and Induced Dreams as a Source of Knowledge for Beadwork Making. An Ethnographic Account from Sioux Country," *Plains Anthropologist* 51, no. 197 (February 1, 2006): 3–15, <https://doi.org/10.1179/pan.2006.001>.

<sup>145</sup> Wallaert, 3.

<sup>146</sup> Wallaert, 3.

<sup>147</sup> Wallaert.



workers, and in relation to the unseen spiritual world even as she lives a life of isolation. Jane's beadwork practice and vision methods enact Lakḥóta visual sovereignty through her communication with nonhumans in the spirit world.

#### 4.4.3 Lakḥóta Geometries: Methodology for Design

In traditional Lakḥóta art-making, beadwork designs can be read as ideograms, a language of symbols. These designs are common to the Lakḥóta visual culture; their method of creation, via dream or vision (they are the same word in Lakḥótayapi), allows us to see them as part of a process expressing Lakḥóta visual sovereignty.



Figure 7: Lakḥóta beaded pipe bag.<sup>148</sup>

#### *Lakḥóta Visual Language*

I became interested in Lakḥóta symbols after a discussion with my cousin Mary Bordeaux, artistic director of Racing Magpie Gallery. She told me about a man who came into the Red Cloud Heritage Center (an arts organization) when she was the curator. He had looked at an artifact, a decorated shirt which had Lakḥóta geometrics designs on it and said he could “read the shirt”.<sup>149</sup> Until that point, I understood these symbols had legible meaning, but I had not understood that legibility could form a narrative.

<sup>148</sup> “Plains Indian Pipe and Pipe Bag - Kansapedia - Kansas Historical Society,” accessed January 12, 2023, <https://www.kshs.org/kansapedia/plains-indian-pipe-and-pipe-bag/10135>.

<sup>149</sup> Conversation with Mary Bordeaux, July 25, 2018.

Sadie Red Wing considers Lakhóta geometric shapes a “visual language”, a collection of ideograms where each symbol signifies a concept, as seen in Figure 8.<sup>150</sup>

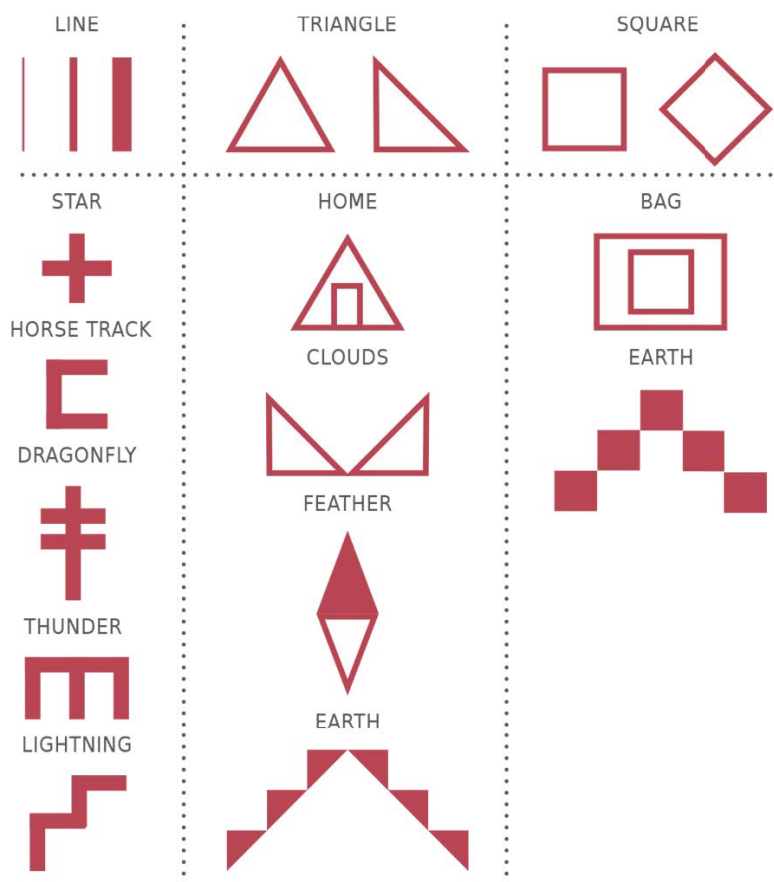


Figure 8: Sadie Red Wing's "Lakota Grammar Chart"<sup>151</sup>

While Lakhóta visual culture was not entirely or strictly gendered, generally women, or people who engage in activities often done by women, create geometric designs (Figure 9) while men create figure drawings such as spirits, horses, and people (Figure 10). Creating Lakhóta geometric designs is often done through dreaming.

<sup>150</sup> This has also been connected to the cult of the Double Woman and her ability to gift designs and skills for artists and singers, man or women, in dreams.

<sup>151</sup> “Learning the Traditional Lakota Visual Language through Shape Play by Sadie Red Wing - Issuu,” accessed September 6, 2022, [https://issuu.com/sadieredwing/docs/srw\\_thesis\\_2016](https://issuu.com/sadieredwing/docs/srw_thesis_2016).



Figure 9: Lakshóta quillwork vest containing Lakshóta visual language seen here in the symbols for eagles and tipis<sup>152</sup>

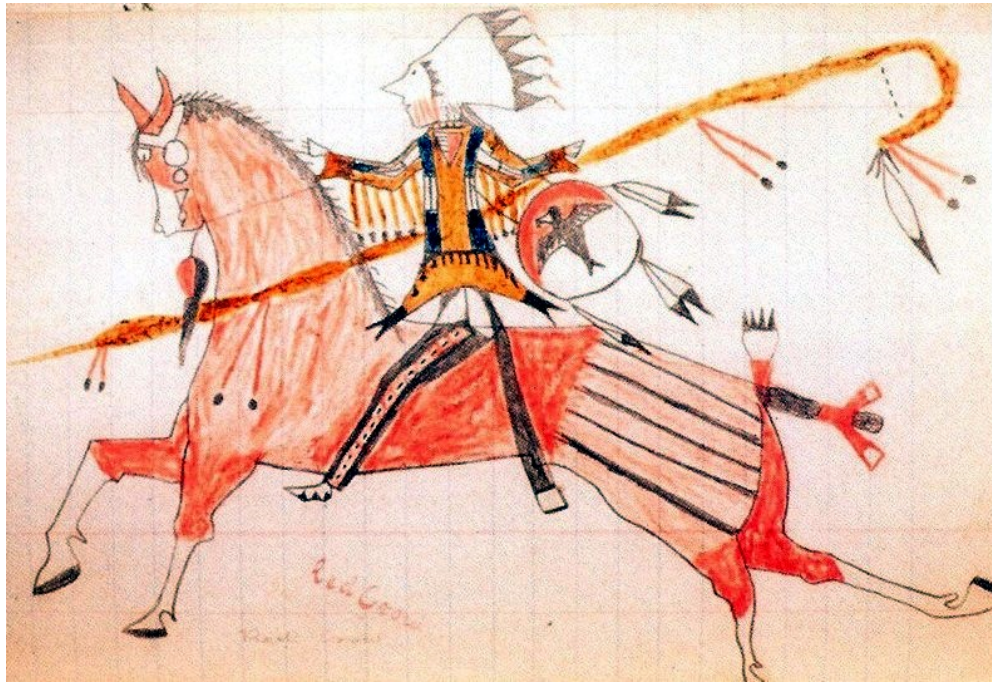


Figure 10: Lakshóta ledger art containing figure of horse and man.<sup>153</sup>

<sup>152</sup> “TREASURES OF THE IACB: LAKOTA VEST, CA. 1880,” August 8, 2019, <https://www.doi.gov/iacb/treasures-iacb-lakota-vest-ca-1880>.

<sup>153</sup> “Ledger Art,” in *Wikipedia*, December 29, 2022, [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Ledger\\_art&oldid=1130313033](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Ledger_art&oldid=1130313033).

### *Visual Shape Kit*

In the second field study, I utilize Red Wing's Lakhóta Shape Kit (LSK) (Figure 11), a methodology for creating designs using the Lakhóta visual language.

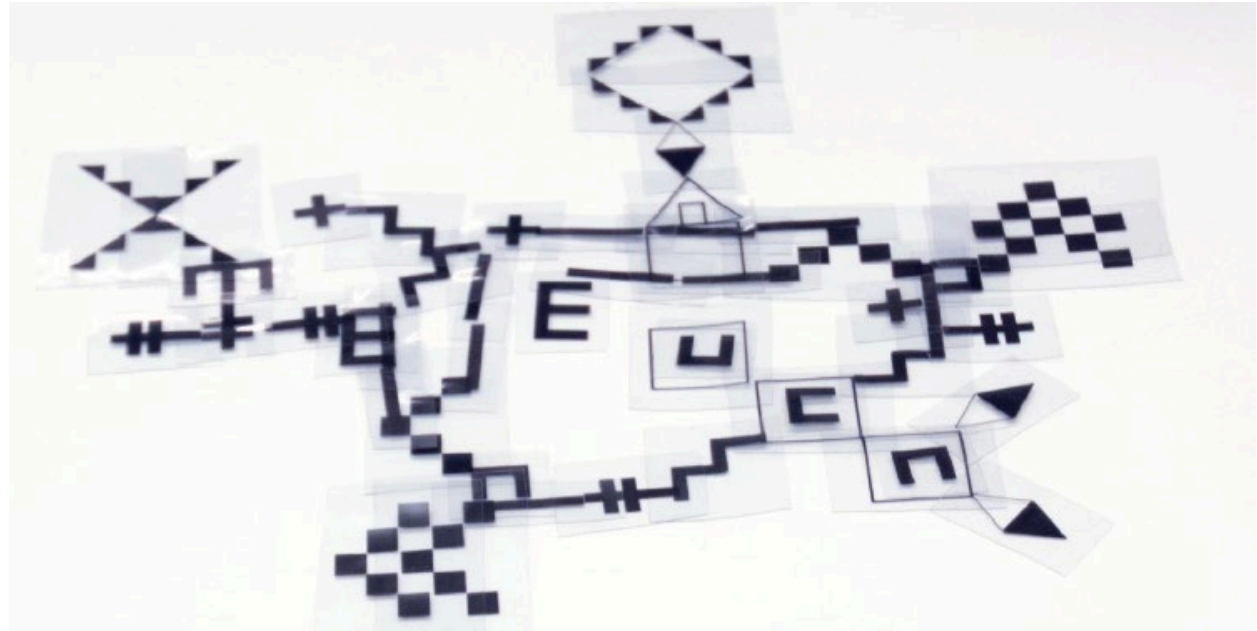


Figure 11: Sadie Red Wing's Lakota Shape Kit.<sup>154</sup>

Developed as part of Red Wing's Master's thesis<sup>155</sup>, the LSK was inspired by the following questions:

I [Red Wing] started to ask many questions. "Why do we have designs on a pipe bag, if it's specific for a man? And how do we document events through beadwork, if we're doing it through winter counts, drawings, ledger art?" And then, "Why does a symbol remind us of something? Does the design on a pipe bag help the pipe carrier remember that prayer that they're going to speak?" That prayer might be specific to them, so they might create either a pattern or a symbol, or if a family has a specific family history that is documented on. It's how we document to remember.<sup>156</sup>

On the status of these symbols as language, Red Wing goes on to say,

We didn't have a written language and because we've really communicated through symbols and that symbols could either be for our documentation or recording purposes to help us remember these wars or beautiful events, like wedding ceremonies or whatever it may be. It's not like the alphabet. There's more oral history in remembering what specific

<sup>154</sup> Red Wing, Sadie, "Learning the Traditional Lakhóta Visual Language through Shape Play" (Graphic Design Graduate Thesis, Raleigh, North Carolina, North Carolina State University, 2016), [https://issuu.com/sadieredwing/docs/srw\\_thesis\\_2016](https://issuu.com/sadieredwing/docs/srw_thesis_2016).

<sup>155</sup> Red Wing, Sadie, "Learning the Traditional Lakhóta Visual Language through Shape Play."

<sup>156</sup> Kite, Suzanne. "Wógligleya: Designs." In *For Zitkála-Šá*. Art Metropole, New Documents, 2022.

symbols mean, and we have a lot of respect for that. And again, it's not like typing ABCs. There's not a specific system.<sup>157</sup>

Red Wing argues that the way the message moves through the design is important as well, that the method of communication is just as intentional as the message:

There was a system of how a message was passed and carried. What was that system, this whole design area of communication, how do we get an important message across to a tribe that consists of 10,000 people? And how do we do that without computational technology? It's a little bit more than just smoke signals, because we are a smart people.<sup>158</sup>

Each symbol in the LSK is pictographic, bearing resemblance to the object it represents, in a layout dictated by the 90-degree and 45-degree angles required by the physical properties of quillwork. These symbols can also be combined into semantic compounds, such as cloud + lightning = thunderstorm as seen in Figure 12.<sup>159</sup>

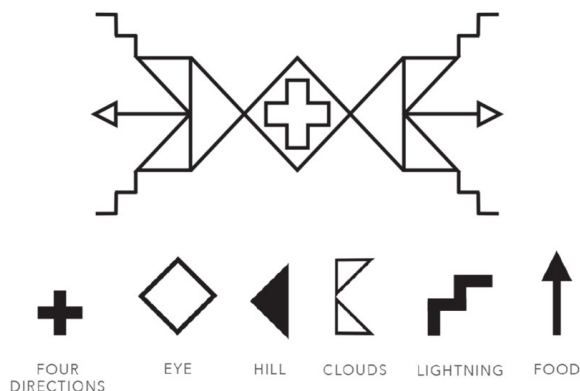


Figure 12: “Teton Logo and Shapes” from “Learning the Traditional Lakḥóta Visual Language through Shape Play,” Sadie Red Wing.

<sup>157</sup> Kite, “Wógligleya: Designs”, 33.

<sup>158</sup> Kite, “Wógligleya: Designs”, 33.

<sup>159</sup> Red Wing, Sadie, “Learning the Traditional Lakḥóta Visual Language through Shape Play.”

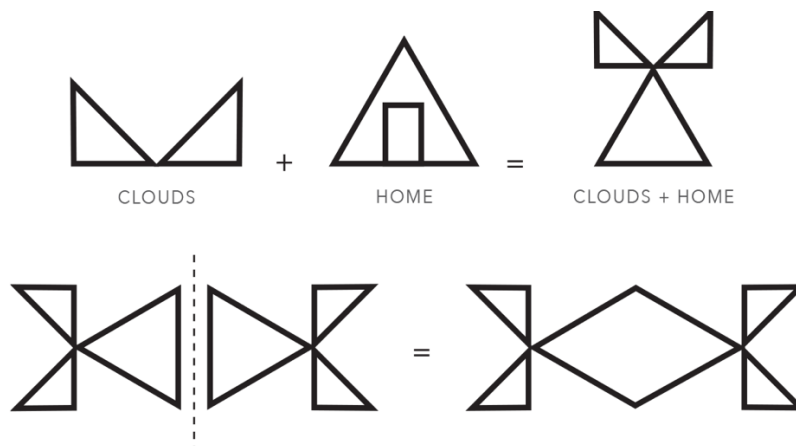


Figure 13: Sadie Red Wing's illustration of "Religious Place"<sup>160</sup>

#### *Lakḥóta Geometries as Visual Sovereignty*

Red Wing sees visual sovereignty as an emergent property of Lakḥóta designed systems, reflecting reciprocity, and enacting specifically Lakḥóta epistemologies and ethics. Speaking directly to visual sovereignty, Red Wing states,

You take away our prairie, there goes our language, there goes our dyes, our foods, there we go. We had a system of keeping that prairie life...It's a designed system, it's an operating system, it's a functional system. This is why we follow the buffalo because we knew the buffalo didn't overwork the soil. It kept the grass high, tall grass helps clean air pollution, just as trees do. People forget design is just more than designing a magazine. Why do we structure our tribes so that we could follow the buffalo, so we could keep reciprocity going?<sup>161</sup>

Red Wing's Lakḥóta Shape Kit enacts visual sovereignty because it is a method of knowledge creation that facilitates the movement of knowledge through communication with the nonhuman world. Her work is especially important as she communicates design as both a macrocosm and microcosm of Lakḥóta knowledge, from prairie-wide design to pipe bag.

#### 4.5 Visual Sovereignty through Relations

Nadia Myre's artistic methods, Lakḥóta dreaming and beadwork methods, and Sadie Red Wing's Lakḥóta Shape Kit all enact Indigenous visual sovereignty. They do this by collaborating with human and nonhuman beings through participatory art-making, dreaming and visioning. Contemporary Indigenous artists use these visually sovereign methods to engage and collaborate with communities, whether they are in the physical or spirit world. These practices inspired and guided my own approach to asserting visual sovereignty while conducting the research-creation for this dissertation.

<sup>160</sup> Red Wing, Sadie, "Learning the Traditional Lakḥóta Visual Language through Shape Play."

<sup>161</sup> Chacon et al.

## 5.0 Field Studies

I conducted three field studies: Stover Tióšpaye, Oglála Lakḥóta Community, and Indigenous Community. The field studies are organized into Context, Methodology, Interviews, and Synthesis and Results.

Context includes descriptions of the history and location, my original and updated field study plans, and the guiding research questions. In Description I describe the field work that took place, the themes that emerged in this process, and provide a description of the scene or scenes of the interviews. In Methodologies Used in Field Work, I describe and discuss the research methods used during the field work and provide the documentation techniques used for the research and interviews. In Interviews I select passages from the interviews, organized by theme, to discuss what was learned concerning the research questions. In Synthesis and Results I consider the results of these three field studies as artworks, culturally-grounded methodologies, and Lakḥóta or Indigenous cultural methods.

The artworks range from art objects, to compositions, to installations, all of which synthesized the field studies into art forms. The culturally-grounded methodologies propose new or emergent methods. The Lakḥóta or Indigenous cultural methods document methods discussed or witnessed during the field studies' interviews.

The following field studies include long quotes. In my community, we prioritize time and space for listening. I have chosen to quote extensively from the interviews in order to provide the interviewees time and space to speak and provide more context to what they chose to share. These quotes emphasize the importance of anchoring knowledge in the contexts of those who teach us, and how many teachings are carried in the nuance and texture of our stories.

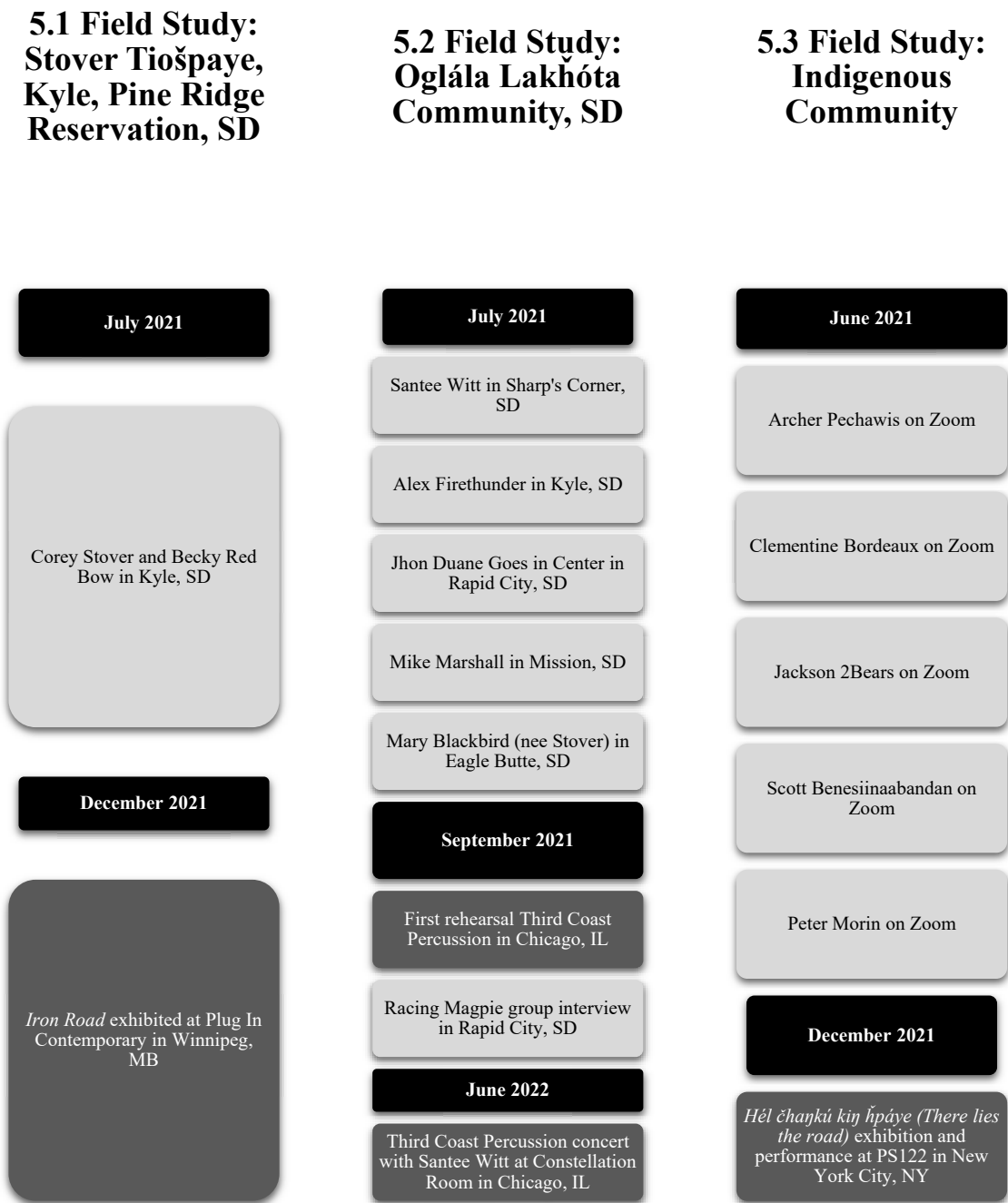


Figure 14: Timeline of Field Studies. Light grey box indicates interview, dark grey box indicates performance or installation.



## 5.1 Field Study: Stover Tiošpaye, Kyle, Pine Ridge Reservation, SD

### 5.1.1 Context

The purpose of this field study was to understand Lakǰóta ontology through collaborative artmaking with my family, the Stover Tiošpaye. It focuses on my family's stories as sites of knowledge creation and employs artmaking to explore Lakǰóta relationships to nonhuman beings.<sup>162</sup> I used Sadie Red Wing's Lakǰóta Shape Kit design methodology in combination with Indigenous research methodologies, such as storytelling, re-telling and reciting genealogy, alongside art-making methodologies of collaborative videography and design, to conduct this field study.

#### *History and Location*

The home of the Oglála Lakǰóta and seat of the Oglála Sioux Tribe government is the Pine Ridge Reservation in the state of South Dakota in the USA (Figure 15). My family lives in the Medicine Root District in the community of Kyle as well as in the community of Batesland (Figure 16). It was essential to locate this aspect of my research in my family's home communities, where knowledge has been grounded over many generations. Much of the metaphysical and spiritual knowledge of my community is created and shared through songs which live through practice in Kyle and Batesland. The Stover family cares deeply about genealogy, sharing that genealogy with each other, and doing so within that landscape. Many maintain close relationships with the areas around my great-grandmother and great-grandfather's home site (Figure 17) and burial grounds through fishing, foraging, gardening, grave tending, playing, and horse riding.

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<sup>162</sup> Tiošpaye means extended family or tipi group, in the case of my family in Kyle, it is a group of homes that are all in the same area near the Kyle Dam.

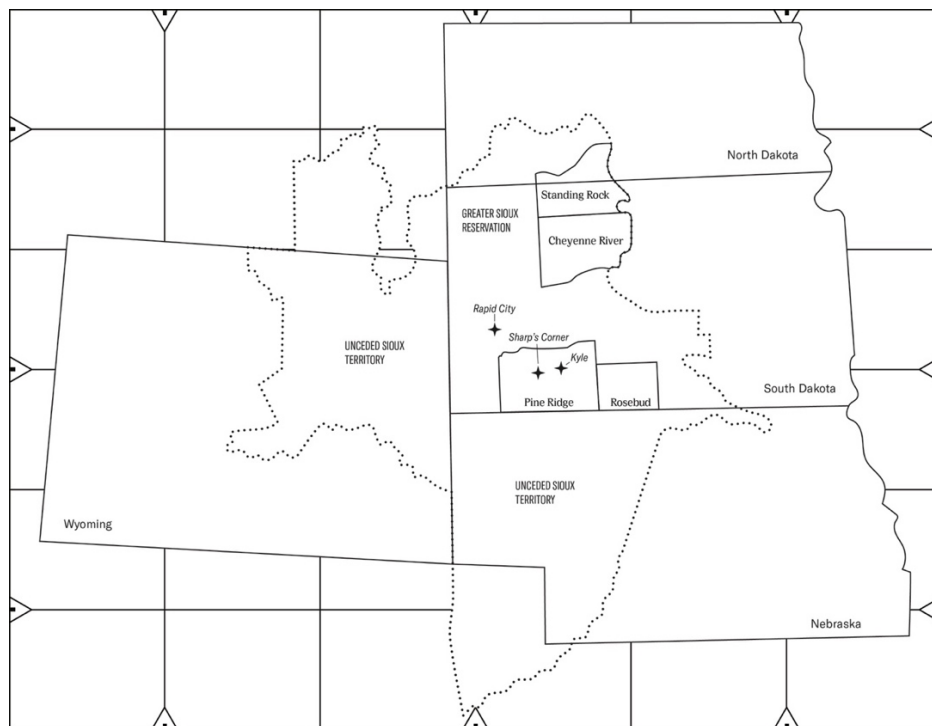


Figure 15: A map of Sioux territory with markers from left to right, Rapid City, Pine Ridge Reservation, Sharp's Corner, Kyle, Standing Rock Reservation, Cheyenne River Reservation, and Rosebud Reservation.

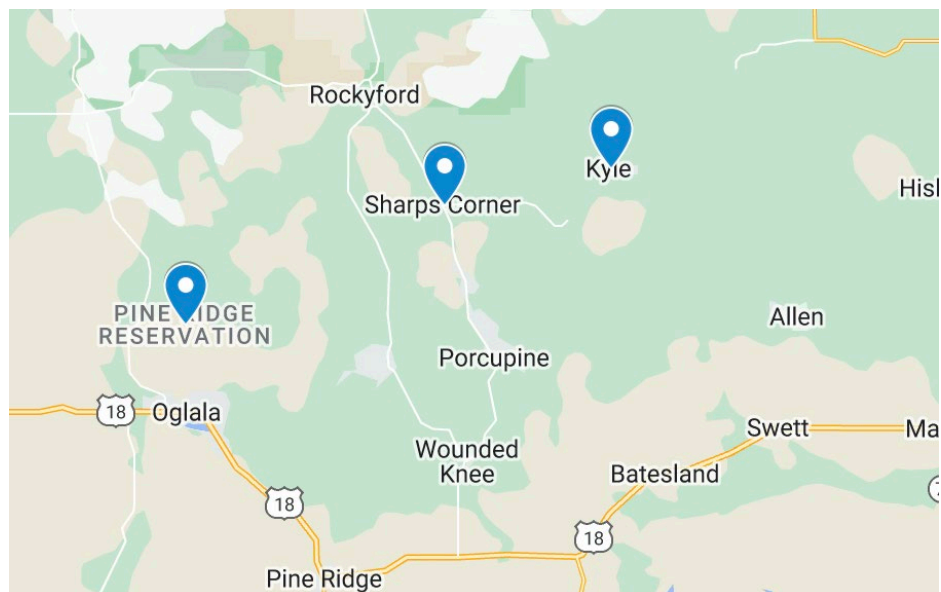


Figure 16: Map of interview locations in Pine Ridge Reservation (from left to right, Pine Ridge, Sharp's Corner, Kyle).

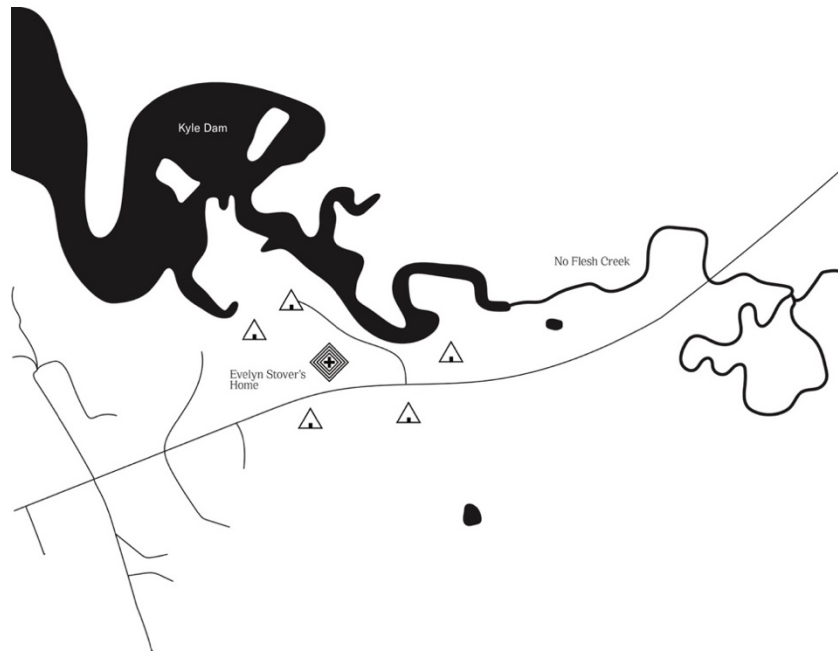


Figure 17: Map of the Stover Tióšpaye. The left body of water is Kyle Dam, the right is No Flesh Creek. The cluster of markers are the homes of some of the children and grandchildren of Evelyn Stover.

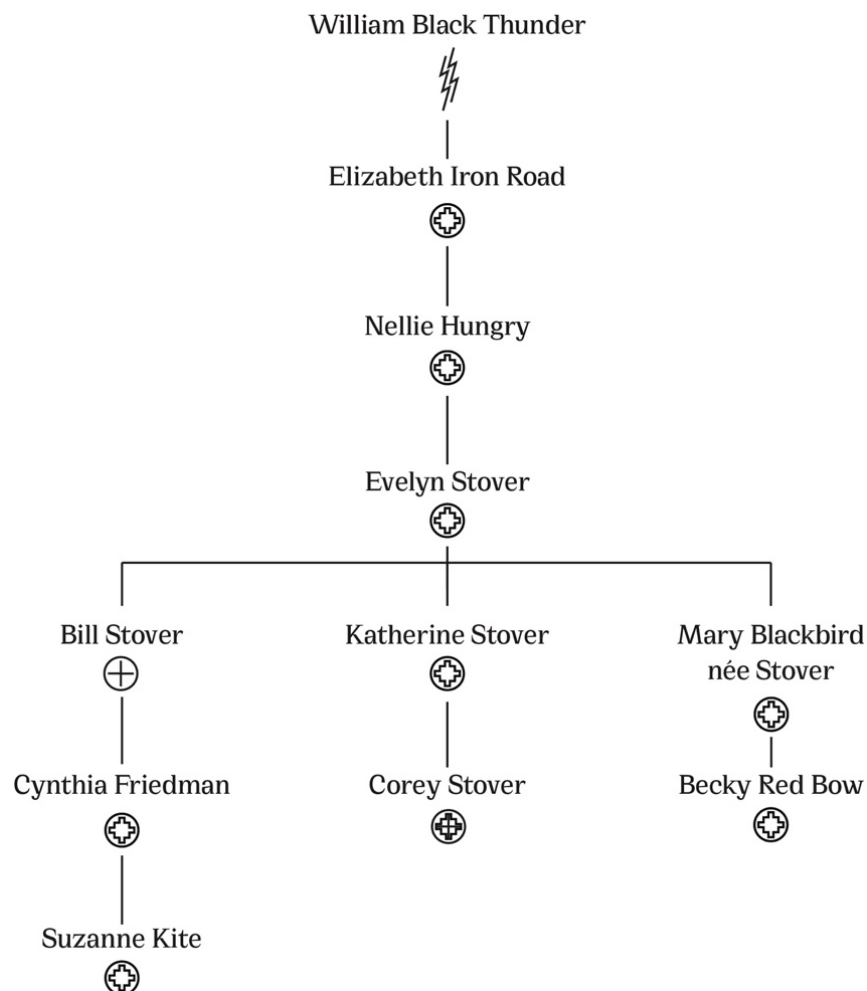


Figure 18: Simplified Stover Family Tree, only people mentioned in this dissertation are included. William Black Thunder was most likely Elizabeth Iron Road's uncle.

### *Field Study Plans*

I had originally invited extended Stover Tiošpaye family members to be interviewed. However, this plan was first interrupted temporarily by COVID in 2020 and then changed entirely by the unexpected death of my grandfather, Bill Stover. These unfortunate events rendered any large gatherings or public performances inappropriate. I began interviews in June 2021, a few weeks before my grandfather's death. Most of field study took place during a brief break from memorial preparations, at the house that used to be my great-grandmother Evelyn Stover's home and is now my great-aunt Katherine Stover's home. I had planned originally to have my cousins interpret the LSK score using movement in the fields around my great-grandmother's house. Unfortunately, this became impossible under the circumstances.

### *Original Questions*

The questions I had planned for these interviews developed from short stories of the love my great-grandmother Evelyn Stover had for collecting stones; my grandfather's spiritual work with

stones; and my previous collaborations with Corey Stover around stones and their role in AI and computation.<sup>163</sup>

The questions, which I shared before the interviews, were the following:

1. What stones do you maintain relationships with?
2. How did you come upon this stone?
3. What are your memories of stones in your family?
4. Why did our family surround the home with large boulders?
5. How do you go about finding stones?
6. Do you have a relationship to your regalia?
7. Do you communicate with your ceremonial objects?
8. Do your ceremonial objects help you communicate through them to other entities?
9. How have relationships with your land and home changed over the years?
10. What do you think is crucial to pass onto your children?
11. What are the defining events in your life?
12. What are the defining events of our family history?

### 5.1.2 Description

In this field study I collaborated with my extended family to co-create an artwork that focused on our specific tíošpaye (family and extended family) relationship with stones over four generations. This study utilized traditional Lakhóta geometric designs to document family history and facilitate a collaborative methodology. Through storytelling, discussion and interviews, we developed a system using Lakhóta geometries for expressing our family story about stones. The main stories that emerged were:

1. The story of Elizabeth Iron Road's escape from the Wounded Knee Massacre
2. Becky Red Bow's Blue Lightning Woman
3. Corey Stover's Hihan Wanna Ob Mani (Now Owl Walks About)

These stories illuminated the Stover Tiošpaye understandings of stones as our closest nonhuman kin. These kin live on our bodies (in the form of wearables such as necklaces and regalia), around our homes (such as in gardens and pathways), and around our altars (prayer areas found in homes, at sites of private ceremony around private homes, and in communal sites of ceremony). Stories of intimate and generative relationships with nonhuman beings in stone form emerged as the most important practice in the family. These stories stem from my Great Grandmother Evelyn Stover's engagement with stones.

This interview took place in the home of Katherine Stover. The people present were Katherine Stover, Becky Red Bow, Corey Stover, Clayton Stover, and Clayton's wife, Colby Brown. There were children and animals present as well. Conversations took place in between funeral events, when Colby served cake and I had a moment to sit down and eat with the family members

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<sup>163</sup> Suzanne Kite and Maḥpíya Nážiŋ, "It's Not Done Through Our Mind, It's Done Through Our Spirit." in "Indigenous Protocol and Artificial Intelligence Position Paper", 2020, <https://doi.org/10.11573/spectrum.library.concordia.ca.00986506>.

staying there. Most people were too tired to speak and slowly left or fell asleep in the room. However, my cousin Corey Stover and my aunt Becky Red Bow gathered nightly to work on the memorial slide show and the obituary details and invited me to talk with them then.

Corey Stover has worked in the Oglála Lakḥóta College's museum and archive and is familiar with traditional objects and practices as well as maintaining a beadwork practice of his own.<sup>164</sup> The extended family and community rely on Corey for beadwork necessities for important family events and ceremonies. He also takes on a great deal of labor for the creation of regalia and items for give-aways.<sup>165</sup> Becky Red Bow is our family genealogist who records oral histories and keeps family records and photographs. She is the daughter of Mary Blackbird, interviewed in Section 5.2, and is a skilled beader.

### 5.1.3 Methodologies Used in Field Work

The methods for this field study were storytelling, discussions, and interviews, where we collectively developed a system for expressing our family story using Lakḥóta geometries. The design tool used to create the artwork was the LSK.

#### *Interview Process*

I prepared for these interviews by considering Lakḥóta protocols regarding welcoming, introducing, and thanking my interviewees as well as the reciprocity (honoraria and donations) necessary for conducting the interviews in a good way. The actual interview process developed into a culturally-grounded methodology: we shared cake and snacks, we got distracted by our animals, we worried about other family members in the room, we sat at a kitchen table until late in the evening, we mourned. While this was a difficult period, the slow discussions about family, survival, spirits, and my grandfathers' role in peoples' spiritual experiences were deeper and more meaningful being shared in a group and over a long period of time.

The interviews were collaborative, with each person taking on multiple roles in a way that expanded well beyond the academic-normative standard of interviewer-interviewee. I acted as interviewer, listener, creative facilitator, and auto-ethnographer; Corey was an interviewee, storyteller, designer, cultural expert; and Becky was an interviewee, elder, family historian and genealogist, storyteller, and cultural expert.

#### *Questions*

I did not ask questions in the way I had originally planned, as structured interviews were inappropriate under the circumstances. Instead, I asked for family stories and followed up with questions about the stories. I did use the original questions as a foundation on which to improvise, as guides for shaping the conversations to help me explore the concept of cosmologyscape and stones as computational materials. I asked questions in an open-ended manner, simultaneously listening to the stories and being attentive to themes that emerged. Through careful listening I was able to identify several stories as key to the Stover relationships to nonhuman beings such as stones.

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<sup>164</sup> "Oglála Lakḥóta College History Historical Center," accessed September 7, 2022, <https://www.olc.edu/about-olc/historical-center/>.

<sup>165</sup> Give-aways are Lakḥóta cultural practices of giving away possessions to honor people during major life events such as funerals, memorials, namings, and graduations.

### *Lakḥóta Visual Language*

Listening to the stories allowed me to generate designs that can be understood as a collective family history spanning four generations, researched and documented by the family, and focused on Iron Road, grandmother of the current family matriarch. This collective history, written in the Lakḥóta visual language, can be understood as a score that facilitates a performance of past, present, and future. We utilized the Lakḥóta Shape Kit (LSK) to interpret the Lakḥóta visual language and create the design together.<sup>166</sup> We used the LSK to engage in a recent research methodology that allows for a design to be created in a collaborative way and allows for beginning with a story in English to create a traditional design.

### *LSK to Short Film*

We made a short film documenting the process of creating a design with the LSK. I had hoped to have family members use this design as a score for a performance that engaged with traditional Lakḥóta dance practices and regalia making. However, my grandfather's passing precluded developing the work in that way. Instead, Corey Stover and I filmed the land and waters around the location where we had planned to record the performance. It was necessary to film the area around the house to place the location of the stories in the cosmologyscape created by the land, sky and waters that inspire Lakḥóta design today and throughout the interviewees' lives.

### **5.1.4 Stories**

The interview process resulted in three core stories: Elizabeth Iron Road's escape from the Wounded Knee Massacre, Becky Red Bow's Blue Lightning Woman, and Corey Stover's Now Owl Walks About.

#### *Iron Road*

The story of my great-great-great grandmother, Elizabeth Iron Road, is an oral history that has helped the family process a historical genocide that affects the family today while simultaneously maintaining the family's Lakḥóta genealogy.

They were getting back because whenever they ran from the gunfire and that guy and those three women, those two women hid her, they found this wagon on the third day. They found this wagon that was headed that way. And what I think it must've been headed close to the railroad somehow. Then she walked on the railroad to get back to White River. Maybe they were going to Nebraska. I don't know how far. Because I didn't know that. I thought that the wagon took them all the way to Rosebud. But when I talked to Ruby, she said how she got the name Iron Road was because she walked on the railroad. – Becky Red Bow<sup>167</sup>

So they are traveling from Big Foot's camp, traveling from the north, going through a blizzard and they set up camp at Wounded Knee and then the gunfire and so they're fleeing and here's the railroad tracks and here's the man and the two women that

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<sup>166</sup> Red Wing, Sadie, "Learning the Traditional Lakḥóta Visual Language through Shape Play," Graphic Design Graduate Thesis (Raleigh, NC: North Carolina State University, 2016), [https://issuu.com/sadieredwing/docs/srw\\_thesis\\_2016](https://issuu.com/sadieredwing/docs/srw_thesis_2016).

<sup>167</sup> See Appendix 8.4.3.

discovered Iron Road. And then this is them taking her back to Rosebud. – Corey Stover<sup>168</sup>

### *Interpretation*

Iron Road was the grandmother of Evelyn Stover. Grandma Evelyn Stover passed down her love of stones to all her children and grandchildren. For part of her life, she was raised by both her grandmothers. Iron Road (Figure 19), like other ancestors of her generation, escaped from the Wounded Knee Massacre on foot as a teenage girl. She watched her parents and brother die, hiding in a bank along a river with three others, and eventually walking the railroad (hence her name, Iron Road) all the way to family in Rosebud.



Figure 19: Great-Great Grandmother Unci Nellie Hungry, her Ina (mother), Great-Great-Great Grandmother Unci Iron Road, and her mother's father Kaká Black Thunder.

### *Blue Lightning Woman*

Oh, [Evelyn Stover] she used to pick up rocks.<sup>169</sup> Everywhere, she used to always look for spirit rocks, like those real round ones and she could never find them. One time I came down and her and I were walking the road and I said, “Look, Grandma!” I could see that spirit rock sitting there. So, she really looked and she grabbed it and she was all happy. She couldn't believe it. It took her years to find one and she finally found it. Well, I actually showed it to her. I hadn't touched it. I let her find it. I just said, “Look.” She was so excited. She couldn't believe it. So, she found her spirit rock.<sup>170</sup> I always wondered what she did with it because I never seen it again from that day on, but I went to visit her in Hot Springs.

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<sup>168</sup> See Appendix 8.4.3.

<sup>169</sup> Grandma Evelyn Stover was Becky Red Bow and Corey Stover's maternal grandmother, raising them as Lakḥóta grandmothers often do for their children. Stover and Red Bow are first cousins, or siblings in the Lakḥóta way.

<sup>170</sup> Another first cousin of theirs and my maternal aunt Melita Stover Janis said to me that stones spend their entire lives looking for their human, just as humans spend their entire lives looking for stones.



This is a rock that she told me she found and she had a story that went with it because every single rock that she had in that box, which was a big shoe box and she went through every single one of them, she had stories for them.

And so this one, she [Grandma Stover] told me the story and I started looking at it while she was telling me the story. And there's a woman on this rock, just [a] perfect picture, like somebody drew it on that rock, but it's just naturally made inside that rock. And so then she got done with the story and I said, "Did you know there's a woman in this rock?" And she said, "What?" And I said, "Yeah, there's a woman right here," and I showed it to her and she was trying to see it and she's just looking at it and she goes, "Ooh, that's spooky. I don't want it. Take it," she said.

And so then she said, "All I see is, like, spooky faces," and I said, "No, you're looking at it wrong." I said, "There's this real, pretty woman on there." There's this woman and she's sitting, she has long braids in her hair. You could even see the braids. They're both braided down. She kind of looks like Deanna Provost in a way with her long, thick hair, but she had her hair braided on both sides. And then she's holding a pipe like this. She's holding a pipe and it's coming up like she just pulled it away from her mouth because there's smoke coming out of her mouth and there's lightning and smoke coming out of the bowl of the pipe. And that's all on that rock. And so, then I took that rock to the Sun Dance. Oh no, before I took it to the Sun Dance, I went to my mom's house [Mary Blackbird] and I showed it to her and Ronnie [Red Bow's father-in-law] both before. It must've been at my house in Rapid or something.

And she said, "Oh," she handed it back real fast and she said, "That woman's trying to tell you something"... And so, I got it and I had it in this hand and she said, "Put it on your heart and then hold your hand out like this." And she [Blackbird] said, "And just listen. Just listen real hard with your mind." So, I closed my eyes and I was sitting up right on the couch or on bed and there's nothing behind me. So, I was sitting straight up and I held that hand back like that and I went like this and all of a sudden, from the ground up, I felt this energy coming to my feet and when it hit my feet, it went all the way up my body, like numbness. Just like, remember how whenever you fall asleep and your arm goes to sleep or your hand goes to sleep and it's numb and tingly? That's what it felt like, but it was moving. And so, it started moving up and I was still sitting there like this and I could feel it coming in real fast. I mean, I was probably sitting there like two minutes.

I had my eyes closed and I was holding that rock and it hit me and when it hit me right on my chest, I was falling into darkness. It wasn't in that room no more. I was falling into darkness and when I opened my eyes, I just saw her, that woman in the rock. And I knew her. She [the woman on the rock] knew me. And I knew her. And I just said, "Unci [grandma]," and I just started crying and it wasn't tears of fear. It was like overwhelming happiness to see her again because I knew her and she knew me and I was just crying.

And my mom [Blackbird] was sitting there watching me and she said I was sitting straight up. I didn't fall or anything. She said, I was still sitting like this, but when they took me out of my body, they took my spirit to the spirit world. When they [the spirits] took me out, it's like falling into the darkness. It's like you're just falling, falling, falling

and then she showed me, she [the woman on the rock] pointed and there was this sweat lodge sitting there and there was lightning coming down from the sky and it was hitting the top of the sweat lodge and it was blue. And she said her name was Blue Lightning Woman.

And then just like that, my mom would say, “Becky, are you okay? Are you okay?” And I was just sobbing. And I was back in that room, sitting there. Sitting there still just in that same spot, like this, I was sitting like this and tears were just running down my face. And my mom said, “Are you okay? What’s wrong? Were you okay?” And I said, “That’s my grandma.” I said, “That’s my Unci. She’s my Unci,” and she said, “Let’s go smoke.” You knew how she is. I didn’t even smoke at the time, but I was like, “Okay.” So, then I went to put her away. She said, “Put that rock down.” That’s what she said, first thing. She said, “Put that rock back. Put that hand down,” she said that. And so, I was looking around my room like that and here, she had a Ziploc bag with material in it.

And so, then I took her [Blue Lightning Woman] to the Sun Dance and your grandpa [Bill Stover] came and he came straight up to me. I wasn’t dancing. I was outside praying with the dancers, but I wasn’t dancing. And here he came up to me and he said, “Can I see?” And he said her name. So, Ronnie must have told Bill or something or my mom probably. My mom probably did. And so then I said, “Yeah.” I had her in a leather pouch tied to my wrist. So, I took her out and I gave it to him and he said, “I’m going to take her to the tree.” I was like, “Okay.” So, he left and went to the tree and prayed and stuff and came back and gave her back to me. And he said, “Nobody can tell you when to dance or if you have to dance or what she wants you to do. She’ll come to you and she’ll tell you when you’re ready.”

So, I still have her [Blue Lightning Woman]. I have her with my bag. I keep her and I stopped showing her to everybody. The first time I saw her, all I saw was her face and her hair. This long braid, it’s just thick and just long and it goes way down, it’s just sitting there. That’s the first thing I saw and that’s the only thing I saw. Then, when I kept looking at her, because I’d bring her out and I’d smudge her, I keep her wrapped in sage, and she’s wrapped in blue cloth and then she’s in that bag, and there’s blue beadwork on that bag. I take her out and I change her sage all the time. —Becky Red Bow<sup>171</sup>

Red Bow’s powerful experience with Blue Lightning Woman clarifies the Lakǰóta relationship with stones as conduits between human experience and the spirit world. Stones are animate and have agency, but for certain people, stones have messages. The methodology of a lifetime of prayer and listening-beyond opened Red Bow to the stone’s message from the spirit world. Protocols for the safekeeping and care of Blue Lightning Woman are taking her to the Sun Dance tree, wrapping her like an “easter egg” in sage and medicines, wrapping in blue cloth and blue beadwork, and changing her sage often. These protocols, which she discussed with Bill Stover, maintain the mutual respect and reciprocity for this nonhuman being.

This story comes to Becky through a stone given to her by Evelyn. She received it through a vision from the stone, in the presence of Mary Blackbird. Becky’s powerful experience with Blue Lightning Woman illustrates how stones are relations that act as conduits between human

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<sup>171</sup> See Appendix 8.4.3.

experience and the spirit world. Red Bow's praying-listening protocols maintain the mutual respect and reciprocity for these nonhuman beings, articulating Lakḥóta ontology.

### *Now Owl Walks About*

When you communicate in the spirit realm, it's on a different level. It's so different. Because when I met my spirit helper in a dream, it was like I knew him. Not how Beck's [Becky Red Bow] describing it, it was different. It was like he was talking to me, but he wasn't talking out loud. It was like energy vibrations coming out of his eyes and coming into my eyes and I was understanding what he was saying, even though he wasn't saying anything. It's really strange, but he's an owl man. He's a man and he's an owl. And he looks, in your human way of looking at him, he's vulgar because he's got little fluffs everywhere. Like it's been plucked out. And his body is halfway between someone who would be turning back into a human if they were an animal. So, he's got the body and everything, but his head, the way his face look[s] and even his eyebrows and stuff, but it was just like an owl.

And his nose, it was almost like he was morphing between an owl and a man, maybe. But what got me was when I was sitting on the edge of this hill, I felt something real soft rubbing against my arm. And I look and I jumped because I was like, oh my god. And it's a man. And his arms are like all fluffy, like little white fluffs all over. And then I look at him in the face and I was so afraid of him. And I was just in my mind, I was like disgusted because... Not disgusted with the spirit or anything like that, but just his appearance was so unnatural. But I was like, "What are you?" And then all of a sudden he was like looking at me and he just started communicating and he just... It was just pure love.

It was the most love energy I've ever experienced. What he showed me was that theirs, it's pure. It's unbiased love. And maybe that's what he was teaching me when I seen him was that his appearance was a certain way, but his spirit was... And I don't know. And then I prayed, and prayed about him and asked him to come and tell me his name and he did. And his name is, it's in the quote of what he said was Hinhan Ob Wanna Mani. Which means "now he walks about." And then certainly after that, I ended up getting an owl tattooed on my arm and ironically, his eyes were blue. That guy drew this up and put it on. I said, "Just put something on there." And that's what he put it on there. Now the owl's got blue eyes.

And his eyes were blue and I seen the energy in them, even in the colour, I remember it vividly. And I was out here in Wanbli. There's Eagle Nest Butte. And I was in a pit where they catch eagles because they used to put rabbits and tie them and they would have wood that goes across almost like a cage and then tie rabbits up there and then the Eagles would come and fly up to catch the rabbit and they would pull out a feather, because to get a feather from a live eagle was so much more powerful than a dead eagle because the eagle still goes up to fly above everything. So that was how they would get eagle feathers.

So, I was in there first and then I had come to the edge of the Buttes, like this... What would you call it? Oh, it's a butte, I guess. Eagle Nest Butte. So it's like a Butte and it's long. There's a lot of land there and I'm sitting on the edge and looking off into the horizon as the sun's setting and I felt so, I can't even describe it. It was like a feeling of despair. It wasn't something in particular that I felt, it seemed in my dream like it was so general, but that it was just such a hard time or I just felt so insignificant and pitiful, I guess. And so I'm sitting there and I'm feeling this way and then that's when he came and I was sitting there and he rubbed against my arm and then he communicated with me a little and then I woke up. And so, that was the first time I ever met that spirit helper. — Corey Stover<sup>172</sup>

This story came to Corey from a nonhuman being in a dream, a dream with a specific location, cultural context, history, and protocol: the dream located him and Eagle Nest Butte, crying for a spirit in the traditional Lakhóta way, connecting with generations of Lakhóta who go to geologic formations to be closer to Creator,<sup>173</sup> and communicating with a nonhuman being. The nonhuman being is a spirit helper who chooses to communicate with a human who is crying out, revealing itself and allowing its power to be called upon in the future. Corey Stover describes the process by which such dreams occur, and the powerful emotions and experiences entangled with receiving a vision from a non-human being.

### 5.1.5 Synthesis and Results

The results of this field study are two-fold: 1) a collaborative artwork that synthesizes the collected data and 2) culturally-grounded Lakhóta methods that emerged while conducting the study.

#### *Collaborative Artwork*

The artwork created is called *Iron Road* (2021). This is a mixed-media installation with two components: the design created in stones and a video taken of the land that was previously Evelyn Stover's, accompanied by an audio interview of Corey Stover and Becky Red Bow. I am the primary artist, working in close collaboration with Corey and Becky.

#### *Iron Road, 2021— Stone Sculpture*

The stone design was created during the interview, arranged by Corey using the LSK (Figure 20).

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<sup>172</sup> See Appendix 8.4.3.

<sup>173</sup> Creator is the term understood in Lakhóta culture to refer to the concept of Wakháŋ Thájka, Great Spirit, or more accurately Great Mystery. While the term is used in the singular, it refers to collective spiritual beings. Personally, I connect Creator with Taku Skan Skan, the force that gives movement.

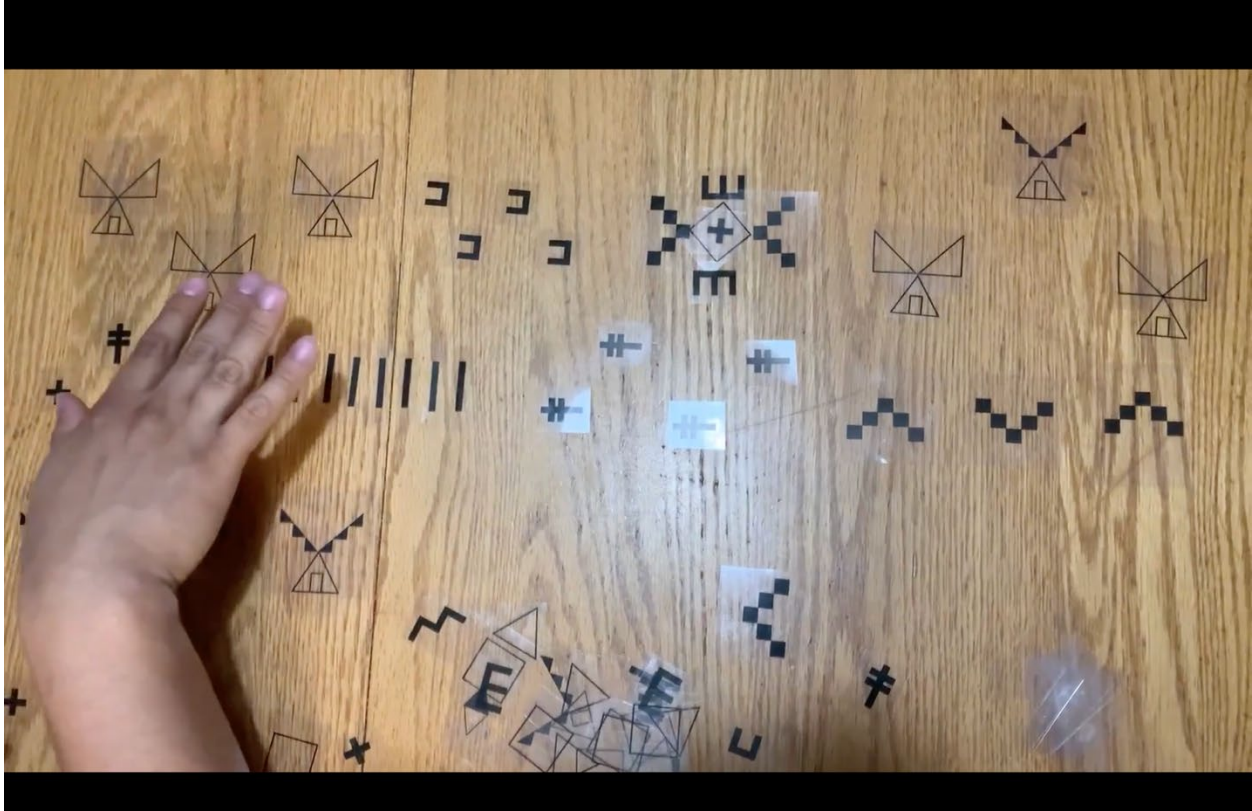


Figure 20: Kite, Iron Road, 2021. Video still.

After the interview, I carefully adjusted the design to reflect along the x and y axes while maintaining the numerology and details of the original one-directional story design. The final design was created as a sculpture arrangement of small stones on a floor (Figure 19). Corey said that the design should now be considered a “family design”, one that is passed down and remains in the family.

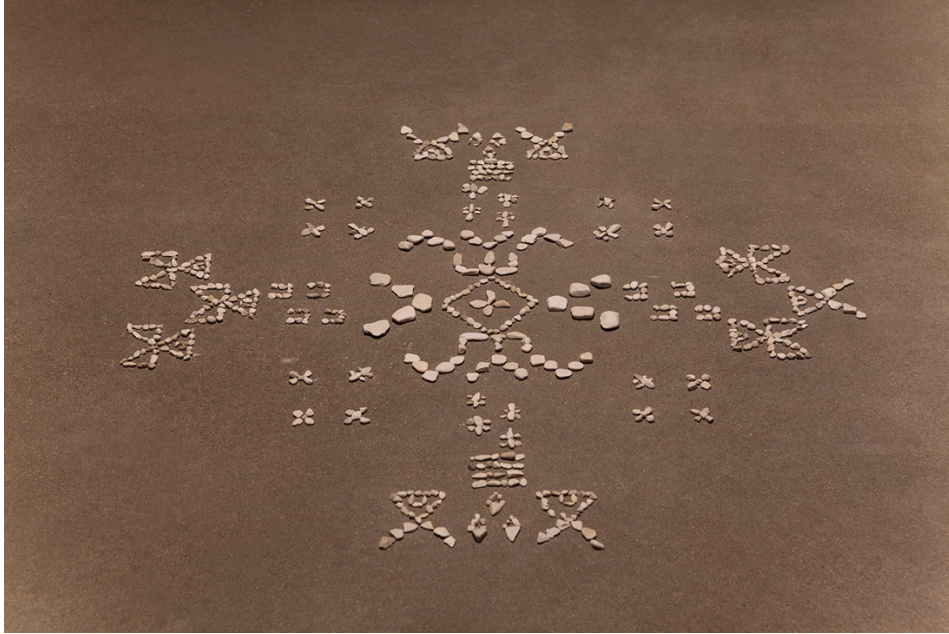


Figure 21: Kite, Iron Road, 2021. Installation detail.

*Iron Road, 2021*– Video installation

The video component was created in four different shots.



Figure 22: Kite, Iron Road, in collaboration with Corey Stover and Becky Red Bow, 2021. Video still.

Shot 1 (Figure 22) was a drone high above the house, the dam, and No Flesh Creek.



Figure 23: Kite, Iron Road, in collaboration with Corey Stover and Becky Red Bow, 2021. Video still.

Shot 2 (Figure 23) was of Stover's hands arranging the LSK.



Figure 24: Kite, Iron Road, in collaboration with Corey Stover and Becky Red Bow, 2021. Video still.

Shot 3 (Figure 24) was of stones on the driveway by the house, many which had been collected by Evelyn Stover as she moved rocks constantly to the house and surrounding yard.



Figure 25: Kite, Iron Road, in collaboration with Corey Stover and Becky Red Bow, 2021. Video still.

Finally, we set up a camera in the small cabin that Evelyn lived in before she passed away, and we took videos of a thunderstorm consuming the sky (Figure 25). The video is meant to be viewed in close proximity to the stone design, on a screen that is flat on the floor. These video sequences are meant to communicate the cosmologyscape—the relationship of places and phenomenon in the physical world—commonly invoked in the Lakhóta visual language and represented in the LSK.

### Exhibition

*Iron Road* was exhibited at Plug In Institute of Contemporary Art in Winnipeg, Manitoba, August 21 to December 17, 2021, in an exhibition called *When Veins Meet like Rivers*, curated by Allison Yearwood. I collaborated with fellow artists Asinnajaq and Dayna Danger to co-create an artwork that responded to their artworks in the gallery space. My contribution was an installation featuring the interviews with Stover and Red Wing. Since the exhibition was about each of our relationships to water and confluences, the stones in the exhibition's stone sculpture were collected by Asinnajaq on Lake Manitoba and returned to the land after the completion of the exhibition. The exhibition included a podcast where an episode was dedicated to an hour of interviews with Corey Stover and Sadie Red Wing where we discuss stones, LSK, and their own practices. Still shot of installation and link to video documentation.



### *Culturally-Grounded Methods* Dream-to-Design Methodology

I call the process of creation which requires the direction and influence of the spirit world “dream-to-design methodology.” The key stories—*Iron Road*, *Blue Lightning Woman*, and *Now Owl Walks About*—converged to clarify how nonhuman beings communicating from the spirit world were necessary for creating the designs. Stories of intimate and generative relationships with nonhuman beings in stone form emerged as the most important practice in the family, stemming from Evelyn Stover’s passionate engagement with stones. The stories of stones were told in-between the stories of *Iron Road* during this interview.

The culturally grounded methods of the dream-to-design methodology began with Corey Stover, Becky Red Bow, and I laying out the LSK shapes on the table. We decided to tell the story in a linear format, following the way it was remembered, and then reshape it into traditional symmetrical Lakhóta style, in order to reflect Lakhóta aesthetics. While doing this, Corey Stover looked at traditional-style Lakhóta quillwork and beadwork for reference and remarked, “They look like the designs that I come up with in my head,” continuing to say,

The purpose of the symmetrical design is to show the mirroring of what is above, so below. And that's a significant part of Lakhóta design. This one's a little bit different... usually what they would probably have done is mirrored it this way and the same with that. They'll mirror it the other way or they'll use them as significant points in the design that tells a story. So, they use the designs to tell the story. It's almost like a pictograph that told a story of their adventure or their war party or things like that. For me, it's weird to actually put a design together because I never really plan my designs. When I do bead work, I just sort of open myself up to what I feel like is going to come out. It's just freehand. But a lot of times, like the pipe bags, what they would do is put the dream that they had on the pipe bag so that when they would take the pipe bag around, they could actually tell the story of their vision on the bag. So, I guess in a way it could also have been a way, like they say they didn't have written language, but we did to an extent, but it was in symbols. I guess I've never really thought of the designs as telling stories. So, I'm still learning how to adapt to that, even though that's the purpose of them. I've always just sort of done it intuitively. So, I guess in my bead work, I'm telling stories, but I never really knew what story I was telling.<sup>174</sup>

Corey Stover compared the design symbols in the LSK to pictographs and draws a connection between war party drawings common in Lakhóta ledger art. He remarked that “I never really plan my designs...I just sort of open myself up to what I feel like is going to come out,” a form of “listening without the ears.”<sup>175 176</sup>

Stover continued to describe dreams and visions that are communicated on the pipe bags for ceremonial purposes, making a distinction between the methodology prompted by the LSK and artworks made from dreams. He said, “In a way, we began using the Shape Kit in the opposite

<sup>174</sup> See Appendix 8.4.3.

<sup>175</sup> Suzanne Kite and Maḥpíya Náziḡ, “It’s Not Done Through Our Mind, It’s Done Through Our Spirit.”

<sup>176</sup> See Appendix 8.4.3.

method from the traditional way, taking verbal language and working backwards from verbal story, into language, into symbols, into pictographic storytelling, into design and finally mirroring that design.”<sup>177</sup> He identified a key part of the traditional design process: verbalized language is never required, and often one must let go of verbal language while forming designs stemming from visions or dreams. This means that the LSK engenders a creative process that differs from strictly traditional method.

Becky Red Bow employed a dream-to-design methodology when talking about her process for creating a pipe bag for a friend named Barney. She tells me,

Whenever I did Barney's pipe bag...he asked if I could fix his pipe bag, put some bead work on it. So, then I went and I just prayed about it that night. And then this design came to my mind. So, I just put it on his pipe bag and I never did interpret it or anything. I just did what they [the spirits] told me to do.<sup>178</sup>

The dream-to-design methodology is a process of creation which requires the direction and influence of the spirit world. In the Barney example, Becky is describing a request by another person for help, her willingness to create this gift for him, and her methodology for doing so. Key to her methodology was prayer to the spirit world, requiring the offering of tobacco or smoke. In return, she was gifted a design by the spirit world that “came to mind.” Interpreting the design was not required. Her collaboration with nonhuman entities relies on trust, where she “just did what they told me to do.”<sup>179 180</sup>

### *Lakḥóta Cultural Methods*

*Iron Road* synthesizes the design we created together with the conversations we shared. It articulates a reciprocal collaboration between human and nonhuman beings. A number of Lakḥóta-grounded methods emerged out of this process:

- Opening oneself to tell a story: Stover described his methodology for creating artwork as listening to nonhumans by opening oneself to the spirit world to tell a story.
- Opening oneself to listen beyond: Becky Red Bow shared her process for listening to stones and creating designs as opening oneself to the spirit world and listening-beyond.
- Artworks as reciprocal relation: artworks synthesize the design we created together with the conversations and articulate a reciprocal collaboration between human and nonhuman being during the research-creation methodology.

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<sup>177</sup> See Appendix 8.4.3.

<sup>178</sup> See Appendix 8.4.3.

<sup>179</sup> I have found that trust and belief are wholly separate in Lakḥóta philosophies, as in this description where her “belief” is not necessary, but emergent truth and trust are.

<sup>180</sup> See Appendix 8.4.3.

These were supplemented by a number of other methods I observed that contribute to creating art in a Good Way:

- prayer
- sharing meals
- caring for nonhumans
- caring for family members
- resting
- opening oneself to listen to nonhumans
- offering sage or other medicines
- the telling of genealogy
- storytelling
- retelling

## 5.2 Field Study: Oglála Lakḥóta Community, SD

### 5.2.1 Context

#### *Why this field study?*

The objective of this field study was to collect data in support of articulating a Lakḥóta ontology, epistemology, and methodology for creating songs and art from the perspectives of artists and elders in the Oglála Lakḥóta community. I was specifically interested in how Lakḥóta song and art embed ethical and reciprocal collaborations between human and nonhuman beings. I extensively interviewed and worked with composer and singer Santee Witt as well as linguist Alex Firethunder, elder and artist Jhon Duane Goes in Center, contemporary and traditional artist Mike Marshall, and elder (Unci) Mary Blackbird (née Stover).

#### *Location*

These interviews occurred across Lakḥóta territory, on the Pine Ridge and Rosebud Reservations, and in Rapid City, South Dakota.<sup>181</sup> All the interviews in this field study were conducted with Lakḥóta people.

#### *Plans*

##### Original Plans

I had originally planned to conduct two workshops, one that engaged with the community of Lakḥóta songwriters in Native American Church meetings and another with a smaller group of Lakḥóta composers.<sup>182</sup> The goal of the first workshop was to consider human relationships to nonhuman beings through discussions about song writing and through writing songs, with a focus on how Lakḥóta relationships to stones is the foundation of Lakḥóta ontology. The goal of the second workshop was to write songs collaboratively.

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<sup>181</sup> Rosebud Reservation is the home of the Sičáŋgu band of Lakḥóta people who share many family ties to the Oglála band.

<sup>182</sup> Native American Church is a type of religious gathering spanning Indigenous communities in North American, known for the religious use of peyote.

I wanted to conduct these workshops as a way to acknowledge my relationships within the community, and to expand those relationships into groups which I did not know or have family relationships with. This expansion was important for me, as someone who did not grow up in Pine Ridge, to learn from the wider community and engage with the extended community of Lakhóta elders, singers, linguists, translators, and scholars to develop new songs about stones.

### *Reason for changes*

This study was originally meant to be a co-composition process with Lakhóta songwriters and composers. Unfortunately, this plan did not foresee participants' time constraints as well as COVID limitations on the length of time it was safe to meet indoors. These challenges required that I adapt my plan into a more manageable and achievable form. I reconfigured from a broad collaborative process with a number of participants to focus on meeting with participants individually, a small group of NAC singers, and a longer collaboration with one person: Santee Witt.

### *Questions*

My goal was to ask participants a series of open-ended questions to explore Lakhóta methods for how and why new songs are written, where the knowledge about stones comes from, how knowledge is transmitted through songs, and how songs function in the Lakhóta world. My role was to be interviewer, listener, and witness. The questions were:

1. What can you share about the common songs which are sung with, to, or about stones?
2. How do you interpret the meanings of these songs? What can one miss when translating these songs?
3. Why do the Lakhóta people sing about stones?
4. When you write a new song, where does it come from? What was the first stone you came to know?
5. What can stones teach us as Indigenous people?
6. What kind of song concerning stones is most important at this time?

## **5.2.2 Description**

### *Field Work*

I began by interviewing Lakhóta knowledge-keepers in my community and extended family. I interviewed Santee Witt, Alex Firethunder, Jhon Duane Goes in Center, Mike Marshall, and elder (Unci) Mary Blackbird (née Stover). Then, I participated in multiple singing gatherings, ceremonies, and online conversations, and gathered with a small group of Peyote singers for a recording session and discussion about the Lakhóta relationship to nonhumans and the creative process of creating new songs. Finally, I collaborated with Santee Witt to create artworks and video.

### *Themes*

Three themes were evident in the discussions and interviews during the field work: Listening to Nonhumans as Method, Stones in Lakhóta Ontology, and Creation as Connection to Land and Cosmos. The interviews in Section 5.2.4, below, are organized according to these themes.

Listening to Nonhumans as Method discusses the human as a vessel or mechanism for listening or receiving the message from the nonhuman world, both seen and unseen; Stones in Lakḥóta Ontology discusses stones as deeply important to many Lakḥóta people, often discussed and important to individual spirituality; and Creation as Connection to Land and Cosmos discusses how stones are connected with people at the micro scale in the form of spirit stones and also at the macro scale in the form of specific mountains and sacred sites; human acts of creation connect humans to both land and cosmos.

### *Scene Description*

The interviews took place in and around peoples' homes. At Alex Firethunder's home we sat at a picnic table in the summer sun (June 4, 2021). At Mary Blackbird's home, we began at her kitchen table but eventually sat in a summer evening breeze on her back porch so she could smoke cigarettes and point at locations on the surrounding horizon (June 5, 2021). I met Jhon Duane Goes in Center at the gallery of a painting show he was curating, a few days before the show opened, so he could reference the paintings for stories he told (June 7, 2021). I met Mike Marshall at his kitchen table to drink lemonade next to his art studio, where he had his traditional games and recent artworks (June 6, 2021).

On Mary Bordeaux's recommendation, I spent many hours with Santee Witt, at his home on the Pine Ridge Reservation from June 2021 to November 2021. I got to know his kids and their two kittens, especially his youngest daughter. His home is set up for Native American Church meetings, with many blankets for sitting and artwork on all the walls. We always drank coffee and included his youngest daughter in the conversation. Santee generously invited me to his classroom where we had snacks after his boys helped us hold an Inípi.<sup>183</sup> We also visited a Sun Dance together and exchanged gifts at the conclusion of the interviews.

The group interview took place at community art organization Racing Magpie in Rapid City on September 25, 2021. Racing Magpie was finishing their relocation and renovation, and director Peter Strong and artistic director Mary Bordeaux graciously allowed me to host the first in-person event in the new space. The interview took place in a circle of chairs surrounded by tables of foods and gifts. Most interviewees arrived after a full night of ceremony, tired but excited. Groups of community members were coming and going during the afternoon to hear the interviewees sing and speak.

### **5.2.3 Methods Used in Field Work**

Indigenous methods used in this field study are discussed in Section 4.2.3. In this field study, the method of listening is used in a variety of ways, such as listening to elders and knowledge keepers during interviews, listening to the dreams, and listening to songs shared by the interviewees. Sharing is a community-centred method seen in this field study in the form of sharing songs and collaborating with the musicians and sharing the performance of the work publicly. Creating or artmaking as a research method is community-grounded, seen in the creation of three artworks: *Okáletkehaŋ (Branching)*, *Wóolowaŋ wakáŋe. (I composed this music.)*, and *Wógligleya (Thunḡkášila Čečiyelo)*.

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<sup>183</sup> Inípi is the Lakḥóta traditional sweat lodge ceremony.

### *Collaborative Composition Method*

The process of creating *Wógligleya (Ṭḥuŋkášila Čečiyelo)* developed into a method. As I interviewed Santee Witt I came to understand his commitment and passion for composing. It revealed the depth of his relationships with the Creator and his understanding of how a song comes to be through him. Witt has a great ability to express his creative process and I was humbled by his willingness to share that with me. I returned several times to listen to his stories, interview him for other projects, and listen to him sing Native American Church songs,<sup>184</sup> traditional Lakḥóta songs,<sup>185</sup> and contemporary songs.<sup>186</sup> I began to be able to hear how his compositions were a striking and innovative combination of all three types of songs. Of particular note were his recordings where he harmonizes with himself, with his daughters, and/or with his community.

By September 2021, COVID had subsided enough in the Rapid City community that we were able to gather safely at Racing Magpie.<sup>187</sup> At this group interview, Witt led Native American Church members in a handful of songs that either he or they had written. This was an honor to record, since recording the ceremonies is normally not allowed. Singers shared songs and stories of how they wrote those songs while other community members sat and listened or accompanied them. Different types of songs in various languages, such as Lakḥóta, Diné and English, were shared, along with various sonic and musical techniques.

That same year I won a commission from Third Coast Percussion, a Grammy award-winning percussion ensemble based in Chicago. I could not imagine doing such an important show without a collaborator and reached out to Witt to see if he wanted to try an experimental composition method. I would co-compose with the ensemble and Witt would contribute a composition of his own to be the center of that piece. The ensemble would realize and perform a graphic score, Witt would sing his own composition in the middle of the piece, and then the ensemble would finish realizing the score. The score and performance, *Wógligleya (Ṭḥuŋkášila Čečiyelo)*, are described in detail in section 5.2.5.

### *Research Methods Used During Field Work*

#### *Individual Interviews*

Individual interviews (with participants listed in 5.2.1) centered on how and why new songs are written, where the knowledge about stones comes from, how knowledge is transmitted through songs, and how songs function in the Lakḥóta world. I returned to Santee Witt's home for

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<sup>184</sup> *Peyote Songs. Da Boyz!! Guud Wayzz*, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FrW0ggbWTvI>.

<sup>185</sup> *Prayer Song*, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SAy1TOaXDz4>.

<sup>186</sup> *Bro MovesCamp Cover*, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g9rm2Qj0tz0>.

<sup>187</sup> “We have developed a space in Rapid City, South Dakota, that is a contemporary nexus and hub for creativity, congregation, sustainability, and learning, with a focus on Native and regional artists...The space includes a modern Native art gallery, studios for Native artists, shared working spaces, flexible creative community space, and opportunities for collaborative projects, networking, and exposure.” “Racing Magpie,” Racing Magpie, accessed September 6, 2022, <https://www.racingmagpie.org>.

extensive interviews because of his openness about his practice, his interest in collaborating, and his offers to include me in community activities.

### Group Interviews

I held one group interview which involved myself as an interviewer, listener, and witness with Santee's singing group. Participants shared songs they had personally written and how they had written them. Per community protocol, I thanked each participant with gifts from the Peyote Tapes record label, blankets, food, and honorariums.

### Documentation

I documented the discussion and recording of the compositions by the group as well as the private meetings with Santee Witt using audio recordings. I discussed with all participants whether a particular song was considered public use, was gifted to a certain person or group, or was a private song only. The resulting transcripts are included in the appendix. The final Witt artwork collaboration was created for public performance and premiered June 26, 2022 at the Constellation Room in Chicago, Illinois.<sup>188</sup>

## 5.2.4 Interviews

### *Listening to Nonhumans as Method*

The concept of the human as vessel for songs or creation requires listening to or receiving the message from the nonhuman world, both seen and unseen.

### Mike Marshall

Mike Marshall is a Lakhóta artist and educator who creates traditional Lakhóta games and teaches them in schools, workshops, and camps. He is a prolific artist who creates batiks, jewelry, paintings, and silversmithing. Marshall makes art for a living and expressed a depth of practice and a practical approach to creation. He distinguishes between vision and dream, waking and sleeping methods of reception. I asked him if he ever had dreams about the work he makes. He replied, "Sometimes you just wake up and you think of things... Sometimes you have visions about things. I hate using that word. But here's a good example. I dreamt about that one [artwork]," and he indicated which one. Marshall also talked about how there is a protocol—a right way to hunt—which he connects to his art practice. He is one several of the interviewed artists who connects protocols for using computer technologies in the right way to protocols for using older technologies such as song in the right way.

### Jhon Duane Goes in Center

Jhon Duane Goes in Center is a jeweler, retired GIS consultant, and sometimes curator who previously worked in the tribal historic preservation office. I asked him, "Are artists vessels?" He responded, "I've heard it about spiritual leaders. They always say, they're a hollow bone or a

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<sup>188</sup> *Frequency Series Presents: Third Coast Percussion with Guest Performer Santee Witt*, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BPNXMCo2z0o>.

vessel, that creator power comes through you and I know that. I'm really happy when making things...in my dreams I'm looking at my engraving, my cutters, just moving through metal and I could just see things moving.” Here the term “hollow bone” refers to the eagle bone whistles which medicine men use during ceremony and are used by participants during the Sun Dance ceremony. Witt also refers to hearing the bone whistles while receiving songs.

### Alex Firethunder

Firethunder shared, “If you receive a song in a vision or something, maybe that song's just for you...for you to sing when you're praying or when you're going on a vision quest, or when you're in sweat,” which shows how protocol can be clear but also flexible in response to personal spiritual teachings. Firethunder recounts further:

I've heard two different medicine men have their own altar songs. Those aren't to be shared or sung in different places, it's just meant for there. But another common teaching I've always heard too is that for wacipi<sup>189</sup> is that if you sing a song to the public, it now belongs to everybody...Once you've done that, now it's the people song...I view my ability to compose songs as a gift that's to be shared. It was given to me, so I give it to others.

### Santee Witt

For Witt, the question of where songs come from is answered through the protocols and processes the composer enacts. He is the channel, prayer is the protocol, and in return he receives a song. Witt says, “All these people...you have the songs, you just got to connect yourself and that's what I do because I'm connected with Tunkáshila and I connect with myself. That's why I have this energy. That's why I can create these songs.”<sup>190</sup> He understands Tunkáshila (Grandfather) or Creator as the source of his creative energy. I asked him, “When you sit down to write a new song, you smudge, you pray and you sit, you meditate and then wait?” Witt replied,

Mm-hmm, and it'll come in. But also, like yesterday, it's crazy because believe me or not, but I wake up every morning and I open my window and I have my tree there. And I'm so happy I have a tree. I don't know why I'm so proud of my little tree. I talk to it and the birds, but I have birds in my wall. I found out I have birds in there. So, the other day, they're chirping on, they're scratching on it, but early morning they start singing and I get up. Like, “Wake me up, get up.”

So, I open my window and I'll come in here, and I'll burn sage, and I'll greet the sun, I'll pray. And I go in that room, and I'll sit there and I just kind of feel the breeze and go meditate. Sit on the edge of my bed. So, I seen this post on Facebook, I scroll on Facebook, do a positive post, try to be encouraging because a lot of people vent to me and tell me about things in their life. I try to, on a whole, encourage everybody, you know?

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<sup>189</sup> Wacipi is a public dance or pow-wow.

<sup>190</sup> See Appendix 8.4.7.



So anyway, I sit there and I'm thinking yesterday, I seen this post, says, "June, our Sun Dances are opening up. Now it's time to pray." It's like, "Yes, it is. I can feel it." So I start singing a song outside my window, a good morning song, you know? So, I start singing it; it's just good morning song. Talks about honoring the sun. You hear these birds, man, right outside my window. They're chirping. All the sudden when I sing this song, they start chiming in with like the Sun Dance whistles.<sup>191</sup>

He is describing here how he started the song that would become the collaboration with the Third Coast Percussion ensemble. Called "Ṭḥuŋkášila Čhékiyelo," it has the following lyrics:

*Ṭḥuŋkášila Čhékiyelo*

*(I am crying a prayer, Grandfather)*

*Ṭḥuŋkášila Namačih'uh*

*(Hear me, Grandfather)*

This is an example of how listening to nonhuman beings—in this case, the birds outside Witt's window—is a method by which knowledge is learned. Witt reiterates multiple times that everyone can hear spirits and everyone has songs within them. Witt speaks often about the meditative process of listening for a song, a calm journey towards the Creator through what my grandfather Maḥpíya Nažin called the quieting of the mind. The passage above also speaks of the quality of human pitifulness, the humble state of humanity in comparison to nonhuman beings and the spirit world.

Witt explained how songs come from the spirit world and how those songs are then utilized to connect back to the spirit world. Witt was careful to not reveal too much in the interview context, due to protocol, "There's a lot of things I can't talk about. I got to keep secrets." But he would explain the basic method, "You enter song and it's kind of a teamwork almost with the Yuwípi man and the singer. Kind of like teamwork almost. But Yuwípi man, he holds that. He's the one that's opening the portal, so to speak."<sup>192</sup> The Yuwípi man is a spiritual man, perhaps a medicine man, who conducts ceremonies, specifically the Yuwípi (Untying) ceremony. Witt explains that the song and the man work together to open the connection to the other world. The songs are given from that spirit world and different spirits are involved in different ceremonies, contexts, locations, and people involved, "What these songs come from spirits directly, different entities that help the people, different ones. Whenever they call these spirits, they say, 'The spirit is here, he is with us.' And so he might have that song."<sup>193</sup>

Lakhóta spirituality involves personal relationships to nonhuman beings, which for Witt and those he prays with, are the Thunders. Witt says, "We work with the Wakhínayan [Thunder] Oyate. We work with the spirits, the stones, the drum, the songs, it all connects. And the

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<sup>191</sup> See Appendix 8.4.7.

<sup>192</sup> See Appendix 8.4.7.

<sup>193</sup> See Appendix 8.4.7.

Wakǰinyan Oyate is the one that I know.”<sup>194</sup> The songs he sings in ceremonial contexts are from and for the Thunders. Witt says, “You got to have a certain beat that the spirits will connect to. So there's song within itself. So it's a power.”<sup>195</sup> The beat of the drum is a song within itself, a key component separate from the words or melody being sung. The beat and melody both are “a power,” important and necessary parts of the ceremonial process that enact a protocol for doing things the right way.

### *Stones in Lakǰóta Ontology*

Stones are deeply important to many Lakǰóta people. They show up again and again in conversations as important to individual spirituality.

### *Jhon Duane Goes in Center*

I met Jhon Duane Goes in Center in the Dahl Arts Center in Rapid City on June 7, 2021. We talked while looking at a collection of paintings (Figure 26) by his late friend, Robert L. Penn, that he helped gather and curate. These powerful paintings helped drive our conversation.



Figure 26: Robert Penn, *Mitake Oyasin (All My Relations)*, 1995.

The first thing Goes in Center wanted to speak about is his love of agate and why he is connected to that stone. He told me about his first *Hanǰlécha*,<sup>196</sup> which my grandfather was helping him complete at the time. Goes in Center said:

In the light of that early morning, I looked on the altar and there was these symbols kind of etched into the dirt. So these are symbols that I probably I have to use in my lifetime. So now I have a little more truth about why native people did the things they did. Some

<sup>194</sup> See Appendix 8.4.7.

<sup>195</sup> See Appendix 8.4.7.

<sup>196</sup> *Hanǰlécha* is the ceremony of crying for a vision, sometimes referred to as a vision quest.

of the symbols they used on their own personal items and bead work and all that. But there were four stones put on the altar. There were three white quartz one, and the fourth one was this agate. And I didn't really know of this agate when I was a kid, but just never thought about it. But here the spirits brought one.

The first thing in creation was an amorphic being, and when he turned himself inside-out he created water. His blood became water and he became brittle. So that's why he became the first rock. Íŋyaŋ [rock] ... was the only being and he was very lonely, so this is where the sun and moon and all those started being created. Personality started developing with all these terrestrial beings. That's why we have a social system, our part of our governance comes from the first thing in creation was rock, who was lonely, had all these things around it. So, I equate, even now, these agates as because they were amorphic, they were formed in water, they become brittle. So they represent life, water. So to me, these [agates] are the face of Íŋyaŋ.<sup>197</sup>

Goes in Center shared his personal relationship to spirit stones:

I do have a, with my special stones, I keep them in the same way that all these medicines stones do.... I'm not going to pray to them as gods. I know they have healing power because they were, are part of creation. All this metamorphic, all of these kinds of things that were happening, traded rocks and this energy, matter, water, all those things condensed into this thing has this powerful energy.<sup>198</sup>

Goes in Center, a practitioner of both geology and Lakhóta spirituality, understands that creating art in collaboration with these stones is, at the same time, relating to the living beings the stone was once made from, “When I make things [with stones] like this, I tell people it was just living; it's marking time.” He sees stones as alive, flowing slowly.

### Santee Witt

I asked Witt about stones and if he had memorable stones from his childhood:

One time I found this rock and it was just a perfectly round rock. I was a kid, but it connected to me for some reason... Play with it and talk to it. Took it with me to sweat, held it. But I connected with it and held it. I didn't know why I was connected to this rock. It wasn't no shiny, pretty... It was just a brown rock... My grandpa told me, “Oh, he had found you, we found each other, and he's going to help you and protect you.”<sup>199</sup>

This is similar to Section 5.1, where Corey Stover and Becky Red Bow discuss Grandma Evelyn, who collected stones and was drawn to stones throughout her life. Witt's most important tool as

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<sup>197</sup> See Appendix 8.4.9.

<sup>198</sup> See Appendix 8.4.7.

<sup>199</sup> See Appendix 8.4.7.

a Native American Church (NAC) Roadman<sup>200</sup> is his drum, which has a drumhead secured by seven stones in the shape of a star. Witt also keeps stones in his fan case, which contains tools for NAC ceremonies: “I have my energy rocks. I pray with them beside the water. I have rocks that came to me growing up. Like you say, I just connect with these rocks.”<sup>201</sup> The video piece, *Okáletkehaŋ (Branching)* shows these stones and his road case (Figure 27).



Figure 27: Kite, *Okáletkehaŋ (Branching)*, 2021, in collaboration with Santee Witt. Video still.

How does one find these rocks? Through careful observation of the world, as Witt explains:

You're observing to take care of things, watch out, look out, be aware, be connected, use rocks to speak to me. They'll find you if you find them. Need to throw this one out, but here's one, I'll be like, "Real special, it's going to help you, energy." So it's about energy. So that's why I've always these rocks, always within my prayers. Exactly, right? It's hard to really explain, but that's just the best way. Because I know these things, utilize it. And I seen my grandfather to take rocks out of people. Things like that. And so, energy, we're

<sup>200</sup> In the Native American Church, a Road Man conducts the church service.

<sup>201</sup> See Appendix 8.4.7.

all energy here. Energy in every one of us. So how you use that energy, how to strengthen energy, how to be one with your energy.<sup>202</sup>

Witt expresses an essential energetic connection with certain stones, though not all stones. This is an understanding of nonhuman beinghood and stone beings' interest in humanity and willingness to help humanity.

### Mary Blackbird

Blackbird spoke at length about stones. As Blackbird explained to me about stones:

They're dense but it still has that spirit inside, just like every plant, blade of grass has a spirit. Every weed down there, dandelions, everything has spirits and that connection. We have to stay connected to what is in everything. Like the birds that come and sing to us.<sup>203</sup>

Blackbird emphasized that, like other beings, a stone contains a spirit. Spirits can be communicated with and Blackbird emphasized that communication is possible with song in Lakḥóta ceremony, "You use those songs to call those spirits. So that they can help with that, whatever you're asking,"<sup>204</sup> Blackbird told me. She communicates with her personal spirit stone, which chose to come to her:

I have a spirit stone and he has a name. One of the things that I know is that when these spirit stones come to you, they choose you to come to, not just anybody, so you can have a lot of stones, but maybe they weren't chosen for you so you have to give them away to somebody else or not have them have anymore.<sup>205 206</sup>

Blackbird continues,

Songs for the Ínyans are sung in those ceremonies to bring them in. They're not sung in a sweat lodge unless they're calling that specific spirit to come in to help with something, a healing and that. There's a lot of people that want to be medicine people and they gather all these stones, but they're not really for them. Because not one specific spirit will say, "I will be your spirit helper." Or, "I'll help you with this ceremony."<sup>207</sup>

The connection and communication with stones is not passive or simple; it contains an unknowable complexity that is slowly revealed over one's lifetime. The songs and ceremonies are part of that complexity.

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<sup>202</sup> See Appendix 8.4.7.

<sup>203</sup> See Appendix 8.4.5.

<sup>204</sup> See Appendix 8.4.5.

<sup>205</sup> See Appendix 8.4.5.

<sup>206</sup> This gifting (or "give-away") of stones is part of the larger connection to gifting practices in Lakḥóta culture and economy, which often involves Lakḥóta art.

<sup>207</sup> See Appendix 8.4.5.

## Alex Firethunder

Firethunder offered his linguistic and personal analysis of stones. This provided a crucial critical perspective on nonhuman animacy from a linguist's perspective:

I've never heard anyone say that the trees are alive, are living, *huŋká*<sup>208</sup> relatives, we might say that...or in stones, I've never heard anyone say the stones are living beings. But we do refer to them as *Tunkashila*, which is grandfather...There's kinship terms used for these inanimate things. But when we talk about them, like you said, the sentence structure, the grammar, it's very explicit, it's very clear what's animate and what's inanimate in *Lakhóta*...And so there is that differentiation in our everyday speech.<sup>209</sup>

Although in the *Lakhóta* language there is a clear differentiation of animate from inanimate, the complexity of the power of stones is evident in a personal stone story of a stone that was gifted to Firethunder by a man he did not fully trust.<sup>210</sup> Afterwards, "I asked a medicine man that my family goes to from Rosebud, I brought him the stone. I said, 'What do you think about this? I said it was given to me but I just don't know.' He took it and he held it and prayed over it and felt it and he told me that it wasn't good, he said, 'Get rid of it.' I said 'How?' And he told me how to get rid of it, what to do, and then he told me what to do for protection." This story highlights the power of stones in *Lakhóta* religion and culture and is an example of a role they play in human lives, regardless of their inanimacy in *Lakhóta* grammar.

### *Creation as Connection to Land and Cosmos*

Human acts of creation connect humans to both land and cosmos. Goes in Centers' transformation of Fairburn Agate into "personal adornment" or jewelry is the harnessing of his understanding of cosmology and geology into wearable form. Humans are connected with specific mountains on the macro scale, through sacred sites, and stones on the micro scale, through spirit stones.

### Goes in Center

The sacred sites of the *Lakhóta*, located in a ring around the Black Hills, are the "apex of spiritual powers,"<sup>211</sup> Goes in Center Says. He explained that each rock formation in the Black Hills was igneous (volcanic). That volcanic stone is used in the *Inípi* (sweat lodge and purification ceremony), where it is referred to as the Grandfather stone for its ability to heat to very high temperatures. Goes in Center observes:

We're recreating creation again, we got the dome, we got the earth, so there's the four elements of air, water, fire, and matter... We heat up the rocks, get them red hot, we give

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<sup>208</sup> *Huŋká* ceremony is the ritual for the making of relatives or a traditional form of adoption.

<sup>209</sup> See Appendix 8.4.8.

<sup>210</sup> The word "gift" is used here to connect the action to the wider practice of gift-giving in *Lakhóta* culture where the items hold religious or cultural significance and the practice of giving them to another person carries cultural value as well.

<sup>211</sup> See Appendix 8.4.9.

them steam, give them back their blood and they in turn give us the breath of life, which is steam. And that's how we purified ourselves.<sup>212</sup>

The purpose of stones in the context of that ceremony is to connect with the story of the beginning of the universe and the story explaining why Lakǰóta people are drawn to stones. Sweat lodge stones come from the same lava flows that formed the Lakǰóta universe, that created the spirit stones, that formed the Black Hills, and that created the sacred sites. All these things are understood in the context of the Inípi, with its intricate ceremonial decisions and nonhuman presences, both seen and unseen, collaborating simultaneously in a humble human act of creation.

Goes in Center sees the intricacy of ceremonial decisions as geographic,

I do know that our ceremonies are all geographic, so when we have a Sun Dance, it's the cottonwood tree in the middle, it's the choke cherries on the gates, it's the sage, cedar, the buffalo skull for the altar, that's all geographic to this area...there's truth to what we do as Lakǰóta people.<sup>213</sup>

Goes in Center notes how the power of these ceremonies is generated from the connection between the materials, the land, the nonhumans that provide the materials, and the cosmos. The geographically locatable nature of these choices deepens Goes in Center's connection.

Goes in Center sees art as part of this continuum of this choice and communication with nonhumans:

Well, we're related to it [stones] just from the fact of, it's kind of a stretch to most people's mind, but we're eternal spirits having a human experience, that's the way I see it. We're part of the universe. We're energy. I don't if you've ever been to Inípi ceremonies and see spirits coming out, little lights and the energy...it's tangible. And we're part of that greater universe that is just a multiverse in a sense. All these things I see are so interconnected. But, at heart, we take materials and transform it into something inspirational, visual, spiritual, we're communicating with it, we're interrelating with it. Everything is in constant flux and there's a Lakǰóta word for that, it's called Skan-Skan. Everything is always moving.<sup>214</sup>

The Lakǰóta people “struck a relationship with not only the land that we live on but also the with the cosmos,” says Goes in Center. He considers Lakǰóta people “spatial reasoners...so we're never lost. We know the macro to the micro because we see things on the ground. So that's called ground-truthing in science.”<sup>215</sup> The relationship to land and cosmos is practiced in a form of Indigenous geography that correlates directly to ceremonies and songs. Goes in Centers' personal relationship to stones such as Fairburn Agate is enacted through his creation of

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<sup>212</sup> See Appendix 8.4.9.

<sup>213</sup> See Appendix 8.4.9.

<sup>214</sup> See Appendix 8.4.9.

<sup>215</sup> See Appendix 8.4.9.

“personal adornment,” generating new knowledge and creations from cosmology and geology in physical form.

### 5.2.5 Synthesis and Results

The results of this field study are two-fold: artwork that synthesizes the data collected and Culturally-Grounded Methodologies that emerged while conducting the study. The synthesis into artworks is an articulation of how Lakhóta song and art are ethical and reciprocal collaborations between human and nonhuman beings from the perspectives of artists and elders. The results of the interview and research-creation methods revealed evidence of how creation is a form of Lakhóta epistemology; listening to nonhumans is both method and protocol; stones are primary to Lakhóta ontology; and creation of art is a connection to both land and cosmos.<sup>216</sup>

#### *Artwork*

In the interviews Witt outlined his methodology as listening to nonhumans: birds, stones, the Spirit World, and Ate (Creator). Jhon Duane Goes in Center explored his spiritual path towards geology and artmaking. Alex Firethunder offered a definition of song as gifts. Marshall created a world through careful understanding of the natural world and Lakhóta history. Finally, Mary Blackbird wove a world of sacred connections between all beings. The resulting artworks from this field study synthesize perspectives of artists and elders living on Pine Ridge Reservation and articulate reciprocal collaborations between human and nonhuman beings using song.

Artworks that resulted from this field study were:

1. Kite, *Okáletkehaŋ (Branching)*, 2021, in collaboration with Santee Witt. Video (colour, sound), 10:17
2. Kite, *Wólowaŋ wakáŋe. (I composed this music.)*, 2021. Stones, dimensions variable.
3. Kite, *Wógligleya (Tšunkášila Čečiyelo)*, 2021, in collaboration with Santee Witt. Score.

#### *Okáletkehaŋ (Branching)*

*Okáletkehaŋ (Branching)* is a video I made to capture the texture of my conversations with Santee Witt. The video has two scenes. One is of Santee’s hands as he opens his Peyote Box, which he uses to conduct ceremonies in the Native American Church. He shows me the water drum he uses to sing during ceremony and the stones used to create a star on the drum and hold the drum head in place. He sings an example song with the drum (Figure 28). The final scene (Figure 29) is a video of a small stone sculpture I made responding to his song.

This video illustrates the discussions about stones as collaborators and knowledge holders. Stones are nonhuman beings that communicate to Lakhóta people; the songs come from listening and connecting to them; ceremony is the enactment of all those things together. Art is the transformation of these relationships into physical form.

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<sup>216</sup> I consider these artworks related but not part of a series.





Figure 28: Kite, Okáletkehaŋ (Branching), 2021, in collaboration with Santee Witt. Video still.

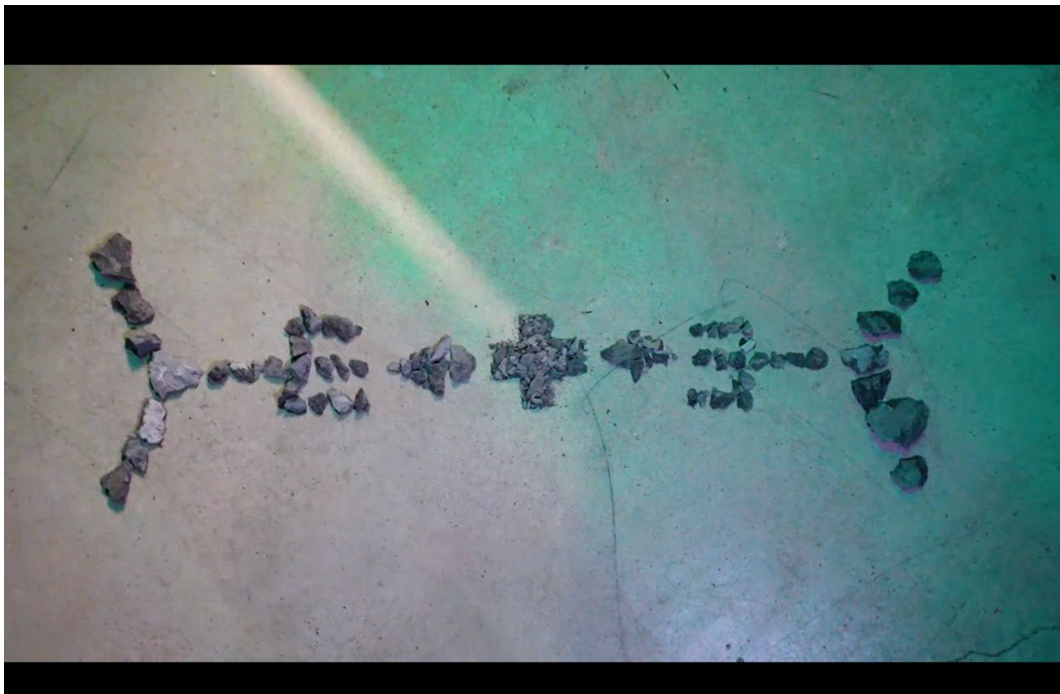


Figure 29: Kite, Okáletkehaŋ (Branching), 2021, in collaboration with Santee Witt. Video still.

Wólowaŋ wakáŋe. (I composed this music.)

*Wólowaŋ wakáŋe. (I composed this music.)* is a small sculpture made of small white rocks placed on the floor in variable dimensions (Figure 30). A center design represents “stone” branching out towards symbols representing “thoughts,” “as a pathway towards,” “transformation into,” “stones or objects.”

In creating this sculpture, I drew on the discussions about stones and song-making and it is my attempt at making concise and decisive designs that have the potential to be interpreted by musicians into sound. The sculpture captures how relationships with stones reveal a specifically Lakḥóta ontology that requires reciprocity with the nonhuman and spirit world.



Figure 30: Kite, Wólowaŋ wakáŋe. (I composed this music.), 2021. Stones, dimensions variable.

Wógligleya (Thŋŋkášila Čečiyelo)

*Wógligleya (Thŋŋkášila Čečiyelo)* is a score and performance realized by Third Coast Percussion ensemble (Figure 31). The score is the result of my collaboration with them and Santee Witt. It enacts a communal dreaming and visioning methodology. The score is made of shapes from the LSK and is meant to be chiasmic, meaning the structure of the piece is mirrored and cocoons a central event on the timeline. The mirror structure of the design was performed by the percussionists. Witt’s composition, *Thŋŋkášila Čečiyelo*, is performed at the center, before the percussionists resume, realizing the score backwards out from the center of the design.

I chose this structure to reflect the mirrored nature of Lakḥóta traditional designs. This piece represented a communal methodology where each musician and composer had individual voices in a collective form.

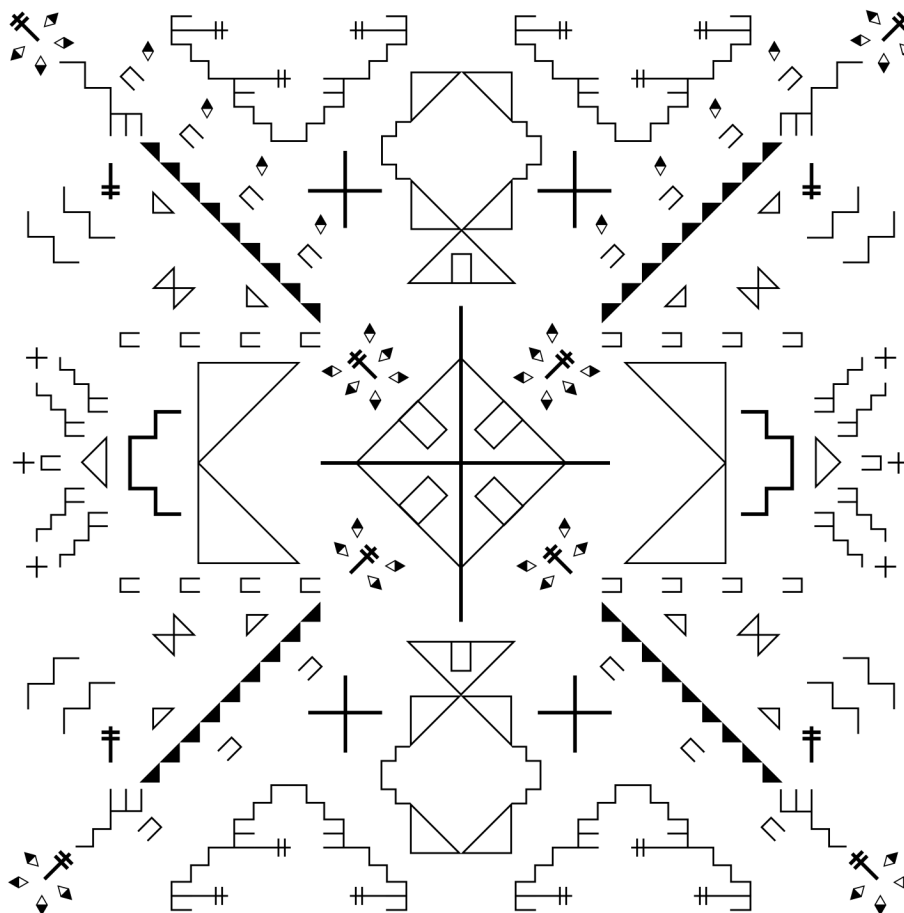


Figure 31: Kite, Wógligleya (Thŋkášila Ččiyelo), 2021. Score.

### *Culturally-Grounded Methodologies* Collaborative Music Composition

My compositional practice for creating *Wógligleya (Thŋkášila Ččiyelo)* began with discussions with Witt, as seen in the video *Okáletkehan (Branching)*. We talked about which song interested him. He shared many different options, and we settled on *Thŋkášila Ččiyelo*. Witt revealed that the story he had told me about listening to birds to create a song was also the story to make this particular song. I analyzed the song's melody and harmony and brought those notes and suggestions to the first composition workshop with Third Coast Percussion. After discussion and listening to instruments, I decided to employ Sadie Red Wing's methodologies in this process, as a contemporary methodology that could translate dreams into designs. On September 3, 2021, I gave the four members of the ensemble her Lakhóta Shape Kit and I asked them to tell me a dream they had using only the LSK's graphic language. After a few months, I received each musician's dream (Figure 32-35).

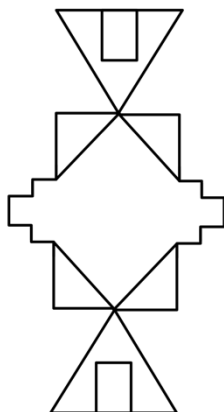


Figure 32: Draft from Sean Connors (member of Third Coast Percussion) for Wógligleya (Ṭḥuŋkášila Čěčiyelo).

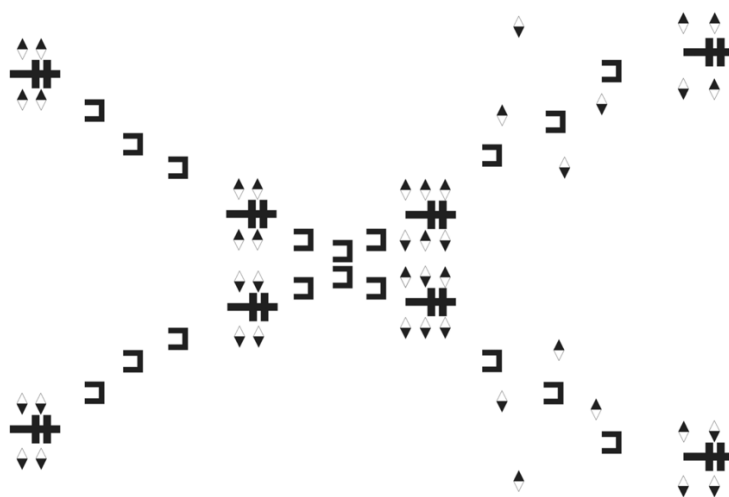


Figure 33: Draft from Robert Dillon (member of Third Coast Percussion) for Wógligleya (Ṭḥuŋkášila Čěčiyelo).

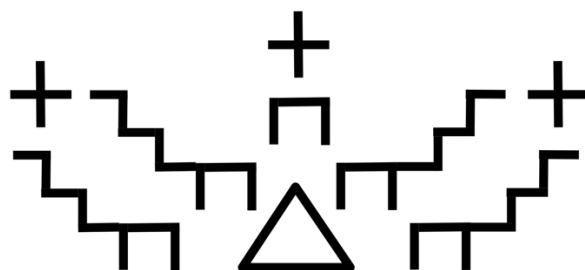


Figure 34: Draft from Peter Martin (member of Third Coast Percussion) for Wógligleya

(Thun̄kášila Čečiyelo).

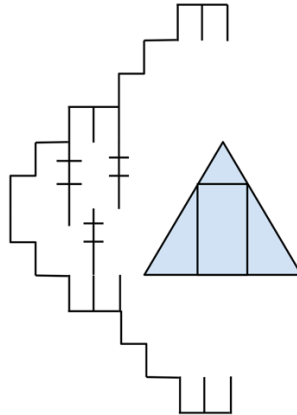


Figure 35: Draft from David Skidmore (member of Third Coast Percussion) for Wógligleya (Thun̄kášila Čečiyelo).

As the second rehearsal approached, I hired former Initiative for Indigenous Futures designer Unna Regino to reformat and arrange the four designs into one single design, taking care to achieve the correct numerology and directionality of the original designs. I then sent the design to an animator, Giorgi Janiashvili, to animate it for live projection (Figure 36).

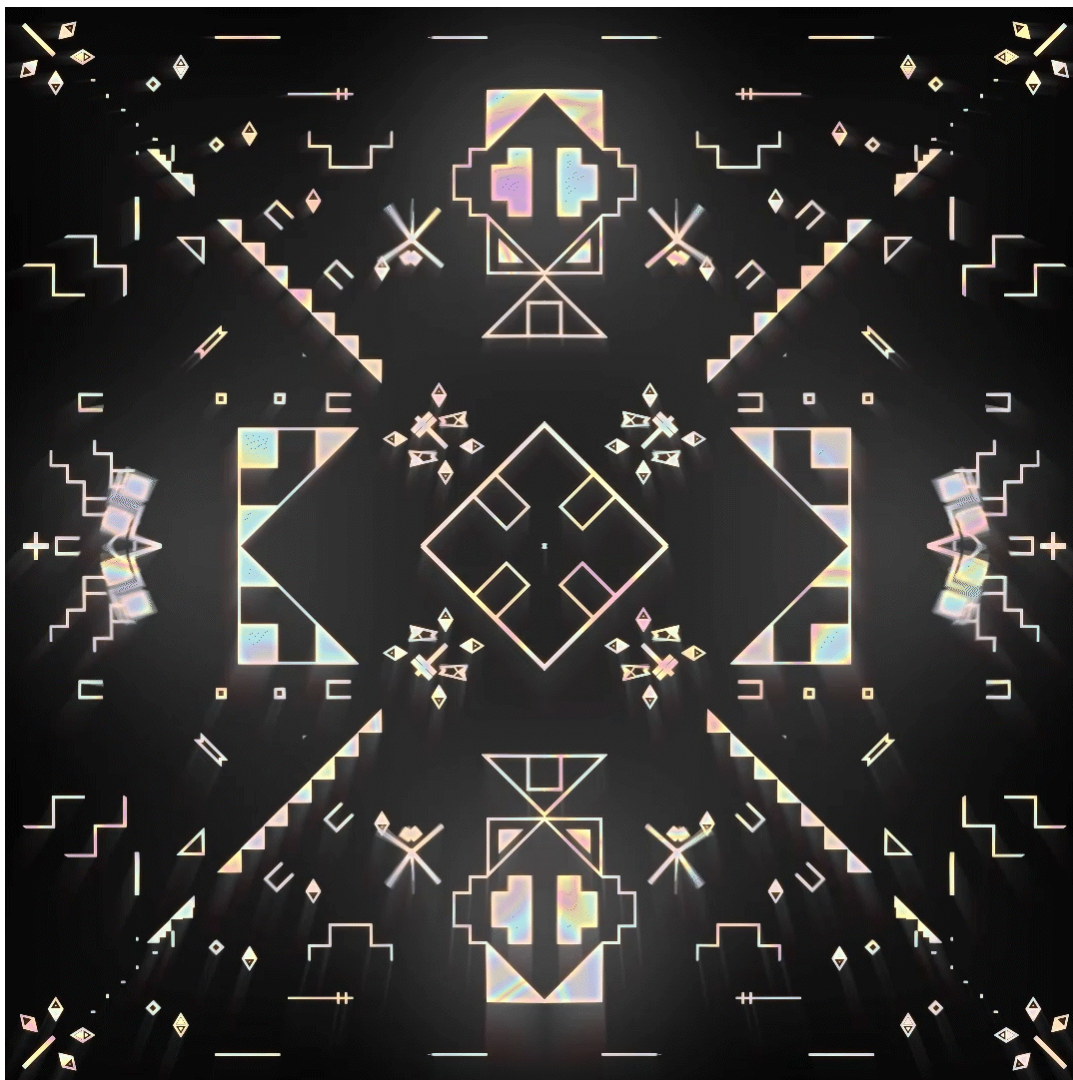


Figure 36: Kite, *Wógligleya* (*Tǔŋkášila Čėčiyelo*), 2021, in collaboration with Santee Witt. Animated by Giorgi Janiashvili. Score, animated.

The performance of the piece *Wógligleya* (*Tǔŋkášila Čėčiyelo*) consisted of each percussionist beginning in noise and moving through pre-decided personal relationships to each symbol in any direction.<sup>217</sup> When reaching the center of the design, the percussionists held a chord, while Santee entered, performing his own piece in the center (Figure 37). Witt invited his daughter Acacia Witt and his girlfriend Melia Anthony to sing with him. Then, the percussionists resumed their score interpretation and exited the composition back into noise.

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<sup>217</sup> *Frequency Series Presents.*



Figure 37: Third Coast Percussion performers are four figures on left of image. Santee Witt, Acacia Witt, and Melia Anthony, singers on right of image.

### *Lakshota Cultural Methods*

The following Lakshota methodologies emerged during the field work process:

#### Nonhuman Collaboration

1. Nonhumans communicating directly with humans (like Jhon Duane Goes in Center's half stone)
2. Nonhumans responding to human creations (like birds singing to Santee Witt)
3. Nonhumans aiding in the performance of miracles and offering protection (like Mary Blackbird's blessed stone)

#### Reciprocal Creation Methods

The final artworks synthesize the conversations during interviews. They articulate a reciprocal collaboration between human and nonhuman beings. Several methods emerged in the interview discussions:

1. Creating as channeling: Blackbird described her experience of crying out while beading and her experience of receiving a vision
2. Protocols during creation: Witt shared his practice of smudging and praying consistently before composition sessions
3. Relationship to land and cosmos: Goes in Center imbues understanding and expressions of land and cosmos into his wearable creations

## Lakḥóta Cultural Methods

Over the course of the field study interviewees and collaborators articulated a number of methodologies and protocols for the creation of artworks:

1. prayer
2. smudging
3. creating
4. listening to nonhumans, such as birds
5. creating wearables
6. blessing
7. crying out
8. singing
9. following protocol
10. sharing

### 5.3 Field Study: Indigenous Community

#### 5.3.1 Context

The objective of this field study was to collect data in support of articulating a Lakḥóta ontology, epistemology, and methodology for creating songs and art. The approach was to discuss relationships with land, material, and listening in order to understand diverse approaches to protocol and methodology. I was specifically interested in how contemporary Indigenous artists expressed Indigenous ontologies, and how understanding this might help me develop protocols for engaging with technologies, as nonhuman beings, through the process of artmaking.

This field study involved discussions with Archer Pechawis, Clementine Bordeaux, Jackson 2Bears, Scott Benesiinaabandan, and Peter Morin. The interviewees are contemporary Indigenous artists practicing across a range of mediums, often with intersections between technology and performance. They were chosen based on their range of perspectives on Indigenous performance practice and connections they make between their specific Indigenous philosophies and how they create artworks. Importantly, I had previous working or familial relationships with all participants in this field study, including several who had been collaborators. This was a methodological choice reflective of the way Indigenous relationships are formed and maintained: slowly and with care, prioritizing trust. The result of the interviews was the synthesis of Indigenous protocols to guide the creation and refinement of the machine-learning sculpture *Napé okičhiyuspa okáwiḥ wačhiuḥiyayapi*. ( *Holding hands we encircle each other in dance.*) and performance artwork *Hél čhaḅkú kiḅ ḥpáye* (*There lies the road*).

#### *Field Study Plans*

Originally, this field study was based in Los Angeles and focused on the diasporic histories of the American Indian population in California. The plan was to gather Indigenous community members for multiple days of collaborative sharing and workshopping with both Lakḥóta and other Indigenous artists for the development of protocols for creating artworks incorporating machine learning. Due to COVID-19, the ability to gather in groups was unsafe at the time and prevented in-person workshops.



All interviews were conducted on Zoom and the artworks were developed by me. Audio recordings for music composition were made by individual musicians.

### *Original Questions*

The questions that I formulated prior to the interviews were:

- What makes us Lakhóta or Indigenous when we are far from home?
- How do we define our relationship to lands when we are removed from them?
- If you could gift a listening device to your great grandchild, what would it listen to?
- What technologies do we want our next generations to receive from us?
- What materials should these technologies be made out of?
- How do you collect materials in a Good Way?
- Why do the Lakhóta and Indigenous people concern themselves with stones?
- What was the first Indigenous material or stone you came to know?
- What can materials or stones teach us as Lakhóta and Indigenous people?
- What kind of information concerning materials or stones is most important at this time?
- When we make something new, how do we begin in a Good Way?
- When we present something new for the first time, how do we present it in a Good Way?
- Should this artwork be seen by the general public?

### **5.3.2 Description**

#### *Field work*

I began this field study by interviewing the four artists on Zoom. After the interviews I analyzed their responses, responded with artworks, and developed an installation and performance. I engaged in discussion with Lakhóta designer Bobby Joe Smith III to communicate what I learned from the interviews into graphic designs. The outcome of the interviews was the site-specific installation and performance artwork *Hél čhaŋkú kiŋ ħpáye (There lies the road)*.

#### *Themes*

Five themes were evident in the discussions and interviews during the field work.

- Indigenous Artists, Land, Diaspora
- Indigenous Artists' Methodologies
- Indigenous Artists' Protocols
- Material and Nonhumans in Indigenous Arts Practices

The interviews in Section 5.3.4, below, are organized according to these themes. Indigenous Artists, Land, Diaspora encompasses discussions around relationships to place and home; Indigenous Artists' Methodologies touches on processes and methods used in artists' practices; Indigenous Artists' Protocols explores how cultural protocols are included in artists' practices; Material and Nonhumans in Indigenous Arts Practices looks at the role of nonhuman beings and materials such as stones in artists' practices.

### 5.3.3 Methodology

Individual interviews were conducted by asking each interviewee the prepared questions one or two at a time.

Indigenous methods used in this field study are discussed in Section 4.2.3. In this field study, the method of listening is used in a variety of ways, such as listening to elders and knowledge keepers during interviews, listening to improvising musicians, and building a system where the computer can listen to changes in audio (Section 5.3.5). Sharing is a community-centered method seen in this field study in the form of sharing a song with the musicians, sharing the performance. Creating or art-making as a research method is community-grounded, seen in the creation of the artworks.

#### *Documentation*

I documented the interviews as audio recordings through the Zoom platform. The resulting transcriptions are included in the appendix. The final artwork was performed at PS122 Gallery in New York City and documented with video and audio by the Vera List Center. The documentation is available on my website.

### 5.3.4 Interviews

#### *Indigenous artists, land, diaspora*

Clementine Bordeaux<sup>218</sup> is a member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe and my aunt by marriage. Bordeaux grew up on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, is a doctoral candidate at the University of California in Los Angeles, and lives in Rapid City, South Dakota. Bordeaux remembers the formation of her Lakhóta identity as being clarified by time spent living fourteen hours away from home: “My Uncle Jhon Duane [Goes in Center] sang a song of prayer to open up the meal and I remember just crying...I realized what it meant to be away for me.” When Bordeaux relocated even farther away to Washington state, she realized, “everything that has shaped who I am is a connection to language, it’s a connection to land, it’s a connection to culture and connection to family that has maintained those connections...It’s work to be accountable to those.”<sup>219</sup>

Bordeaux defines this connection:

To be indigenous is to maintain those connections. When I'm elsewhere, when I'm not in my homeland, it's then how do I conduct myself as a Lakhóta person with this idea of being a good relative...how do I do that on someone else's land as an uninvited guest? Which is also hard work. But imagine if we actually came with that type of care and accountability all the time everywhere... Because we would all be working on accountability and we would all be working on reciprocity, which is then again not easy. I think that's the other part that I think often our culture, Lakhóta culture, is, like, oversimplified. Our people just take the pretty, fluffy parts. It's hard work being Lakhóta. You have to love people that you want to push off a cliff. But because people are a resource and life is precious, you have

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<sup>218</sup> “Clementine Bordeaux,” accessed September 8, 2022, <https://www.clementinebordeaux.com>.

<sup>219</sup> See Appendix 8.4.2.

to work at that love and that care. And love not in the sense of settler love, “oh, I possess you because I care for you,” but we're responsible for each other because we care about each other, even though we might not like each other. That's accountability...<sup>220</sup>

Bordeaux regards diaspora as a sense of allyship or accomplice-ship when a guest on a territory, saying “diaspora is a settler concept to disconnect us from place and to create a dichotomy in the sense that we don't belong...it was settlers that told you, you were in diaspora when you got here...Historically, indigenous people are like, ‘Oh, who are these people? Tell us who your families are and how you're here and then we can build a relationship.’”<sup>221</sup>

### *Indigenous Artists' Methodology and Protocols*

I asked the artists about their processes of creation. Archer Pechawis<sup>222</sup> is an Anishinaabe performance artist. Pechawis discussed the purpose of performance art:

Those are beautiful moments when the lightning strikes and that the idea comes fully formed, typically fully formed, into my head. And then, a moment later, there's the, oh, is that ever going to be a lot of work? We've chosen this very challenging road: Performance, it's a practice of ephemerality...It's like trying to catch lightning in a bottle. Which some can do, but most not, most not.<sup>223</sup>

This moment of inspiration always leads him to the question “where does the lightning strike come from?”<sup>224</sup>

Jackson 2Bears<sup>225</sup> is Kanien'kehá:ka (Haudenosaunee) from Six Nations and Tyendinaga. He currently lives in Treaty 7 Blackfoot territory, based at the University of Lethbridge where he is Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Arts Research and Technology. 2Bears suggested that the process of working with dreams or visions requires slowness, “the approach to that in terms of what we were just talking about, dreams, spatial philosophy...takes patience.”<sup>226</sup> 2Bears continues, “I've been doing this too: paying attention to my dreams and things that happen and how those things interconnect with the things that I'm thinking about, because they help us get outside of the sensory experience of this version of reality and help us think about things in that sense...not making artwork necessarily just for human consumption.” The ways in which dreaming contributes to the artwork, whether accessed through a lightning strike or slow interpretation, is a method for collaborating with the nonhuman world.

Bordeaux relayed their recollection of a process they admired while working with Cornerstone Theater and their ground-breaking community-centred methodology.

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<sup>220</sup> See Appendix 8.4.2.

<sup>221</sup> See Appendix 8.4.2.

<sup>222</sup> “Home | Archer Pechawis | Performance & Media Artist,” accessed September 8, 2022, <http://apxo.net/>.

<sup>223</sup> See Appendix 8.4.4.

<sup>224</sup> See Appendix 8.4.4.

<sup>225</sup> “Jackson 2bears,” accessed September 8, 2022, <https://jackson2bears.net>.

<sup>226</sup> See Appendix 8.4.6.

Cornerstone does this whole story circle process, where it's basically a year of doing the story circles in the community to kind of gather a narrative building. It's people sharing and the playwright is building narrative off of stories that are being shared in the community. And then, that has taken those stories, the narrative form is then taken and written into a script. That script is then taken back to the community. The community gives more feedback. And then eventually, gets to the production stage. This could take anywhere from two to five years to build a play, that is supposed to be a reflection of the community and have community engagement. And watching and witnessing this play, Urban Rez at that time, engage with Tongva folks was really powerful. That was another shift for me, was participating in that play, and being able to perform. The first place we performed was downtown, which is now where the Los Angeles Historic State Park is, right next to Chinatown, right before Lincoln Heights... Tongva folks that came to open the space for us, they were like, "You're bringing healing to this place because you're telling stories that haven't been told here before." This used to be a really violent place. Because there were cornfields and Olvera Street, they used to auction off California native people. So there was just this engagement and this listening. I feel like Larissa [Fasthorse] listened to people. She didn't come and was like, "Here's the story I'm going to tell." She was like, "What story do you want to tell?" We're trying to tell these stories.<sup>227</sup>

### *Indigenous Artists' Protocol*

Protocol are practices which maintain the safety and well-being of community members. An example protocol is the offering of tobacco. Scott Benesiinaabandan<sup>228</sup> is an Anishinaabe visual artist. Benesiinaabandan explains, "violence comes in when you forget those stories, when you don't put down tobacco... that simple ritual is supposed to stop you from taking without [giving]... It's not a literal one-to-one transactional thing, it's for you to stop and to say that life is valuable, and all the stories that provide history for you."<sup>229</sup> The act of offering of medicine such as tobacco or cedar are shared protocols across many Indigenous communities, allowing for a gift to be offered to beings, human and nonhuman, who are involved in the action taking place. Artist Peter Morin refers to offering tobacco as "this sacred power-house contract when you put that tobacco on the grounds, and to not have actual fear about asking for things, making the commitment to say, 'I am ready to do the work. I am ready to suffer as I need to, as you want me to. I'm putting this tobacco on the ground and this is my commitment to this.'"<sup>230</sup>

Pechawis relates a similar set of protocols for honoring the nonhumans and ancestors involved in the process of creating art:

I always get my ideas from the ancestors—they're not my ideas I'm just the lightning rod of the receptor, these ideas come to me. In a perfect world I would run outside, I would put down tobacco, I would give thanks. In a practical sense, oftentimes I just get so excited about the idea I forget about protocol and I just

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<sup>227</sup> See Appendix 8.4.2.

<sup>228</sup> "Benesiinaabandan," accessed September 8, 2022. <http://www.benesiinaabandan.com>.

<sup>229</sup> See Appendix 8.4.1.

<sup>230</sup> See Appendix 8.4.11.

start making stuff. But there's always a point in the process where I go, "Oh, hang on a second here, the forms must be obeyed and the protocols should be observed." So, there will always be a point where I will make that... To observe the protocols, and to put down medicine, and to give thanks for all of it. That moment often comes the day of a performance where I go, oh yeah, I should do this right. But sometimes it comes before that, like I said, sometimes there's some feasting, I'll put out a feast bowl.<sup>231</sup>

For Bordeaux offering tobacco represents reciprocity:

I'm not just going to take, take, take to have an abundance, but I'm taking and I'm giving and I'm creating and it's beneficial for everyone and everything, because then we see rocks as animate parts of our lives, as opposed to just adornment...trying to draw these connections between things that then perform a level of connection. There's the visceral connection but not theoretical connection.<sup>232</sup>

Such protocols transform ephemeral and spiritual relationships to nonhumans, encountered on the land and in the cosmos, into the physical world through action. Acts of reciprocity are how Indigenous protocols can enter spaces like contemporary performance art and imbue them with values and care. As Morin notes, "Indigenous knowledge is so innovative and sophisticated that it actually can be adapted to fit into any of the kinds of spaces that Western culture makes available, but it doesn't work the other way. Western knowledge cannot be adapted, it cannot fit into Indigenous ways of being."<sup>233</sup>

Bordeaux sees responsibility and care expressed in protocols of Indigenous and non-Indigenous visitors when family holds each other accountable:

Even people who are in diaspora...everyone listened to the place that they were from, to the land that raised them...you can tell the people who've never been pinched by their elders for misbehaving... they keep acting entitled in a particular way...these folks have never been pinched either ideologically, emotionally, or physically.<sup>234</sup>

Discussing and checking in with elders and family members is important for many Indigenous artists who maintain a sense of responsibility to community through their families. For Morin, "I want my actions and behaviors and my making to not disrespect or embarrass my grandparents...I used to also talk with my mom all the time about what I was making just so that I could make sure I was for sure not embarrassing..."<sup>235</sup>

Pechawis also highlights the crucial connection between protocol, song, and prayer:

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<sup>231</sup> See Appendix 8.4.4.

<sup>232</sup> See Appendix 8.4.2.

<sup>233</sup> See Appendix 8.4.11.

<sup>234</sup> See Appendix 8.4.2.

<sup>235</sup> See Appendix 8.4.11.

When we play our drums and sing at the beginning of a process to ask the spirits, to join us, it's crucial that we sing them back out at the end...I also have a set of protocols that I followed before I do a performance that are ceremonial...but I don't have a formal ceremony at the end and this is kind of a glaring hole in my practice, now that we're talking about it. It never occurred to me before because we put ourselves into that performative space, which is a very open and receptive and vulnerable space to be in... We need to be able to come back into our quotidian selves.

Protocol is the enactment of ethics and engagement with ethics: it creates safe boundaries and maintains responsibility to ourselves, our families, our communities, human and nonhuman. Protocol can change and adapt over time and through discussion. For Benesiinaabandan, making art is the exercise of ethics in the world. He says:

Ethics isn't a hundred percent or nothing kind of thing...the awareness of what we're using and where it comes from isn't always possible because of the way the world works now. But being aware of what we're ignorant about, or not knowing about, and the curiosity to try to continuously make the effort and do the work. [Artwork] is sort of like therapy for ethics of making things. You have to do the work that's hard, and it's near impossible oftentimes, but this whole process, for you, is an expanded laying of the tobacco...making artwork in a Good Way is sort of like the dream that slipped away...ethics are a little bit like that. You need to make the effort to be aware of what you're doing and the impacts, as well as you can.<sup>236</sup>

For Benesiinaabandan, using artwork to engage with and enact ethics is connected to the protocols and processes of prayer: "Pray with your eyes open because that is who we're in communion, that's who we are talking to. This is the world that we've been gifted with."<sup>237</sup>

### *Material and Nonhumans in Indigenous Arts Practice*

The physical, material state of objects and the questions of "object-ness" and agency were discussed in many of these conversations. The objects Indigenous artists use to create their artworks are entangled in the protocols necessary to create art in a Good Way. Morin sees Indigenous art and protocol as technology: "Certain culture reads it as it's like material object production, but if we're centring and foregrounding innovation as a technology, then you can see that this thing becomes something completely different. It's an exercise of skill for sure. But it's also a practice of power, Indigenous power."<sup>238</sup> Discussing the creation of instruments for his performances, Pechawis described his drums: "Moose hide, deer hide, wood. Sennheiser 604 e Drum Microphones, eight-pin XLR Cables, eight-pin XLR Connectors, seven-pin XLR connectors, multi-strain, usually twelve-conductor cable, piezo discs, wire, solder, tape, hide, rawhide... That's an incomplete list."<sup>239</sup> Pechawis does not see these materials as wholly different from traditional drums. They are all made of mined materials and harvested materials that come from the earth. Pechawis explains:

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<sup>236</sup> See Appendix 8.4.1.

<sup>237</sup> See Appendix 8.4.1.

<sup>238</sup> See Appendix 8.4.11.

<sup>239</sup> See Appendix 8.4.4.

We can feast our drums, we can feast our pipes, and we can feast our materials, and there are layers of abstraction between the natural resource that they sprang from and the final product that we purchase from wherever, but they still spring from the earth and they still have spirit. So, we can feast our soldering irons, and our spools of solder, and our rules of cable, and our plugs, and our digital machinery. Which is, now that I'm talking about this, and I'm like, I better put a feast together for my studio. I have to feast my studio.<sup>240</sup>

Stones can also be seen as material manifestations of covenants between humans and nonhumans. Benesiinaabandan shared, “After all those years...millions of years...this rock is sitting in front of us and it’s giving us all the knowledge, and all the life that we need...our little frail lifespans for eighty years, this million-year object is saying... That’s a covenant too...that’s a personal relationship.”<sup>241</sup>

Bordeaux exclaimed and held up her stones:

Oh my God, Suzanne, I have rocks everywhere. I have rocks just in my office... Because I remember hearing the Ínyan story, right? An omniscient being that then had a thought. And from that thought, things came. And they gave of themselves so much that they turned to stone. Maybe that always just stayed with me and formed my obsession with rocks.<sup>242</sup>

### 5.3.5 Synthesis and Results

The results of this field study are two-fold: *Hél čhaŋkú kiŋ ĥpáye* (There lies the road) (2021), an installation and performance work, and *Imákħaheye* (Method) (2021), a collection of seven methodology graphics made in collaboration with Bobby Joe Smith III. Each participant defined a personal perspective on Indigenous ontologies which I synthesized through the process of creating the graphics, installation, and performance. The results of the interviews and research-creation revealed possibilities for Indigenous protocols to guide the creation and refinement of the machine-learning sculpture and performance.

Working with non-Lakħóta, Indigenous artists enriched this field study. The interviews of these artists provided key perspectives on the movement of knowledge, even when the artists lived at a physical distance from their home communities. The concept that Indigenous artists only get their ideas “from the land” felt reductive because every interview I conducted pointed to the fact that diasporic Indigenous artists are still making Indigenous art, Indigenous to the place they are far away from, and creation does not merely come from the land or the physical realm, but from the cosmos and the unseen world. As a Lakħóta artist who has lived primarily in California, the perspectives shared in these interviews grounded Indigenous relationships to nonhumans in the lived experiences of the artists, regardless of histories of forced removal, relocation, emigration, or separation.

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<sup>240</sup> See Appendix 8.4.4.

<sup>241</sup> See Appendix 8.4.1.

<sup>242</sup> See Appendix 8.4.2.

*Hél čhaŋkú kiŋ ħpáye (There lies the road)*

*Hél čhaŋkú kiŋ ħpáye (There lies the road)* consists of an installation, music composition, computer system and performance.



Figure 38: Diagram of *Hél čhaŋkú kiŋ ħpáye (There lies the road)* computer system.

The installation was exhibited by the Vera List Center at PS122 Gallery in New York City from December 3, 2021 – December 12, 2021 (Figure 39 – 42).

The gallery was organized beginning from the entrance door around the space. Two hundred feet of plastic hair braided with LED lights began at the front door, leading the viewer past the introduction text and graphics down a hallway to a darker gallery.

This darker gallery had quadraphonic speakers along the perimeter, pointing in towards the center. Two full walls of projections displayed three orbs of swirling colours, with hues of Lakhóta Fairburn Agate. On a slow, periodic change, the projects zoom into and enter the center orb, with volcanically swirling colour overtaking the projection.

In the center of the room, a section of hair braid drops from the ceiling to the floor. Sections of this hair braid are bound with leather hair wraps, protecting three sections of sensor packages. A single piece of sheer blue cloth was tied to the braid, representing a prayer flag for my grandfathers.

The braid on the ceiling curves around the room, exiting the dark room back down the hallway, passing an arrangement of installation texts and reference books for the installation, a selection of this bibliography (Section 8).



With the viewer returned to the entrance gallery, the three artworks from Section 5.2 were shown on screens and on the floor.

The braid was wrapped around a single column in the room, terminating on the floor next to a small plinth where a spirit plate was offered (half my dinner from the night of the performance) and a bowl of tobacco.

Finally, the graphics from *Imákħaheye (Method)* concluded the show back at the entrance door (Figures 43-46).



Figure 39: Kite: Hěl čhankŭ kin ĥpáye (There lies the road), PS122 Gallery, New York City, NY, December 2021. Gallery graphics. Photo: Argenis Apolinario.



Figure 40: Kite: *Hél čhaŋkú kiŋ ħpáye* (There lies the road), PS122 Gallery, New York City, NY, December 2021. Installation view. Photo: Argenis Apolinario.



Figure 41: Kite: *Hél čhaŋkú kiŋ ħpáye* (There lies the road), PS122 Gallery, New York City, NY, December 2021. Photo: Argenis Apolinario.

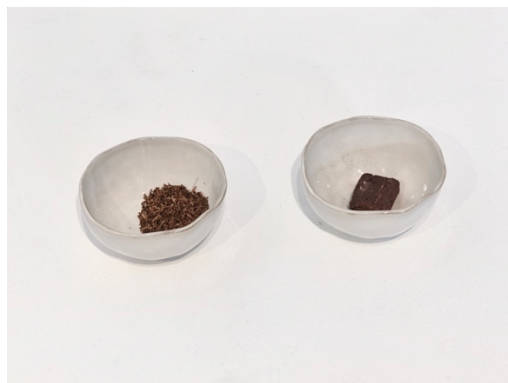


Figure 42: Kite: Hél čhaŋkú kiŋ ħpáye (There lies the road), PS122 Gallery, New York City, NY, December 2021. Offerings of tobacco and my dinner. Photo: Argenis Apolinario.

### Music Composition

I invited musicians to record improvisations using three pieces of media as their “score”: an animation of an agate stone, *Imákħaheye (Method)*, and an audio file of myself singing the Íjyaŋ (stone) song heard in Inípi (sweat lodge ceremony). The guest musicians’ improvisations were connected, and slightly arranged or adjusted. Each recording was treated as a separate channel in the installation, with separate volume controls for each. The instrumentalists were: Robbie Wing - banjo, Jackie Urlik - harp, Eyvind Kang - viola, Devin Ronneberg - synthesizer, Warren Realrider - noise, Matthew Allen - vibraphone, Cochomea - saxophone. Documentation can be heard here: <https://kitekitekite.bandcamp.com/album/h-l-ha-k-ki-p-ye-there-lies-the-road>.

### Computer System

The audio channels were connected to a system of patches built to mix the audio channels based on the position of the hair braid sensors and control the animations. The system sent messages to a machine-learning system called Wekinator,<sup>243</sup> which had been trained to turn up the volume on certain channels based on the position of the hair braid in the room. Wekinator sent OSC messages back to TouchDesigner to control the movement and formation of the animations of round agate spheres. When interacting with the braid, moving towards the back of the room brought the saxophone and synthesized noise out of the mix, the corner of the room highlighted the harp and banjo, and the center of the room, the viola.<sup>244</sup> The patch system was built and Wekinator trained by my collaborator, Devin Ronneberg.

I was able to use my own movements to train the Wekinator machine-learning algorithms, software. This produced a Lakhóta data set, created by my Lakhóta body.

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<sup>243</sup> “Wekinator | Software for Real-Time, Interactive Machine Learning,” accessed September 5, 2022, <http://www.wekinator.org/>.

<sup>244</sup> Performance of score live at the Open Ears Music Festival in Waterloo, Ontario. <https://youtu.be/evmoX0wdJqM>.

## Performance

My goal was to create the simplest performance possible. I move and the computer translates that movement into sound. The sound is translated into video, to which I then react with more body movement. The computer learns how to react to me by using machine-learning techniques.

The audience is seated on the floor around the braid. For fifteen minutes I speak about what I learned from the interviews about stones and creation, while moving the braid slowly through seven invisible zones in order to trigger different audio mixes and their in-between spaces. I improvise my speech as I both manipulate and listen to the music. I speak about stars and stones, cosmologyscape, and other topics I discussed in Section 5.3.

The entire system represents the concept in Lakhóta ontology where stones are beings. As discussed in Section 3.3.1, this ontology is generated through body-oriented knowledge making, in a similar way to how knowledge is generated through songs in collaboration with nonhuman beings. The installation and performance are a representation and an enactment of the process where songs emerge from the body.

### 5.3.6 Culturally Grounded Methodologies

#### *Imákħaheye (Method)*

The *Imákħaheye (Method)* graphics are designed as guides to developing and maintaining future relationships to nonhumans. The graphics synthesized what I learned from the interviews about making and maintaining relationships with nonhuman beings in a Good Way as well as more holistic approaches to the creation of new things. All six diagrams represent the same concept of cosmologyscape. It consists of six graphics.

- Kapémni (twisting vortex)
- Thiyúktaŋ (dome framework)
- Wičháħpi, ɪŋyaŋ (stars, stones)
- Okáwiŋŋaŋpi (circling)
- Wičháħpi, ɪŋyaŋ, thiyúktaŋ (stars, stones, dome framework)
- Oáli (ladder)

These graphics help pose future questions: When we make new knowledge, who are our collaborators? Do we communicate with and through our technologies to the spirit world? Does all of time and space conspire for our spirits to see a star or meet a stone? When are we listening to nonhumans?

I imagine the moments and gestures, the protocols and the Culturally-Grounded Methodologies described by interviewees to be the stars and stones (the plus and the zigzag-square shapes, respectively) in the following diagrams.

## Kapémni (twisting vortex)

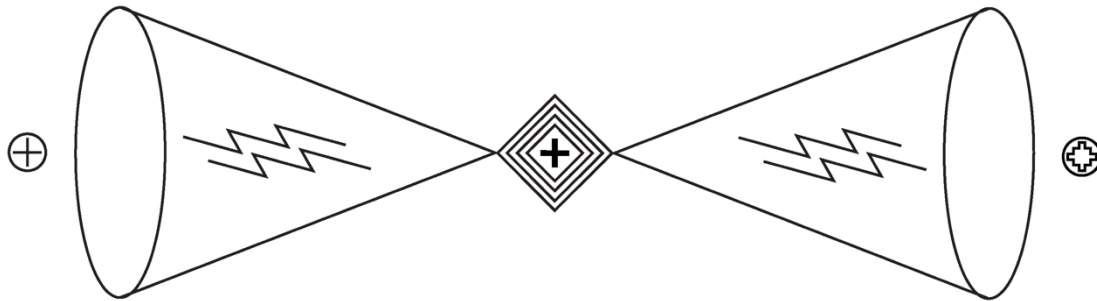


Figure 43: Kite and Bobby Joe Smith III, Kapémni (twisting vortex), 2021.

### *Description*

The plus sign in the centre represents the artist creating art (Figure 41). The lightning strike shapes represent the power of transformation. The plus sign on the left is a star representing the cosmos, and the unseen knowledge of the spirit. The cross on the right is an arrangement of two symbols for mountains representing the seen, physical realm. The cones represent the Kapémni, or the Lakǎóta concept of a twisting vortex. The concentric diamonds around the middle star represent thought.

### *Holistic view*

The Kapémni connects the macro and the micro, how we maintain the relationships within the physical world and beyond. It represents the aspect of the Lakǎóta cosmologyscape where the timescale of the stars and the timescale of our volcanic sacred sites are mirrored, stars and stones in an ancient and future dance.

### *Meaning*

*Kapémni* illustrates conceptual frameworks developed in conversation with my Lakǎóta community members, each a different perspective on the process of making, whether an artwork or an AI. Each decision made transforms energy from one world to the next. Most importantly, through Lakǎóta ontology I consider much of nonhuman ontologies and epistemologies outside of human knowability altogether.

### Thiyúktan̄ (dome framework)

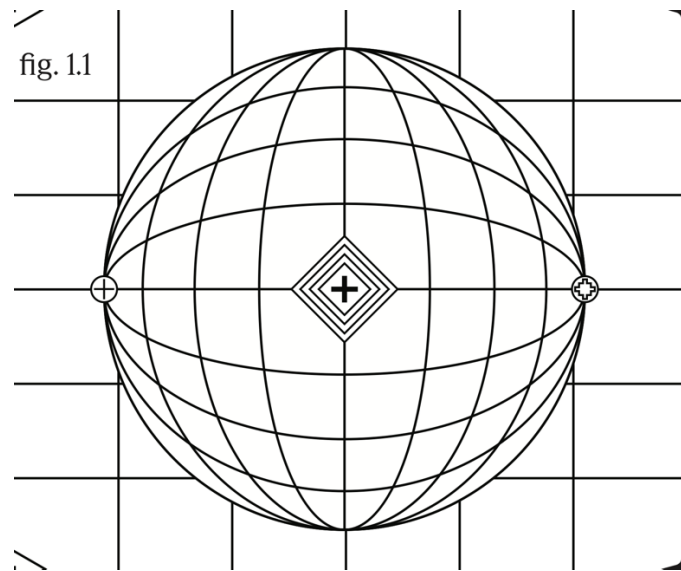


Figure 44: Kite and Bobby Joe Smith III, Thiyúktan̄ (dome framework), 2021.

#### *Description*

*Thiyúktan̄ (dome framework)* (Figure 44), is a sphere with a plus sign in the centre and a star and stone on each side. The plus sign in the middle represents the artist creating art. The lightning strike shapes represent the power of transformation. The plus sign on the left is a star representing the cosmos, and the unseen knowledge of the spirit. The cross on the right is an arrangement of two symbols for mountains representing the seen, physical realm.

#### *Holistic*

The *Thiyúktan̄ (dome framework)* holds earth and stars, the knowable and the unknowable, the physical and the metaphysical; an act of creation floats in the center. The seven lines come from our sweat lodges, where we honor the four directions, the heavens, the earth, and oneself. In the sweat lodge, the dome is visible above the earth and an invisible dome is felt below the earth. The points of intersection on the willow branches align with constellations of stars. The same constellations which guide our movements on the earth to move from ceremonial site to ceremonial site.

#### *Meaning*

This design represents the points of intersection between the physical and spirit world when an artist creates art. This design represents the interconnectedness of decisions and ethics with each part of the artmaking process.

Wičháŋpi, íŋyaŋ (stars, stones)

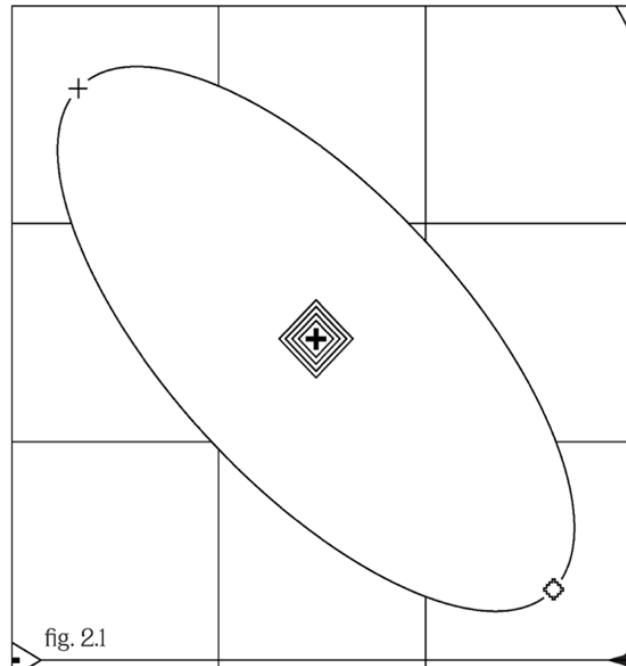


Figure 45: Kite and Bobby Joe Smith III, *Wičháŋpi, íŋyaŋ (stars, stones)*, 2021.

*Description*

In Figure 45, *Wičháŋpi, íŋyaŋ (stars, stones)*, we see a simplified version of the *Okáwiŋŋaŋpi (circling)* (Figure 46). On one end the star, on the other a stone, and in the center a human creation: an artwork, a computer, a speech, a song, a machine-learning system, a painting, a beaded medallion, a quillwork pouch.

*Holistic*

Art is made in collaboration with humans and nonhumans in the physical and spirit world. Artworks encompass both realms.

*Meaning*

The act of creation is the channeling through the human body of the physical and nonphysical world, human and nonhuman communication, the knowable and unknowable.

## Okáwiŋǵaŋpi (circling)

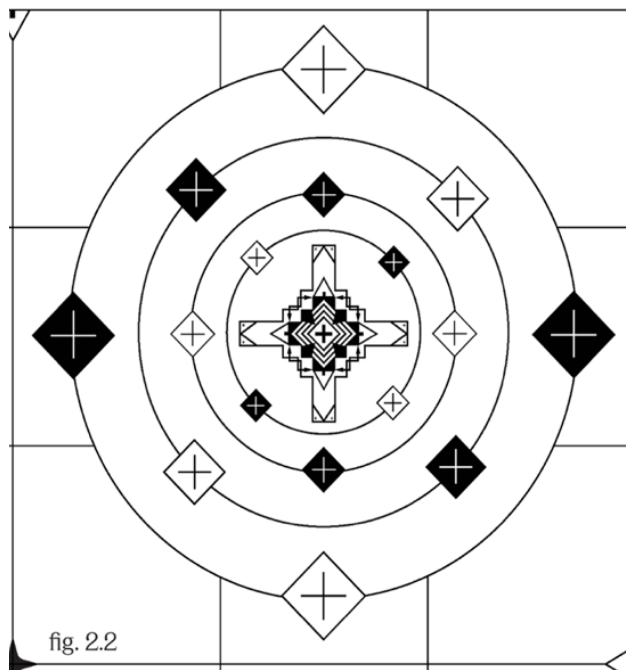


Figure 46: Kite and Bobby Joe Smith III, *Okáwiŋǵaŋpi (circling)*, 2021.

*Description*

Each of the diamonds with pluses (stars) are nodes in this sphere *Okáwiŋǵaŋpi (circling)* (Figure 46), representing points of protocol such as: listening, hearing, exchange, reciprocity, acknowledgement, gifting, feasting, and honoring the knowable and the unknowable. The cross in the center is the unfolding artwork.

*Holistic*

Each point of protocol that the artist participates in has effects on the artwork. Anishinaabe artist Scott Benesiinaabandan, tells me, “I consider dreaming the most important technology we have because it weaves together one day to another day...one idea to another idea, to another idea.”<sup>245</sup> Dreaming is a protocol that can connect the physical and spiritual world in the process of creating an artwork.

*Meaning*

Listening to the unknowable is the listening to nonhumans, a listening that requires understanding that nonhumans are beings, listening to how they make their knowledge, and reflecting those frameworks in how we, as humans, create something new. Each act of protocol honors and communicates with nonhumans.

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<sup>245</sup> See Appendix 8.4.1.



Wičháłpi, ńyąń, thiyúktąń (stars, stones, dome framework)

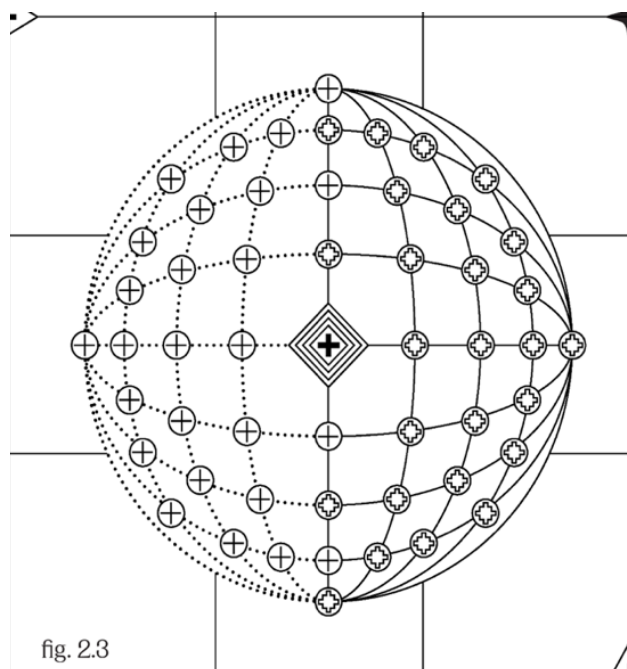


Figure 47: Kite and Bobby Joe Smith III, *Wičháłpi, ńyąń, thiyúktąń (stars, stones, dome framework)*, 2021.

#### *Description*

*Wičháłpi, ńyąń, thiyúktąń (stars, stones, dome framework)* (Figure 47) is a more detailed version of *Thiyúktąń (dome framework)* (Figure 44). Each plus (star) and cross (stone) is networked together in dome frameworks, rippling out from the cross and diamonds (artwork) in the center.

#### *Holistic*

Acts of protocol affect both the physical and spirit world. Each act of protocol in the physical world is reflected in the spirit world.

#### *Meaning*

In this figure, the nodes of protocol, decision-making, and methodology are seen as interactions with human and nonhuman, seen and unseen beings, affecting each other (and others) in infinite ways. The offering of tobacco may seem irrelevant to building a computer, but the chain reaction of reciprocity reverberates into an unseen world. Feasting one's tools in the physical world has deeper and farther-reaching effects than are knowable to the human experience.

## Oáli (ladder)

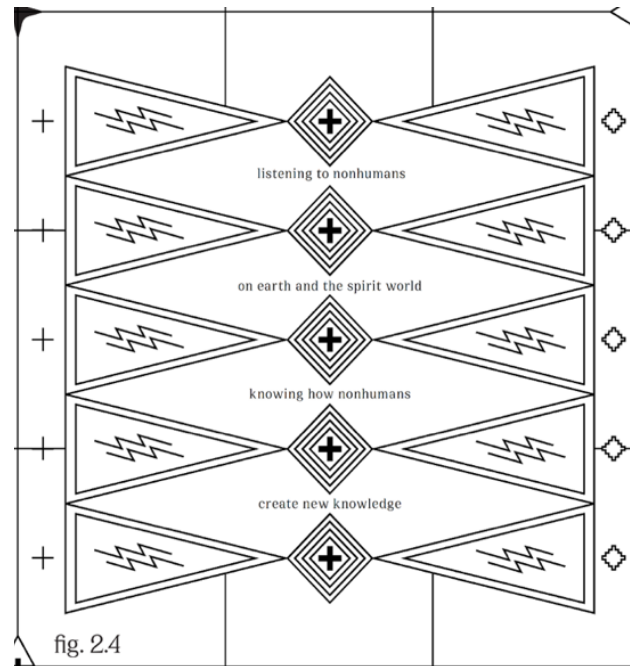


Figure 48: Kite and Bobby Joe Smith III, Oáli (ladder), 2021.

### Description

The design of *Oáli (ladder)* (Figure 48) is five stacked *Kapémni (Twisting Vortex)* (Figure 43). Between each *Kapémni* is a poem: “listening to nonhuman | on earth and the spirit world | knowing how nonhumans | create new knowledge.”

### Holistic

The Indigenous methodologies I learned about in the interviews and synthesized into graphics do not answer, but instead embrace, the process of continually asking the question, “Where do our creations come from, if we as humans are conduits, mere channels by which spirit moves through us to act on this earthly plane?”

### Meaning

The *Oáli (ladder)* (Figure 48), reads: “listening to nonhuman | on earth and the spirit world | knowing how nonhumans | create new knowledge.” I could not reconcile a hierarchy of ontology, epistemology, methodology, and cosmology. Instead, I chose to represent ontology as “listening to nonhumans,” cosmology as “on earth and the spirit world,” epistemology as “knowing how nonhumans,” methodology as “create new knowledge.” These *Kapémnis* (twisting vortexes) are connecting star to stone, with the artwork in the center. They should be imagined as the same *Kapémni* enacting the creation at once.

### Indigenous Cultural Methods

The following cultural methods were discussed during this field study:

- Opening oneself to dreams and visions
- Patience in interpreting dreams
- Fostering conversations and discussion
- Seeking input of elders and family members
- Creating to listen to community
- Offering tobacco or other medicines
- Feasting one's tools
- Creating the boundaries of beginning, middle, end

## 6.0 Conclusion

### 6.1 Contributions

In this dissertation I argue the acute necessity for engaging with Indigenous ontologies through research-creation methodologies in order to develop artworks and technologies in ethical ways. I do this through collaborative processes with my family, the Oglála Lakhóta community, and Indigenous communities beyond Lakhóta. I documented and synthesized teachings about Lakhóta ontologies by collaboratively defining relationships to nonhuman beings through the process of art-making. The field studies and artworks document different applications of Lakhóta ontologies and Indigenous methodologies for maintaining, developing, and discovering ethical and reciprocal relationships with the nonhuman, especially stones. I argue that an Indigenous ontological approach would benefit current and future research into advanced computational technologies and that it will lead to better ethical foundations for AI particularly.

The need for Indigenous ontologies, epistemologies and cosmologies is urgent in thinking towards the next seven generations. Without Indigenous thought, humans and nonhumans are facing global extinction and environmental collapse. This dissertation reaches towards Lakota philosophies to learn how to make things in ethical ways that will sustain us through (at least) the seventh generation. Wolakhóta and the possibilities of a Good Way are in direct opposition to colonialism, capitalism, and human greed. The future depends on Indigenous philosophies and their inclusion and consideration of nonhuman beings.

This research focused on the teachings in the Oglála Lakhóta community and in my family surrounding singing and design, with supplemental research with Indigenous artists from non-Lakhóta communities. Through collaborative thinking and co-creation, I articulate who and what is in relation during ethical processes of creation. I created the collaborative artwork *Iron Road*, which included the Iron Road design. I engaged with nonhuman ontologies in my research process for *Wógligleya (Ṭḥuŋkášila Čečiyelo)*. I explored methodologies for creating relationships with AI through the hair braid interface in *Napé okičhiyuspa okáwiŋḥ wačhiuŋhiyayapi. (Holding hands we encircle each other in dance.)*. These artworks, research-creation projects, and technologies exemplify the necessity for engagement with Indigenous ontologies through research-creation in order to develop artworks and technologies in ethical ways.

The technologies developed for the performance of *Hél čhaŋkú kiŋ ěpáye (There lies the road)* are an extension of the technologies developed for the sculpture *Īnyan Iyé (Telling Rock)* (2019) which is an extension of the technologies developed for *Listener* (2018). Methodologically, *Hél čhaŋkú kiŋ ěpáye (There lies the road)* tries to deepen the process of consulting with other artists and elders to create the piece in a Good Way. In these artworks, I have explored how, through Oglála Lakḥóta ontologies, even materials such as metals, rocks, and minerals can communicate of their own volition. By considering the hearing and listening capabilities of nonhuman entities, a method of engagement reliant upon mutual respect and responsibility becomes possible.

### **6.1.1 Foundations for Lakḥóta Artificial Intelligence: Lakḥóta Research-Creation Methodology**

The following is a list of tools for expanding Indigenous research-creation methodologies. I hope to use this list to create future artworks, collaborate with Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, combine methods to produce new research-creation projects, participate in the shaping of the future of AI, and both deepen and slow my engagement with human and nonhuman beings during all steps of creation. I hope this list provides other Indigenous artists with methods to deepen and slow their practices and push back against Western institutional pressures for production. I hope non-Indigenous artists use this list as a framework to investigate their own contexts and hyperlocalities, prioritizing ethics in engagement with Indigenous communities and both human and nonhuman beings. Researchers in the fields of AI can use this list to expand the field's understanding of what creates and moves knowledge in Indigenous communities to imagine new methods for needs and use applications of AI.

Through specifically Lakḥóta methodologies it can become possible to create Lakḥóta Artificial Intelligence. I believe that these methodologies will result in a creation that both embraces its naturalness and prioritizes concepts of intelligences other than those defined by Western perspectives. Instead, a Lakḥóta creation, created in a Good Way, will move knowledge from both the earth and spirit world through collaborations with both human and nonhuman beings.

The following are Indigenous protocols and methodologies I used in to shape this work, were generated during the field study process, and described by interviewees:

- Praying
- Sharing meals
- Caring for nonhumans
- Caring for family members
- Resting
- Gifting
- Listening beyond
- Opening oneself to listen to nonhumans
- Offering sage or other medicines
- Telling and researching of genealogy
- Storytelling
- Offering tobacco or other medicines
- Opening oneself to dreams and visions
- Patience in interpreting dreams

- Protecting artwork that is the result of visions or dreams
- Speaking to nonhumans who approach
- Feasting one's tools
- Fostering conversations and discussion
- Seeking input of elders and family members
- Creating to listen to community
- Creating the boundaries of beginning, middle, end
- Singing
- Collaborating
- Composing and co-composing
- Harmonizing
- Beading
- Listening

## 6.2 Future Research Trajectories

I will continue research through artmaking and research-creation methodologies that integrate Lakhóta values through the creation of performance, sound art and visual art through reciprocal and dreaming methodologies. I plan to create public performances with new sculptures and human-computer interfaces; engage communities in discussions and workshops; and collaborate with Indigenous knowledge keepers, community members, and artists/academics working in the AI field. My goals for my next research projects are to,

- continue to explore Indigenous ontologies, specifically Lakhóta ontology, by collaboratively defining relationships to nonhuman beings through the process of art-making
- continue to develop Indigenous protocols to guide the creation and refinement of AI wearable and digital technologies through performance, sound art, and visual art practice
- develop a specifically Lakhóta Artificial Intelligence system
- collaborate with Indigenous communities to develop methodologies for research and creation.

### **Foundation for Dreaming Performance Instruments**

The process of conducting this research-creation has led me to consider developing a methodology for dreaming a new instrument. This process could include combining wearables during dreaming or visioning with Indigenous methods such as: offering sage or tobacco, resting, gifting, opening oneself to dreams and visions, listening beyond, opening oneself to listen to nonhumans, speaking to nonhumans who approach, patience in interpreting dreams, seeking input of elders and family members, storytelling, fostering conversations and discussion, and protecting artwork that is the result of visions or dreams. Using these methods to create new sound or listening instruments prioritizes Lakhóta and Indigenous ontology and epistemology.

If our instruments are objects that help communicate and make new knowledge, perhaps the best framework for creation is dreaming about those instruments. Furthermore, creating instruments for the act of listening through dreaming or visioning allows the simultaneous communication

with and through an object. This with-and-through-ness can also be applied to the creation of technologies in the future.

I hope to develop methods for gift-giving and reciprocity in the future. I would like to explore methods that illuminate nonhuman agency and communication through acts of gift-giving and reciprocity between humans and humans as well as humans and nonhumans, such as in offering tobacco, gifting stones, and harvesting willow branches. The methods of reciprocity are complex and interconnected. For example, I hope to explore the microcosms and macrocosms imbued in the act of offering tobacco, as it encapsulates how one's entire life should be the act of trying to give more gifts than one receives.

### 6.3 Limitations and Transformations

The research results are limited by the specificity of my research within my family. The concept of hyperlocality, while useful in articulating contextual ethics, presents challenges to extending the methodologies developed in this dissertation beyond my family and community. Many of the methods lose meaning and ethics when separated from their community contexts and are meant as suggestions and not guidelines for other communities and researchers.

I have gained a great deal by looking at the core themes of my research from a broader Indigenous community perspective and the inclusion of non-Lakḥóta, Indigenous artists in section 5.3. By doing this, I have been able to gain a deeper understanding of my own experiences in Lakḥóta culture, as well as the protocols of others. This has helped me to create art that is more meaningful to me, as well as helped me to connect with my peers across Indigenous nations.

My research has also moved away from a focus on AI and closer to the lived experiences of Indigenous and Lakḥóta peoples. By listening to the stories and experiences in non-Lakḥóta communities, I have been able to learn more about values, protocols, and possible frameworks for applying Indigenous ethics to AI.

The trajectory of my research project has changed and transformed as I conducted my research over the course of this doctoral program. Ultimately, my original proposal themes from 2017, the differences between truth, fact, and belief in Lakḥóta epistemology, remain present in this research. The transformations occurred at distinct moments. I remember distinctly the moment I could visualise a connection between Lakḥóta nonhuman ontology and research-creation methodology as I drove through Montréal. I also remember vividly the moment I began to sense the multidimensional orbs that would become *Imákḥaheye (Method)*. There were no seismic shifts in the course of this research, but slow moving recontextualizations and realisations.

### 6.4 Listening Towards the Unknown

In *Hél čhaŋkú kiŋ ḥpáye (There lies the road)*, the artworks are combinations of human intervention amidst arrangements of nonhuman beings. Relationships flow energetically through each form. Communication with and through humans and nonhumans, objects and being, make it possible to create in a Good Way, an ethical way. The frameworks and protocols I have investigated in this dissertation rely on the power of transformation: water becomes steam, fabric

becomes electricity, stones become electric circuits. All these transformations enable communication between beings. These transformations are guided by protocol: decisions and actions taken in order to enact relationships between the unknown and the known, the stones and the stars.

The details of these energetic transformations stay with me: *Napé okičhiyuspa okáwiñh wačhíuñhíyayapi*. (*Holding hands we encircle each other in dance.*) with its two hundred feet of braided hair, transforms space through invitation of the body, capturing minute data points of movements of arms and torso to translates this movement through flowing stones of computation. From electric brain impulse to bodily movement to sensor to computer to projector to speaker, electricity becomes the communication in between beings. *Napé okičhiyuspa okáwiñh wačhíuñhíyayapi*. attempts to capture the texture of the Lakǎóta Fairburn Agate's slow formation over millennia, an unfathomable scale for a human being. Each layer bears the beauty of the world and the possibilities of patience. Braid and stone become the human face stretched towards a star filled sky, become hands pressed deep in warm earth. This dissertation and its artworks have begun a discussion that will last my entire life as I attempt to listen to what cannot reach pitiful human ears. The braid is an extension of a thought and a prayer, winding through columns, disappearing into ceilings, emerging from walls, a request to listen even more deeply into the unknown.

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## 8.0 Appendix

### 8.1 Artworks

*Hél čhaŋkú kiŋ ěpáye (There lies the road)*, Kite, 2021, performance

*Imákħaheye (Method)*, 2021, Kite and Bobby Joe Smith III, Applied Phototex, 72"x72"

*Iron Road*, Kite, 2021, Installation

*Napé okičhiyuspa okáwiŋħ wačhíuŋhíyayapi. (Holding hands we encircle each other in dance.)*, Kite, 2021, Installation

*Okáletkehaŋ (Branching)*, Kite in collaboration with Santee Witt, 2021, Video (colour, sound), 10:17

*Okáwiŋģaŋpi (circling)*, 2021, Kite and Bobby Joe Smith III, Digital graphic

*Wógliġeya (Thŋkášila Čečiyelo)*, Kite in collaboration with Santee Witt, 2021, Score

*Wólowaŋ wakáģe. (I composed this music.)*, 2021, Kite, stones, dimension variable

### **Methodology Diagrams, Kite and Bobby Joe Smith III:**

*Kapémni (twisting vortex)*

*Oáli (ladder)*

*Okáwiŋģaŋpi (circling)*

*Thiyúktan (dome framework)*

*Wičháħpi, iŋyaŋ (stars, stones)*

*Wičháħpi, iŋyaŋ, thiyúktan (stars, stones, dome framework)*

## 8.2 Proposals for Future Listening Devices

The following is one future listening device for the next generations, shared by each interviewee in the Field Study 3: Indigenous contemporary artists (Section 5.4) to share an idea for a future listening device, to be used by the next generations. These imaginings represent potential future trajectories for Indigenous listening practices and Indigenous technologies. Each of these technologies is specific to the artist, their practice, and their context.

### Morin

I think the technology that I want future ancestors to know is how innovative artists were and are. There's no limitation to what our artists actually did... The kids in care in particular like, so I wanted to tell them the truth. I wanted to talk to them with deep meaning about things like residential school. The only way for me to do that was to make the performances that I made because I'm not a book, we're not books. So I needed to create a thing so that I could transport myself and be there with those young kids because I needed to help the kids now.<sup>246</sup>

### Pechawis

I want them [my children's children] to listen to their drums... The teachings that I've received around the drum or the way I interpret those teachings, is that for me: they are inter-dimensional communication devices. So, I would like my children, and my grandchildren, and all the way down the line, I want them to have drums, I want them to use those drums, I want them to hear those drums, I want them to listen to those drums. But also, I'm hoping that in the spirit of the great, great grand pappy, me, that they will also integrate different technologies into those devices, for purposes that they will come up with themselves.<sup>247</sup>

### Bordeaux

I don't think it's mysticism, this is real. It's there. It's present. So for me, it's like, how do we tease out that over spirituality and mysticism that's in place by settlers, to really listen? You have a connection to place. You were raised by the land around you, even though you didn't see it... I want my great grandchildren to remember how to listen. And I don't know what that looks like, but I want them to be able to remember land and remember other-than-humans can and do remember those cosmologies that exist in a place regardless of what's around it.<sup>248</sup>

### Benesiinaabandan

The materials, and the technologies they're made of, those are dreaming technologies. For me, they're dreaming technologies: the rattles, and the Little Boy drums, and the big drums, and the conversations, and laughing is also a technology. It's a human soft technology, but it's still what gets us from one day to the next day... that's sort of an ephemeral time jumping to make this old

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<sup>246</sup> See Appendix 8.4.11.

<sup>247</sup> See Appendix 8.4.4.

<sup>248</sup> See Appendix 8.4.2.

technology, which is futuristic ideas that are required to make any sort of material manifestation.<sup>249</sup>

## 2Bears

Maybe we're just not aware of the spirits that possess our technology. Maybe that's the problem. We spent thousands of years, where our people get masks from, for instance, talking to the trees. Or you dreamed them first, and then you go talk to the tree and you know how to talk to this tree, and that's where you carve your mask from. There's a whole process, takes several months, and you're feeding the thing tobacco and you've got the corn mush. There's a whole series of things that happen that spent thousands of years to develop, thousands of years...For instance when I was back home recently, we were talking about these four masks that were made in Six Nations Territory after our people had been moved there, and they're supposed to control the winds in that territory. They've been taken now by various museums, they're split across the world... how many years it took to develop that and develop that technology, essentially, to help control the winds...Maybe it's just about now, at this moment...we just don't know how to talk to those spirits just yet...making instruments out of those things is a way to think technology non-technologically.<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> See Appendix 8.4.1.

<sup>250</sup> See Appendix 8.4.6.

# 8.3 Exhibition Guide

The Vera List Center for Art and Politics and PS122 Gallery presents *Hél Čhankú Kiň Ĥpáye* (There Lies the Road), an installation on one wall, curated by Oda A. LaHelle, with Suzanne Kite as the co-curator. The artist's previous research project *For Protocols for Art and Politics* (2019) was the most recent movement in the evolution of the Vera List Center as part of its 2022-2023 focus on research, theory, and pedagogy. The project is a series of courses, a journal, and a collection of essays that can be viewed online at [www.veralistcenter.org](http://www.veralistcenter.org) and also in the protocols book case on LaHelle's table.

For this installation, LaHelle and Kite, with the help of a team of collaborators, have developed a body of work that includes research, performance, and theory. The work is a series of essays, and graphics that are intended to be viewed in a non-linear, non-sequential way. The work is a series of essays, and graphics that are intended to be viewed in a non-linear, non-sequential way. The work is a series of essays, and graphics that are intended to be viewed in a non-linear, non-sequential way.

In addition to the essays, there is a series of graphics, and a series of performance pieces. The work is a series of essays, and graphics that are intended to be viewed in a non-linear, non-sequential way. The work is a series of essays, and graphics that are intended to be viewed in a non-linear, non-sequential way. The work is a series of essays, and graphics that are intended to be viewed in a non-linear, non-sequential way.

The exhibition is accompanied by a series of courses, a journal, and a collection of essays that can be viewed online at [www.veralistcenter.org](http://www.veralistcenter.org) and also in the protocols book case on LaHelle's table. The work is a series of essays, and graphics that are intended to be viewed in a non-linear, non-sequential way.

The artist's previous research project *For Protocols for Art and Politics* (2019) was the most recent movement in the evolution of the Vera List Center as part of its 2022-2023 focus on research, theory, and pedagogy.

### West Gallery

1. *Hél Čhankú Kiň Ĥpáye* (There Lies the Road) by Oda A. LaHelle, Suzanne Kite, and the Vera List Center for Art and Politics. December 3-12, 2021.
2. *For Protocols for Art and Politics* (2019) by Oda A. LaHelle, Suzanne Kite, and the Vera List Center for Art and Politics.

**Kite**  
 Oda A. LaHelle  
 Suzanne Kite  
 December 3-12, 2021  
 PS122 Gallery

### East Gallery

1. *Hél Čhankú Kiň Ĥpáye* (There Lies the Road) by Oda A. LaHelle, Suzanne Kite, and the Vera List Center for Art and Politics. December 3-12, 2021.
2. *For Protocols for Art and Politics* (2019) by Oda A. LaHelle, Suzanne Kite, and the Vera List Center for Art and Politics.

In addition to the essays, there is a series of graphics, and a series of performance pieces. The work is a series of essays, and graphics that are intended to be viewed in a non-linear, non-sequential way. The work is a series of essays, and graphics that are intended to be viewed in a non-linear, non-sequential way. The work is a series of essays, and graphics that are intended to be viewed in a non-linear, non-sequential way.

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The artist's previous research project *For Protocols for Art and Politics* (2019) was the most recent movement in the evolution of the Vera List Center as part of its 2022-2023 focus on research, theory, and pedagogy.

### Methodology

Where does art come from? What is the core of art? What is the core of knowledge, and how is it related to art? What is the core of research, and how is it related to art? What is the core of theory, and how is it related to art? What is the core of pedagogy, and how is it related to art? What is the core of research, theory, and pedagogy, and how is it related to art? What is the core of research, theory, and pedagogy, and how is it related to art?

These questions illustrate concepts of research, theory, and pedagogy. The work is a series of essays, and graphics that are intended to be viewed in a non-linear, non-sequential way. The work is a series of essays, and graphics that are intended to be viewed in a non-linear, non-sequential way. The work is a series of essays, and graphics that are intended to be viewed in a non-linear, non-sequential way.

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*Hél Čhankú Kiň Ĥpáye* (There Lies the Road) at PS122 Gallery is presented by the Vera List Center for Art and Politics as part of the Center's *Art for Protocols for Art and Politics* series, a series of research, theory, and pedagogy projects. The exhibition is curated by Oda A. LaHelle, Suzanne Kite, and the Vera List Center for Art and Politics. The work is a series of essays, and graphics that are intended to be viewed in a non-linear, non-sequential way.

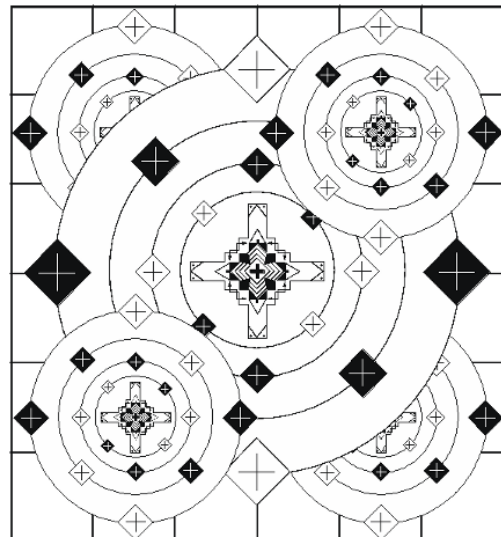
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Suzanne Kite is an Oda A. LaHelle performance artist, visual artist, and composer based in Southern California. She holds an MFA from Bard College's Milton Avery Graduate School. She is a PhD candidate at Occidental University, Research Assistant for the Institute for Indigenous Studies, and a 2019 Fulbright Scholar. Her research is concerned with contemporary LaHelle ontology through research, theory, and pedagogy. She is a 2018 Pinar Filizet Institute Foundation Scholar, a 2020 La Via Artist Fellow, and a 2020 Women of Substance & Advice Fellow.

PS122 Gallery is a not-for-profit alternative exhibition space in the East Village, operating since 1976. It is dedicated to featuring and developing the arts by providing opportunities and support to visual, performing, and interdisciplinary artists. It is an ongoing program of Painting Space 122, the grassroots, artist-run organization that has provided the vibrant cultural community at the City of New York's Central Park Community Center (CPCC). PS122 Gallery often presents the work of artists of all backgrounds in a diverse and equitable context. By acting as a platform, PS122 Gallery also seeks to engage with the surrounding community, welcome new communities, and create new and diverse spaces for engagement.

The Vera List Center for Art and Politics is a scholarly research center and a public forum for art, culture, and politics. It was established at The New School in 1962—a time of rising debates about freedom of speech, identity, politics, and society's commitment to the arts. A pioneer in the field, the Center is a nonprofit that serves a critical mission to foster a vibrant and diverse community of artists, scholars, and policymakers who take creative, intellectual, and political risks in thinking about positive change.

**FOR PROTOCOLS**  
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**PS122 GALLERY**  
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**HÉL ČHANKÚ KIŇ ĤPÁYE + (THERE LIES THE ROAD)**  
 KITE  
 DECEMBER 3-12  
 2021





## 8.4 Interviews

These interviews have been edited for legibility and for interviewees preference to prevent the sharing of private stories.

### 8.2.1 Scott Benesiinaabandan, Interview Transcript

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

I get your vibe. So, I consent to be recorded.

Suzanne Kite:

Let's just start off with you introducing yourself.

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

[Anishinaabemowin introduction]. My Anishinaabe name is Thunderbird, but my English name is Scott. I'm originally from Lac Seul First Nations and I currently live in Winnipeg. And I'm a visual artist.

Suzanne Kite:

Great. I guess what we could start off talking about is something around this first question of what makes us indigenous when we're not on our specific territories. How do you feel you maintain ... A lot of times we use the word identity, but I don't even think that's a good word to describe it.

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

So really, I've spent a lot of time thinking about this question and I've done works around it. I mean, I think it's not ... There's many levels to that question, right? There's the physical territory of the physical land of our communities, there's the ontologies that we bring with us when we go to other places. There's, I guess, the knowledge that we gain from other places and take back to our territories, right? So I think there's lots of considerations when answering that question.

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

I started thinking about this a lot when I was doing a lot of residencies just in different places outside of Canada, including Ireland and, most notably, probably in Australia. Because before that, I had spent a lot of time, most of my time, in Winnipeg, and there's a certain politics and a certain sociality about indigenous people out here that binds us. Even though we might have different languages, we come from different communities, but there's still a solidarity because there's one great obstacle, which is the Canadian state, right? So, in the face of the Canadian state, we all sort of face the same set of problems.

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

And then when I was in ... So I had that in the mindset, that this global indigeneity, that we're all fighting the colonial state, whatever manifestation that might be, wherever that territory might be fighting that occupation. So, when I was in Australia, I realized quickly that the politics and the social politics down there is so much different. The territories are smaller, they're defined very, very closely between like ... on the other side of that river is not our territory.

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

And what we can talk about, the knowledge that we keep and the knowledge that we're gifted to speak about for them is very territorially given, right? So that they say ... Well, when I first went over there, talking about ... Make a note here that I'm only talking from my express experience and not ... This is not a greater knowledge about indigenous people in Australia or anywhere else that I'm talking about, but just my experience with that, and should just come through like that. But I looked at their arts, the paintings they were doing and the songs they were singing. It was very clear about what you can and cannot do, what knowledge is yours to say, to speak about, to paint about, to make art about, and what there isn't.

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

So I started really think ... Because I thought, well I'll just go to Sydney or Parramatta. I would do some sort of collaboration, just like a typical what we do here, right? Me and you could do a collaboration and we have enough overlap. I mean, territorially, linguistically, ontologically that we could do ... We already have that base level of homeness that we can build off of. But, over there, it was a whole different learning process. Ended up having to go to a different territory, so I went to make sure that I wouldn't offend anybody in the territory I was making work in.

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

Then, after that, I came back to Montreal with a whole ... really questioning about what really makes us indigenous when we go to a place like Australia, where the culture is indigenous, but it's also Blak, right? They consider themselves Blak people or Blak communities, and it's just a different type of division lines between what indigeneity is, or who's part of the community, who isn't part of it. And that's really part of ... How do you feel at home? So, when I was there, I felt very at home with the indigenous people that I was with, but it really brought up lots of questions about what makes us indigenous when we're not in our territories.

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

I came back and started to do a long-term residency at Montreal, and even though that's closer to home in Canada, I still felt it was super away, right? I still felt like that's Mohawk territory, Haudenosaunee territory, Algonquin. And it's not ... So I still felt that the knowledge that I had, the stories that I had, or the language that I had still wasn't home there, you know? But I still brought all of those things with me. So I guess that's a long way to answer, through all that searching process and reflective process, that you carry the language with you and you carry the

dreams that you have with you. You dream in that vernacular that you belong to, right? So the dreams connect you to the space, and the place, and the languages are the way you can express that in the best possible way.

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

And the manifestation of all those things, the dreams and the language, is the materials that you pick up along the way, and that's sort of also rooted in the place that you are. It takes the colour or space that you're in, but the root of all that is the dreams and language that you're thinking through.

Suzanne Kite:

Have you ever considered yourself removed from territory? Because I didn't grow up in a place like Winnipeg, so I knew no indigenous people, but I'm wondering if people ... if it feels like diaspora or removal or separation from the land? Does it have that texture?

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

I guess the question is a very personal one, as well. Growing up, I was taken from my mother early and put into a white home. So, there's that level even before all of that, right? You're removed from territory and any knowledge of what territory that might be, right?

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

I was in Great Lakes, like Sault Ste. Marie. I knew I was Ojibway. But, I mean, when I was growing up, I thought people would make fun of my big head. I was like, "Oh, they thought I was Inuit." Even my social workers would say, "Oh, I think you're probably Inuit, because you look sort of Inuit." It was just a weird sort of place, right? You knew you were indigenous, and they would tell you that you're indigenous, they just didn't know anything beyond that point.

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

What was the question again, sorry?

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah. I mean, you're answering it. Does it feel like ...

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

Oh, yeah, does diaspora-

Suzanne Kite:

Do you consider yourself separated-

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

Right.

Suzanne Kite:

-from the land?

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

In one way, yes, but not in a disconnected way. That's the levels I think I'm talking about in terms of ... I've always been around indigenous people because I was lucky that the city I was adopted into, strong indigenous presence. Then I moved out to Winnipeg when I was 16, and that's huge. I didn't know that it had such a huge indigenous population, and that's our traditional territory as well, right? Little did I know that I was actually closer to my home community than even Sault Ste. Marie was, so I've never felt ... Well, I guess the metaphysical question is I've never felt lost, or not on territory, and not on my territory. Because I was literally on my territory for the whole time, even though I didn't know, you know? If I didn't know that expressly or I could map it directly.

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

That said, I think that the vibe in Winnipeg, it's so different. There are so many indigenous people: the Dakota, Lakshóta, Cree, Inuit ... Inuit? Inuit? ... Anishinaabe, so I think all those histories are roiling in Winnipeg, and that comes out in the politics, and the art. It's hard to be lonely, indigenously, in Winnipeg, I think, especially compared to somewhere like Montreal where most of the indigenous people there are, say, Inuit or Haudenosaunee, so there's not the express conversation that I could have to anyone out here.

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah. I feel like that in this project, and in projects before, and in your work, I mean, I think that's why I always tell people you're so obnoxious when you make sound art, because you're not a sound artist, but then you make better sound art conceptually because you're not a sound artist. But this idea of listening across time and space. Because my hope for this field study is to talk to people and then basically ask this group of people how they think a new listening device should be made.

Suzanne Kite:

Not necessarily ... Maybe what to make, but how to make it, what protocol. And I think that one thing that you said earlier prompted a question for me: do materials come to you? You were talking about manifest ... the dreams, language, and then material. So when you find ... or when you look for material ... There's this thing, and I don't even know if you can call it protocol, but there's specific methodology to coming across this very thin line between, "I found the material and the material found me."

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

Right.

Suzanne Kite:

Where do you experience that? Maybe do you have an example?

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

Yeah, well, I think it happens all the time. So, the outward manifestation with the materials we use, whether that is ephemeral, digital work, or sculptural, physical 3D stuff, for the production of those things. But again, all of that ... When you were talking there, I had a moment where I was like, "Oh, this makes sense now because ... " You know we talked about with that paper, the electronic ... EM field theory of consciousness, and the binding problem, right? And how all these things ... I was thinking a lot about how our languages are agglutinative, all these worlds that are bound together. This is how dreams are also formed, too, the reason why dreams are bound together in weird ways where a tree has a voice and operates on a different time, operates on different orientation, and gravity affects the things different. So there's that the meeting of things, right?

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

I guess this is the Karen Barad and the gentle, phenomenological binding of moments. I think when Jason and Skawennati invited me to do the residency at AbTeC, I had never considered using programming or coding as part of the material. In that case, materials found me, right? That changed the shift in my perspective on the dream, and the language, on how to consider image making, in a way.

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

Then, most recently, I'm doing this residency at UBC and my roommate is a teepee maker. He builds teepees. So he strips all the teepee poles in the backyard. I was sort of considering the ethics around ... because I was considering the meeting that we were going to have ... so the ethics of making ... And seeing all of these logs, they're beautiful logs, but there's still a violence in stripping this ... This was like two days ago, this was a 12 year old black spruce tree in the forest, right? Living its life. And now it's in the backyard and, yeah, there's a violence in terms of that beautiful large pole, but still, you have to acknowledge this violence in making that, stripping away the skin of the tree and using it. So we had in the backyard, there's piles of this beautiful, long strips of black spruce bark. So I was considering all these things, and the intention of the residency, the conversations with you. I was thinking about the politicization of space, when those teepee poles are occupying the city lot.

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

And then I saw this Facebook post, this guy Kevin Finney, and he's Anishinaabe guy from Michigan. He does all this amazing reclamation, old school building of things, stuff. He's making, he started to make this really beautiful, old school lodge, and he was using elm bark, right? The old school way of making these things. So all these things came together, and they met, and it was like, "Oh, you know, I'm going to try to ... " We've always used bark. It's not just an east coast or west coast thing. We've all used bulrushes, and cedar, and all these bark things to make utensils and make material. So I'm going to figure out how to use it.

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

Again, in that instance, the material found me because it was right there, ready for me. It was cut into strips. It was like all the questions were there, the dreaming of talking with you, and the UBC were there, all the things were in place for me to just meet the material, I guess?

Suzanne Kite:

That's the bracelet you showed me?

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

Yeah.

Suzanne Kite:

That makes me ... I mean, talking about violence and relationships to the non-human, one thing that Vine Deloria says that I really like is about how we have covenants between humans and non-humans.

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

Yep.

Suzanne Kite:

And one that is very well known as the covenant between bison and humans, where they pitied us, as many non-humans pity us, and offered their bodies. So there's a covenant and very clear story to look towards and say it is violent, but it has been decided that that was ... So I was wondering, thinking about .. When materials find you or you approach a material, do you see the non-human, or ... I mean, one thing that comes up is, in these ideas of unspoke ... I mean, bison don't speak English, and spruce, elm, or any of these, they don't speak out loud in a hearing sense, but do they let us access the unknown, or the spirit world, or something?

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

Yeah, it's interesting, that covenant, I was just talking with a friend out at UBC. She deals with stories from a legal perspective, so they do a translation process so that communities can use

these stories into a legal framework. I remember one of the stories, again, but ... Recently I read ... I'm doing another project, and you would like this one. Winnipeg, and Manitoba itself, the name is called 'where the spirit sits.' So it's part about, this is where the first human was lowered down, and Bannock Point and all these petroforms that talk about these stories. I started this project at Tide Creek, so we walked in a few miles into the bush, and it's the really distant place where these petroforms are.

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

I've started to do a lot of research on the other petroform sites. It's kind of amazing. But even that was sort of ... That knowledge, and researching all these things in terms of a covenant between the humans being lowered down, and the elder in that book. It was a 1974 publication. They called the Anishinaabe people the second chance people because we weren't always good people, right? And this is a thing with all these old stories that we talk about is our communities were sick, our communities were dying, we're fighting, we're doing all these things. So the humility ... Because I feel like one of the foundational ontological frameworks of building blocks of Anishinaabe worldview is kindness and generosity. That covenant speaks to that in terms of we have to understand that the only reason humans, Anishinaabe people, are still here is because the non-human spoke up for us. You know what I mean?

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

So all these old stories sort of to come to that point. When you get to go there and see these, that history, you feel that history and you're on that place. So that's a real interesting thing, now that I'm thinking about it. From sitting in Australia, contemplating, sitting in Montreal, contemplating, and then one of the first major places I came after I was sick was this super important site, for our people at least, you know?

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

Then considering all these stories of why we're ... I know there's a difference between ... Some people don't like to use the word pitying, but I hear it all the time in ceremonial translations, because we're in that position. We're weak, we're vulnerable. The universe is a very powerful place where humans don't really have a primacy place, you know?

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

Yeah, so what I was thinking about violence, I think the violence comes in when you forget those stories, when you don't put down tobacco. And I was thinking about the tobacco offering, too. That ritual, that simple ritual, is supposed to stop you from taking without ... It's not a literal one-to-one transactional thing, it's for you to stop and to say that life is valuable, and all the stories that provide history for you, you know what I mean?

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

And I drew this little sketch thinking about you, because it was like ... You know, to the light cones from the past, the future? And then that moment is when you offer that tobacco, because it all connects there. And so it's not violent after that moment, right? Because you've recognized, you've remembered the covenant, but the violence is when you forget that or if we drift away from that and we forget the making. How to make things ethically, you know what I mean?

Suzanne Kite:

Way smarter this year.

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

It's cold here, baby.

Suzanne Kite:

Reading, using the word ontological.

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

Everything.

Suzanne Kite:

I mean, there's a couple of ways we can go now. Maybe it'd be interesting to hear your definition, current definition, of technology. You and I experience the very common question in panels where people want you to talk about making technology, using technology as an indigenous artist. Do you have ... Because I feel my definition has moved towards philosophy as being technology, but what's your current?

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

Well, I've used ... My favorite technology, I think, and it all comes back to the same thing, is the dreams. I consider dreaming as a technology. That's the most important technology we have because it weaves together one day, to another day, to another day. It weaves together one idea, to another idea, to another idea. That's what makes the foundational point of being in community, and all these things.

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

That one project that I think I ... I don't know if I showed you that image where I'm making a dream mask, you know? So thinking about how dreaming ... So there's the intersections of classical technology, in terms of transistors, and programming, and screens, and all of that. But I think, underneath all of that, it's still driven by the old technologies of, say, the shaking tent, or dreaming, or all the things that actually help us realize bigger things, you know?



Scott Benesiinaabandan:

Yeah, it's moved quite far away from a singular material technology, or classical technology. Like you said, it's the ephemeral. The ideas, or the knowledge that we pick up along the way, is the technology that gets us to the next day, you know?

Suzanne Kite:

This is kind of a side note, but one question I get a lot when I've been talking about dreams, and different Lakhóta dreaming songs, is people always ask me about nightmares.

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

Do you have nightmares?

Suzanne Kite:

I no longer have nightmares, fingers crossed, but what do you think about nightmares?

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

Well, I got a good story about nightmares. I think it was like 17, and I met with my Gwime. At 16, 17, I had just moved out to Winnipeg, and I had hooked up with my Gwime, Stan Williams. And the Anishinaabe, and Lakhóta people, too, have the contra-clown It's a very strong part of the Sun Dance. So he was one of the head Windigokans up here, so he did a lot of that work, shared the songs, all the ceremonies, he led, he led it around. So I learned most of my stuff through that method of teaching. And I remember in the spring, one time ... I was doing a lot of sweat lodges, I was skabe-ing a lot, helping every weekend. I remember I was getting this increasingly ... It started off pretty gruesome, these dreams. And I won't get into the dreams itself, but it was horrific.

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

I was traumatized, and it was every morning I'd wake up with the worst dream. It was getting to the point ... So it was like, I don't know, seven dreams later. I was traumatized because I didn't want to go to sleep. So I went in ... I was helping at the sweat lodge, so I went in, I gave some tobacco to to Danny Thomas and Stan Williams. The first thing they did was just laughed. They just laughed at me. They're like, "Oh, you're just supposed to dance with the windies." And that was it. It was like my whole ... I was scared I was going crazy. Literally, I was like, "What's going on? What the fuck?" I can't even express to you how horrific the dreams were. I was doing shit that ... This is well before my true crime phase. I didn't even consider this shit. And they're like ...

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

I still remember these dreams with vivid clarity. And so the question was is, do you have ... I came to them with this horrific nightmare sequence, and they were like, "Oh, you're supposed to dance with us, so there's what you have to do," you know?

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

Then after that, the dreams came back and they're like telling me how to dance with him. It was like, "Oh." I think that really shaped my perspective on dreams a lot in terms of the interpretation, and when you ask for translations, you might just get something that you're not expecting and it shifts your possibility of what the dreams are telling you.

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

So I still get horrific dreams time to time, but now they're all generative, and they're all meaning something, you know? They're all, from the pleasant dreams to the ... Most of them are in between. They're just weird, dislocated dreams of post-apocalyptic things, but I never treat them as bad or good. They're just ways for me to understand the one day to the next day, so.

Suzanne Kite:

That's a good way to look at it. Yeah, okay. Not supposed to give too much of my opinion, I'll just have to delete it. But let's see.

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

The Lakhóta, they say, if you're having bad dreams, or you're going through stuff, you're supposed to burn ... One of the things is that cedar protects us from ... and the sound of burning cedar, the sound of it, keeps away the negative spirits, you know? And so they'll say, "Oh, the sound ... " Before the sweat lodges, you put cedar in the thing because that drives away the sound of it. So again, it comes back to sound a lot and Anishinaabe, ceremonial sort of things.

Suzanne Kite:

That's interesting. I burn cedar. I don't have any sage left so I only burn cedar, basically every morning.

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

Yeah. It's interesting, the sound. Again, yeah, I've been thinking a lot about the importance of ... Well, what is the ceremonial sound? You know, the importance of sound is learning from the institution, sound theory and that, but then there's taking that theory and applying it to going back to revisit ideas of the rattle, the Zhiishigwan or the drum, or all these things, so.

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

But yeah, those are, again ... I'm just looking at one of your notes, the materials, and the technologies they're made of, those are dreaming technologies, right? For me, they're dreaming technologies, the rattles, and the little boy drums, and the big drums, and the conversations, and laughing is also a technology. It's a human soft technology, but it's still what gets us from one day to the next day, you know?

Suzanne Kite:

That's really ... I mean, maybe this is like what's wrong with me with this ... It just occurred to me, I've been approaching maybe this entire process the wrong way. Maybe I should be thinking of a methodology to dream a new instrument instead of asking people, materially, what to do.

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

Yeah, no. Say that again? How to dream ...

Suzanne Kite:

If you read my questions, they're all about stones, protocol, making something new, doing things in real life. But maybe I should be asking people a methodology to do some dreaming.

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

Right, the what comes before the manifestation of it.

Suzanne Kite:

Like how would I even know what to make?

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

Yeah. Yeah, the internal subjective mapping out of ... until it comes to you, you now? Even making the bark bracelet was lots of different days that cycled through, and conversations, but all those times, even from when I first met you, and Honolulu was there with me, all these things. Yeah, that's sort of an ephemeral time jumping to make this old technology, you know? Which is futuristic ideas that are required to make any sort of material manifestation.

Suzanne Kite:

Is there a way that you know you're going to have a very dream filled night? My technique is to write lines before I go to bed. I'd say like, "I will remember my dreams."

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

What I do know about dreaming is that I'm not doing any illicit substances, I dream quite clearly, and quite powerfully. And usually the first part of the night, I don't dream that much, but it's

usually after 3:00 AM. And I usually wake up briefly a couple of times, and then it's in between those that those bigger dreams come. So by doing all that I need to, I've started voice memoing, even in short form, because those dreams are like so slippery, eh? They're not encoded at all. They're just kind of gifts. If you're not paying attention, they'll just go past you. You can like, "Yeah, well, I drove through Thunder Bay once, but fuck, I could tell you nothing about it," right?

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

If you're not paying attention, and dreams are like that, sort of gifts like that, I think. They're just greasy, and slippery, you know? They can just slide away. So I have to record them, even if it's conjoined, because then I'll come back and they'll be there. But if I don't, I don't give them any energy to manifest here, in a voice memo or a text memo to myself, they'll just go, you know?

Suzanne Kite:

Mm.

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

So, I guess that's another technology that's used, the voice, your phone, the quick dictation or the memory, pneumatic devices.

Suzanne Kite:

So, there are some ... I mean, so you talked about working with trees, I know you've worked with animal hide, and I know you've gifted people non-human things, and I know you work with wolves. Maybe you can remind me the process by which you came to use the wolf, and then maybe ... I remember we talked a lot about you acquiring it.

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

So how did I ... What's my relationship to the wolf and then how did I actually get that wolf pelt?

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah.

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

Well, how I came to ... My relationship was, again, with Stan Williams, my Gwime. When I first moved to Winnipeg, when I was 16, I didn't know my clan. And so one of the things I did was I gave him tobacco and asked for a name and my clan. So he gave me my name and the story that went with my name, Benisii, and he also gave me my clan, which is the Black Wolf. But there's no colour differentiations. He said he saw a black wolf in his dreams, but it's just the Wolf clan.

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

And, after that, in the same series of dreams that I talked about before, those horrific dreams, shortly after that, I had another series of four dreams where ... Three dreams so far, I haven't had the fourth dream about this, but that this massive black wolf, like prehistoric wolves, the dire wolves that are like six feet tall, three times they came and bit me on different parts of my body. So I'm just waiting for the one last time, but I don't know how I feel about that, waiting for it. Because it's like well, maybe that's it, you know?

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

So that's my clan, my Indian. But I also have a really strong connection and they come visit quite a bit in dreams. So the physical relationship with the pelt that I have, the black wolf pelt, is that initially when I first moved to Winnipeg, I had already pow wow danced when I was younger, out in Rankin Reserve. So, I was already into the pow wow scene a bit. When I first moved out here, I was supported quite a bit from the people that I knew, because they were all pow wow people, and they traded from me this black wolf headdress.

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

So my whole regalia now, which is red, black and yellow, which is the wolf clan colours, so that's the reason. So I dance, my pow wow regalia is also reflected as the wolf clan. And initially, I danced with the black wolf headdress. This particular wolf that I have now is that it was part of actually coming home, because when I was out in Montreal, and I had left Winnipeg, and I was really feeling hollow, and I felt pretty empty and lonely because I was traveling so much, it filled me with lots of other things, but you lose a lot of things too, right? Connection to family, connection to friends, connection to, you know, the people around you, the safety of all these things.

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

My friend Brennan Manoakesick would visit Montreal quite often. I knew that, with my regalia, I hadn't danced in like 10 years, or 15 years, or something like that. And so I asked him to bring it out for me. So my friend from way back was caring for it, all my regalia was safe in their house. So he collected it and brought it out to Montreal. So, living with that regalia again, started really thinking about home again, because it filled me with a piece of home, right? Home came to me. So I didn't have to go back, and sustained me for a long time, just having the bustle, and the bead work, and all those memories were there, right? That also was a moment of reconnection. It filled me back up and I could stay back in Montreal for longer, for a few more years, at least.

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

This black wolf was part of a project I did in Kingcome Inlet, with Marianne Nicolson and Althea Thauberger. So we went up there for a couple of weeks and the idea was ... She was telling me stories about really being protective of home, Kingcome Inlet, it's a small, secluded,

up the river kind of community. She said she's very protective of it and she didn't want anybody coming in to exploit it or to do these things. But the story resonated with me because she said, "Well, population keeps going down in the community." So she recognized I needed to infuse blood, ideas, and people into the community to invite artists.

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

So this whole project was to bring in people from all different communities, to learn about the community, to be in the community, to be on the land, and also share ideas. One of the things she mentioned is that her people ... I'm not going to try to remember how to pronounce it, but you could research that after ... was that their origin story involves a wolf. And I was like, "Oh." Just right away, I was thinking about work I want to do and stuff. And I was like, "Oh," when I go home, and I was sitting back in my little room in Montreal, right at the foot of my bed was my suitcase with all my regalia. I opened it up and it's like, "Oh, see?" These suitcases are like little ... you open them and they spill out. That's home coming out at you. That's the stories, it's an ephemeral but a material ... like a portable home with you, you know?"

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

One of the teachings of the wolf clan is that it leaves the community and goes out and brings back teachings to the community, right? In the responsibilities as teachers, you have to go out into the world and bring back new ideas. That's the role, to be out there. And so when I was sitting there, fucking feeling lonely, and wondering what I was going to do, then I was like, oh, you know, the wolf, the creation, the clan. So I said, "Oh, you know, I'm going to do a wolf piece." I hadn't really worked with literal wolf pelts or anything like that because I had a strange feeling about doing that. And I said, "No, this is what I want to do. I want to make that artwork that will live with me after the fact. It's not going to go anywhere else besides this, and it's going to live with me and I'll carry it with me." So, it's ceremonial like that, it's like a piece of home.

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

Then I was looking around, trying to find the black wolf, couldn't find one. It's really hard to find a black wolf. I found one in Idaho, and Skawennati's sister was going to ... because she lives at Akwesasne. She was like, "Oh you ship it to Akwesasne, I'll bring it back over the border for you." But right near where I grew up, Sault Ste Marie, there's the place called Elliot Lake. And I was just browsing on the internet, looking for a wolf. I talked to this guy, indigenous guy, who's a trapper. He goes, "I have a black wolf for you. I have a black wolf." And I was like, "Oh, this is perfect, right from my home territory."

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

So all the things were just falling in place. It was like this is so synchronicity, right? This is exactly how it's supposed to be. And, you know, and when he shipped the wolf, he put in all the medicines for it to travel, the tobacco, the cedar, the sage, the sweet grass. So it has been cared for even though there was no violence. You knew that he wasn't violently taken, right?

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

So we were talking about the violence. It's like, well, you knew that trapper knew the protocols, and he knew how not to be violent. You know, he's respecting that covenant. So I think that story about the black wolf is sort of a fulsome story in terms of my relationship to home and technologies. So I still carry it with me, and it's just going to be one of those things, so.

Suzanne Kite:

Nice. I'm glad I asked. That's a good story. Do you have any relationship to stone material? You know, that's my focus. Do you have any relationship to that?

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

Well, I mean, yeah. I think we all have real fundamental relationships to Asin, our grandfather rocks, right?

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

So growing up in Sault Ste Marie, I've always, on the horizon, we don't get it on the prairies here, but there's always a ridge line, right? Like a little hill, not much bigger than Montreal, but just in the distance, right? So you just grow up with this idea. Then, when you get older, you learn that the St. Lawrence, or the ... again, I have research the mountain range ... is older than the Rocky Mountains. I learned that when I was still living in Sault Ste Marie, I was like, "Oh." It's so old that that mountain range is ... That hill you're looking at is so old, it used to be bigger than the Rocky Mountains, right? So this sense of geological time always really resonated with me.

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

So we grew up in that ... the Canadian Shield, that's it ... the Canadian Shield belt. So always big rock faces, lakes, all these things. So I think, aesthetically, even just growing up, rocks in the ... The aesthetic of rock, sort of really ingrained in me. So when I go over it to Ontario now, it really triggers some sort of deep aesthetic belonging, you know? Then moving out to Winnipeg, and learning more about the ceremonial things like sweat lodges, Madoodsan, and learning about the spirit of the rock and how it gives itself in the spirit, and it dies for us in ... You should erase that, because that sounds too much like Jesus stuff, and it's not Jesus stuff. It gives its life so that we can have life, right? So that steam escapes, it cracks, so that's why we put it aside after.

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

So after all those years, these rocks ... millions of years ... this rock is sitting in front of us and it's giving us all the knowledge, and all the life that we need to ... Our little frail people, our little frail lifespans for 80 years, this million year object is saying ... That's a covenant too, right? That's a covenant, we'll take care of that. You know? So that's a personal relationship, I think, that I think most indigenous people in terms of the sweat lodge.

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

I think even more fundamental to that is that, again, coming back to dreams, is that ... I never shared this dream with anyone, but I've been thinking about it a lot and I think it's ready to come out, I guess. But I had a dream when I was still stuck, kidding, going through some real hard times. I had this dream where this monster figure chased me down, and held me down, and put seven perfectly round stones, forced me to eat them, into my mouth. And I didn't know until so much later, those are the little boy stones that tie the drum. But again, terror turns into this beautiful thing.

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

And so I always think is that ... I remember waking up and I was alone in this dark room, and just like petrified because there's this monster figure making me eat these fucking stones, right? Pours forcing me down the thing, I could still feel it. But I realized now is that that was gifts to keep me going, you know? It was the things that got me to move on, you know? That was the strength. And so it wasn't a monster. It was only a monster because I had no other conscious way to recognize it. That's a personal relationship to those little ... I forget what they're called, they have a special name, those perfectly round stones. You talk about those, too.

Suzanne Kite:

We just call them spirits stones, I think.

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

You find those in Madeline Island, in Lake Superior, I think? Mad River?

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

So, yeah, I think the stones are ... I think there's lots of different levels of relationship.

Suzanne Kite:

Bringing the stones into ideas of ... Because, I mean, that's an ongoing conversation we've had for years, now, is what do we do about making things with technology, which I see as melted stones from other territories, where you've got layers and layers of no protocol, no way of knowing where things are from, and this impermeable barrier between making something with these technologies.

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

Right.

Suzanne Kite:



But we're still doing it. And I'm trying to navigate that, and question that, but I know in your contribution to the IPAI paper, you're contributing a vision of a technology that jumps beyond that. Yeah, I mean, I don't even know how to ask this. How do we want our ... It's a simple question that we've answered a lot, but what kind of materials do we want our technologies to be made out of? I would say it's not possible to do now, but for some reason I'm trying to do it anyway.

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

To find an ethical way of applying technology?

Suzanne Kite:

To still try to make ... I'm going to be making things anyway, and this process is kind of asking people where to start in the hopes that it'll become clear. But I know we can't right now, it's impossible to build computers.

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

Right. Yeah, well, I think the answer is the process, right? The IPAI paper was sort of far future dreaming, you know? Sort of magical ... not magical dreaming, I don't like that term. But trying to skip ahead to all ... using your own body to ... And that comes from a Sun Dance teaching me, we only own our bodies, and that's the only thing we own in this world, right? That's why we Sun Dance, right? We give flesh for that reason.

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

But I think it comes back to there's no a hundred percent ... Ethics isn't a hundred percent or nothing kind of thing, right? Like we talked about, the awareness of what we're using, and where it comes from, isn't always possible because of the way the world works now. But being aware of what we're ignorant about, or not knowing about, and the curiosity to try to continuously make the effort and do the work ... It's sort of like therapy for ethics of making things, right? You have to do the work that's hard, and it's near impossible oftentimes, but this whole process, for you, is an expanded laying of the tobacco, right? You're already considering these things, even though ...

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

I mean, the first two chapters of Atlas of AI really talks about the disastrous chain of non ethical sourcing of rock, and mineral, and all of these things. It's disheartening to know that, but therein lies even some honor, or some covenant making, in terms of, "Well, if I'm going to get a new computer, now I know a more fulsome where that computer comes from." Or, if I want to buy an electric car, I'm not just driving around thinking that, "Oh, now I'm better for the planet," right?

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

So it's the process of ... You're never going to get to a purely ... I don't think there's ever been a purely, hundred percent ethical thing about being human, or the technologies we use, from fishing, hunting. It's all a process of just being aware of what we're taking in and what we're putting back out. So maybe therein lies the answer, too. You have to answer, maybe, as an artist, is the art that I'm going to make with the technology worth what it's extracted, right? If you can't say that it's worth it, then maybe that's the answer. Don't use it. Don't buy the new phone if you don't think you need it, don't buy the new recording device if the other one will do. Little things like that.

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah. I really liked what you said, the process of making a piece is long form putting tobacco down.

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

Yeah, and just by bringing it to mind, right? That's the important thing. It's sort of like the dream that slipped away because you didn't make the effort to record it, or to reiterate it, or to wake up enough to grab it, you know? And so I think ethics are a little bit like that. You need to make the effort to be aware of what you're doing and the impacts, as well as you can, right?

Suzanne Kite:

I mean, there's a couple more questions I could ask. One thing is .... When you try to make a new artwork, and you're trying to do it in a good way, I've found that I have a teeter-totter opposing artworks where I want to make critical work that is messing with my audience. And then sometimes I want to make ethical, good way generative work, where I'm trying to play that line between, "Oh, it's just art, and it's not just art." So then sometimes I find myself, "Oh, I'm going to start this in a really ethical way."

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

Yeah.

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah. Do you have a process by which you start?

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

Well, I think most of the work that I do usually spends a lot of time thinking ... It's in the thinking mode, literally thinking mode. Thinking about the materials, thinking about the concepts, reading. So I say in ephemeral stage, and I think that's a really long process. So, by the time I begin to make things, it's a hundred percent done in my head, almost. The concepts are all ... So the binding problem, right? The concepts, the background research is all done. And so all

of the ephemeral dream stuff has already taken place. So now, this dream machine, I already know exactly what I need to do. I just need the material to do it.

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

So I think the art that I make that aren't all done in a good way is because, one, I said yes to too many things, and I'm out of time to consider it completely, you know? And it's one of those things like, if I don't want it to live with me after, then it's probably not done in the best way, but sometimes life is messier.

Suzanne Kite:

I'm going to be interviewing some other artists for this that are very ethical, and always put down tobacco before they start projects, and really pray around their process, which is not something I do. I mean, I pray every day, and hopefully that covers me for every activity. But have you ever done that? I know, indigenous art, we really are riding that line between our lives, and there's kind of the press of the postmodernist art world.

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

Yeah. Again, one of the formative things that I heard with the children at the high school, we would do a share circle every morning, and one of the things I've always really felt when they said it ... I think it was an elder knowledge keeper, I forget his name. He was from Peguis. Really great guy. But I remember him, we were all standing around, and he was going to lead this prayer. I remember him saying, "Don't close your eyes, look up. That's where we're talking to, right? Look. Look around at each other. Pray with your eyes open because that is who we're in communion, that's who we are talking to. This is the world that we've been gifted with, right?" He said, "You can pray, but also you could pray with your eyes open." And that's the thing I consider I've always carried with me. That praying process is ... When you're walking down a street and you see somebody hurting, or somebody that needs help, and you go through that process, it's like ...

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

When you go through that prayer process of empathy and sympathy, or even just happiness for someone ... It's sort of like this ongoing background, dream state of prayer, you just being aware and drawing up what your inner voice is talking to you about already, you know?

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

So that really changed the way I thought about ... Because prayer is ... The ceremony of the smudge, and the tobacco laying, and the praying, it's a particular method, and it's a particular, specific ceremony for that thing. But there's an all day praying where you always are aware of where you are in the world, what you're doing in the world, what the words that you're saying are going to do to the other person, or how the impact they're going to have. So I think that is as important as the specific ritual, or the ceremony of prayer.

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

And that way we're always just walking in prayer, right? There's some ... I forget the teaching. I forget what it was, but it's always like, "Every step is how you want to see it." But you know what I mean, though, right? Just being really mindful of what you're doing in the world, and your connection to it.

Suzanne Kite:

I think my last question, but you're welcome to move tangential, is have you ever made work that's not meant to be seen by a public?

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

Well, I think the Animiikikaa work, because it's non translated. The premise of it is non translatable. It's not seen. There are hidden parts of that. I realized that work, because the viewing of artwork, and the making of artwork is a translation process, that there are elements in each work that aren't meant to be seen, you know? One of my favorite things was hearing about fluent speakers, and knowing that they went in there, and they can understand the two stories that were interwoven, right? They could hear that story, but no one else in the world knew what those stories were. But they still had the experience of it, so it was hidden in plain sight, you know?

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

One of the reasons I love the language so much, or the idea, is that I always thought, in Winnipeg, you get on a bus, or a metro, and your ears recognize ... You can recognize, especially in Winnipeg, if there's people talking, and you could understand, you know what they're speaking, you know? French people, you recognize the language of the land. Oh, sorry, their language, right? You recognize just the inflections, Russian, all these things have a very unique ... And we've been exposed to them enough, even if it's just a little bit, you kind of guess what ... You know, play that game, it's like, "What part of Europe is that from? That kind of sounds Polish," you know? Versus Anishinaabe, or Lakhóta, or Haudenosaunee, our ears don't even recognize what they are because it's so silent, it's so quiet. So I think ... And Animiikikaa was sort of not meant for everybody, or experienced the same way as everybody.

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

But I don't really have ... Maybe making ... I don't know, I've done doodles and drawing, and there's tons of work that hasn't made anything, hasn't been shown in public, but that's just because, after a certain while, you just move on to new ideas and you forget about it kind of, you know?

Suzanne Kite:

Is there anything else ... I mean, you'll probably be one of the people who talk about this in the study the most. So just anything else you wanted to bring up?

Scott Benesiinaabandan:

No, I think that's great. Yeah, that's plenty to say about that. Waste, I keep on trying to ... I still want to do Wind in His Hair.

Suzanne Kite:

I'm stopping the recording.

## 8.2.2 Clementine Bordeaux, Interview Transcript

In conversation with the author, May 17, 2021

Suzanne:

All right. Thank you so much for agreeing to be part of this field study. You have the entity questions. And if you want to start by introducing yourself, we can begin now.

Clementine Bordeaux:

Yeah. I'm Clementine Bordeaux. I'm an enrolled member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe. But I grew up on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. I'm also a doctoral candidate at the University of California in Los Angeles. I'm currently residing in Oceti Sakowin territory in Mni Luzanhan Otuwanhe, which is Rapid City, South Dakota.

Suzanne:

Cool. So I mean, we can come back and forth from ideas of location. But do you consider yourself diasporic when you're in Los Angeles or when you are living ... I don't know how long you were living away from attachment.

Clementine Bordeaux:

Yeah. So maybe I can just kind of give an overview of the times that I've been away. The first time I moved away from home, was to go to college and I went to undergraduate school in Wisconsin. And at the time, I didn't really think about what it meant to be away. I just knew I was homesick. So my first year of college was really difficult. I remember I came home for Thanksgiving, because I was at a Christian school so we got a lot of breaks for the holidays. And I remember my Uncle John Dewayne sang a song ... We used to all eat at Sacred Heart Church in Pine Ridge, there'd be about 50 family members.

Clementine Bordeaux:

And I remember it was my freshman year of college, I was able to come back because my school is 14 hours away. And my Uncle John Dewayne sang a song of prayer to open up the meal. And I remember just crying and I was just like, ugly crying before. And that moment, I realized what it meant to be away for me. I was like 18, right? Or 19. No, 18 I was totally young. Oh, my God, I was 18. That was almost 10 years ago, 20 years ago. Oh, my God, I'm so old.

Clementine Bordeaux:

And then, but I think I was still coming into this understanding of being away. Because I was born and raised in my homelands. And I've been really grappling right... now thinking about the last 20 years of traveling and living in different places, of what it means to have connection to homeland. What it means to be an uninvited guest. And what it means to be Lakhóta as we go, right? I think especially being Oglála, when we think about scatter their own, right? Historically, we were okay. You go, go away, go learn, go be somewhere else.

Clementine Bordeaux:

So college, I wasn't really hyper aware of being on other people's lands, or what it meant to be Lakhóta in other people's land. And then, so that was four years back and forth between Wisconsin. And that it was Potawatomi Land where my school was. And then I went to grad school in Seattle and lived in Duwamish Land. And I think that was the first time in an urban context, right? Seattle is like a densely populated metropolitan area, where I really was like, oh, shit. There isn't a presence of indigenous people that isn't ... I mean, of course, we're always criminalized in a particular way.

Clementine Bordeaux:

I remember, you get off the plane at SeaTac. And if you take public transportation into downtown, there's this huge art installation at the airport that has welcome and hello in Co Salish languages, right? And I was like, wow, there's a presence of indigenous representation in the city. And a lot of Duwamish communities are not federally recognized, so their relationship with Seattle is very strained. But that was the first time I really started to think critically about being on someone else's land. And then from Seattle, I moved to Los Angeles and I lived in Los Angeles almost a decade.

Clementine Bordeaux:

And I always tell folks, I really hated L.A. when I first moved there. But when my relationship with L.A. shifted, was when I started visiting Kuruvungna Springs in Brentwood. And Kuruvungna Springs are natural springs that still exist in the crazy city of L.A. And they're protected and still taken care of by Tongva folks and other community in the Los Angeles area. And once I started going there consistently and volunteering as much as I could, my relationship with L.A. as a place shifted. Then I didn't really see L.A. as this daunting settler landscape. I really started seeing it as Tongva Land and really understanding myself as a guest.

Clementine Bordeaux:

And now that I'm home again, back in Oceti Sakowin Territory, I've been trying to think about this idea of diaspora and what it means for indigenous folks to be in diaspora, right? And I don't know. I think there's a lot to learn and a lot of conversations to have about it and what it means for folks. I have a cousin right now who we didn't know existed. And about a year ago, I think because of the pandemic, started reaching out to our family, our Bordeaux side. And is now really making an effort to try to learn and make connection and be present in a way that I think a lot of non-native people don't ever have the opportunity.

Clementine Bordeaux:

So I feel there's these levels of how do we talk about diaspora? How do we talk about returning? How do we talk about also allies and accomplices, right? At some point, we are all settlers and we're all in diaspora, right, in some sense. So yeah, I don't know. Those are things I've been thinking about lately.

Suzanne:

Yeah. That reminds me, I mean, maybe we'll come back to this question. But this question of what are the mechanisms or the ethics of indigenous artists going to other parts of the United States and making artwork? And we've seen some examples of that in Los Angeles and ... Yeah. I question how tenuous the ethics really are when that happens and how if it's actually possible, it is possible, of course it's possible to make those works in a good way. It's just a ton of extra work.

Clementine Bordeaux:

Yeah.

Suzanne:

Yeah.

Clementine Bordeaux:

Right. I feel like I learned so much from Los Angeles about being a guest, about being in diaspora if I were to use that word. I don't know if I would in relation to my own experience. Because I feel like also diaspora is a settler concept to disconnect us from place and to create a dichotomy in the sense that we don't belong, right? Because I think about non-North American indigenous people who see themselves in diaspora, right? My partner's ancestor is from the Philippines and it's like, well, that I am in diaspora. And I'm like, but who told you that you were? Your family had to leave because of so many different issues. And it was settlers that told you, you were in diaspora when you got here. But imagine if you had the opportunity to actually show up first as a guest, right? Historically indigenous people are like, "Oh, who are these people? Tell us who your families are and how you're here and then we can build a relationship."

Clementine Bordeaux:

But to me that concept is still kind of a settler concept in the sense that it's telling you, you don't belong. But I'm like, who's telling us, the settler or the indigenous people? Because indigenous people will tell settlers they don't belong, but can settlers tell BIPOC folks, they don't belong, because that's always ... And then we end up doing the job of the settler. But yes, to get back to you, thinking about art making, right? There was like a huge music thing at Indian Alley recently. And all the artists, they're like, we're the exiles, right? Invoking Kent Mackenzie's film. And I'm like, but are you ... You chose to come to L.A. That's different than being exiled to L.A. So to invoke being an exile, you're not. You can go home. So I just think there's just so many complications in it, but yeah.

Suzanne:

A really, really good point. Yeah. I think about that a lot. Because my grandmother came to L.A. And then I guess I still haven't returned. I haven't ever moved back. So it's different than going back.

Clementine Bordeaux:

Yeah.

Suzanne:

It's hard to sort that out. Because I'm like, I think my grandmother's experience was a little different than down the IRA bus.

Clementine Bordeaux:

Yeah. And I think there is a difference, right? Historically, we would have come and gone in a particular way. And yeah, I think trying to evoke ... I think about Kent Mackenzie's film in collaboration, right, with people who came out and relocation. And they saw themselves as exiled and it was ... But when we have the ability to return, what does that mean for diaspora or being in exile? Yeah, I don't know. I think it's a lot to try to untangle.

Suzanne:

So when you are in Los Angeles, or Seattle, or Wisconsin, or wherever, or even sometimes Rapid City itself, what do you think makes ... This is such an impossible-to-ask question. What makes you Lakhóta? Because one of the issues that comes up is when I meet people and they're like, I'm indigenous and what does that mean? They just know their identity is some indigenous identity. How do you know or feel the formations of Lakhóta-ness?

Clementine Bordeaux:

Yeah. I think this is, right, like you said, it's impossible to answer. I think for me, it has been ... Well, even in Rapid City, my sister Mary always jokes that Rapid City is a suburb of Pine Ridge. Because we're on our homelands, we're at the base of the Black Hills. We historically have



always been here. And it's a settler and placement that, the city of presidents, right? It's a settler and placement as opposed ... And so, I'm existing as a Lakhóta person in my homelands regardless if it's a reservation or not.

Clementine Bordeaux:

But yes, I was raised on the reservation. And so also, I've been trying to untangle what that means, because I think there has come into existence this romanticization of reservation life and being raised on the reservation. And I used to think that I was never raised enough, right? Like watching Lord of the Rings cartoons and reading Harry Potter and my mom and grandma loves Star Trek. I didn't see that reflected as like raised enough.

Clementine Bordeaux:

But then, once I left the reservation and left my homelands, I was like, oh, fuck, I'm super Lakhóta. Not like, I am super Lakhóta. But I saw this ... I'm like, oh, everything that has shaped who I am, is a connection to language, it's a connection to land, it's a connection to culture and connection to family that has maintained those connections. And it's not always easy to sustain those, right? And it's work. It's work to be accountable to those.

Clementine Bordeaux:

So I think for me to be indigenous, is to maintain those connections. And then when I'm elsewhere, when I'm not in my homeland, it's then how do I conduct myself as a Lakhóta person with this idea of being a good relative, or thinking about our structures of all Lakhóta? And not in an overtly New Age-y spiritual way, but the hard work of being accountable to those ideas. And how do I do that on someone else's land as an uninvited guest? Which is also hard work. But imagine if we actually came with that type of care and accountability all the time everywhere.

Clementine Bordeaux:

If everyone did that, we still wouldn't be in this fucking pandemic. And we would be able to take care of each other in a way that I think historically we did and have built up these structures and these protocols in order to do that. But now because of all these settler and placements, we're struggling to figure out what that looks like. Because the settler idea is individualistic. So for me, I think it's just trying to figure out how to continue to be a good relative, which is not always easy.

Suzanne:

So I think that's kind of what I imagine when we talk about research methodology, or art making methodology is, the difference perhaps is accountability or responsibility. And I wonder if the precise mechanism is reciprocity. Feeling the responsibility can only go so far, but what is the action of accountability? And I guess, Vine Deloria would say something about the ability for us

... I can't remember that quote... is the ability for humans to receive not lessons, but some sort of criticism from the world.

Clementine Bordeaux:

Yeah. That's it. I'm thinking about this whole situation. This is off the record. But with Peter Hill, right, and like him, everyone keeps framing those who are critiquing Peter Hill as haters, right? And I'm like, when did accountability equate to hate, right?

Suzanne:

Yeah.

Clementine Bordeaux:

And I think this idea of hate, is again placed by settlers, because historically we would have, and not to romanticize or oversimplify. But I think historically, if we had hate we would work on untangling that to the source. And then the accountability wouldn't be as painful. Because we would all be working on accountability and we would all be working on reciprocity, which is then again not easy. I think that's the other part that I think often our culture, Lakhóta culture is like oversimplified. Our people just take the pretty fluffy parts. And I'm like, it's hard work being Lakhóta. You have to love people that you want to push off a cliff.

Clementine Bordeaux:

But because people are a resource and life is precious, you have to work at that love and that care. And love not in the sense of settler love. Like oh, I possess you because I care for you, but we're responsible for each other because we care about each other, even though we might not like each other. That's accountability. Yeah, I don't know it's ...

Clementine Bordeaux:

Well, I think about the creation of the land acknowledgement that the American Indian City Center did at UCLA. And it was a two year process of them meeting with Tongva community and Tongva speakers and intergenerational Tongva folks to be, how can we make this statement? Right? And understanding that the statement is still performative. But if we're going to do this performance and this gesture, what should it look like? And I wasn't a part of those conversations, right? I just was on the periphery watching.

Clementine Bordeaux:

But it was a sustained relationship. And now the land acknowledgement UCLA has been adopted in different ways. I also think about Urban Rez. That was the fast versus Urban Rez and produced by Cornerstone. And I was a part of the process later, right? Cornerstone does this whole story circle process, where it's basically a year of doing the story circles in the community to kind of gather a narrative building, right? So it's people sharing and the playwright is building

narrative off of stories that are being shared in the community. And then, that has taken those stories, the narrative form is then taken and written into a script. That script is then taken back to the community. The community gives more feedback. And then eventually, gets to the production stage.

Clementine Bordeaux:

So this could take, right, anywhere from two to five years to build a play, that is supposed to be a reflection of the community and have community engagement. And watching and witnessing this play, Urban Rez at that time, engaged with Tongva folks was really powerful. That was another shift for me, participating in that play. And being able to perform. The first place we performed was downtown, which is now where the Los Angeles Historic State Park is, right next to Chinatown, right before Lincoln Heights.

Clementine Bordeaux:

And I remember, we were getting ready to do our first performance, like a preview. And there were some Tongva folks that came to open the space for us. And they were like, "You're bringing healing to this place because you're telling stories that haven't been told here before." And this used to be a really violent place, right? Because there were cornfields and Olvera Street, they used to auction off California native people. So there was just this engagement and this listening. I feel like Larissa listened to people.

Clementine Bordeaux:

And it wasn't, she didn't come and was like, "Here's the story I'm going to tell." She was like, "What story do you want to tell?" We're trying to tell these stories. And I think that's the difference, right? The opera being, we're going to tell the story, what can you add? As opposed to, what stories do you want to tell? Maybe that's the approach that's different. And I think that's the part that I ... Even just now been back this year and I've been home hiding in my apartment because of the pandemic.

Clementine Bordeaux:

But there is a shift that occurred from sitting in isolation in my alley apartment thinking about my project, versus coming here and seeing the landscape in a different way. And be like, oh, this is how I could approach things differently. Actually, visibly seeing the landscape. Because I also think seeing an urban or metropolitan erasure of a place, can look very different, right? So I'm like, how has Rapid City in place itself on Oceti Sakowin lands? How has Los Angeles in place itself on Tongva land, right? I think that is also a part of how we talk about that connection. And what can I do, right? As an artist, how can we reflect that A, might disrupt settler imaginaries, but B, might also uplift the local tribal understanding of that place?

Suzanne:

Yeah, that's all. I mean, I had an experience over working with them. L. Frank who is amazing. I really highly recommend collaborating with L Frank. My mind is blown. She's so giving. And we-

Clementine Bordeaux:

She's ornery too, I love it.

Suzanne:

I don't know. She chain smokes chain vapes on the phone. She's so bad at. And I'm working with her and I had this experience. I was in Glendale, Pasadena or something at my friend's house. And we were talking about ... Sorry. I had an experience with L. Frank where we were in a conversation and I was just literally showing my friends her singing an opening song. So it's on YouTube bioneers. And at the moment, literally we're like, we're just moving on with the conversation. And then these ravens are screaming outside the window. A whole flock of them. And I go outside and they're chasing a coyote down the street.

Clementine Bordeaux:

Oh, my God.

Suzanne:

And so the entire practice right now is dreaming of raven and coyote. And I was like ... It's hard to explain, where entire cosmology is reality in broad daylight in the middle of the day in Los Angeles on a busy street. And like boom there, that's what the dream is. That's the reality between all of the city reality.

Clementine Bordeaux:

Yeah. And it's always been there. And I think that's the part I like chastise myself for not going to Tongva Land earlier. I was like, I should have been here my first year. I think that would have totally changed my perspective of Los Angeles, because I just saw the Metropolitan, I didn't see that cosmology, right, that's always there. I was blinded to it by getting in my own way, right? Just because it doesn't look like how Lakhótas do it, It doesn't mean it's not there.

Clementine Bordeaux:

So I think the other part is, how do we really pause and listen to that, other than human can? That's trying to tell us, right, that there's a whole connection there that we could all be a part of, if we just pause and listen and we're accountable to it. Because it's there for everyone. And I think that's the part that I wanted ... How do we communicate that without appropriating? I don't know.

Suzanne:

Right. But maybe that's a way we can talk about because this ... I mean, thinking about, I'm in Los Angeles, we share Los Angeles in common. So that's an interesting place to think through. But some are making artwork in Los Angeles or New York or something. And we're thinking about raw materials, how do you complete the amount? I can theorize or because I've seen some good examples of using raw materials from a place and the mechanisms of making new things out of them.

Suzanne:

I think L. Frank is probably the best example I can think of because she acquires soapstone from Catalina Island and makes her artwork from it or dreams are also her raw material. Yeah. I just wanted to know if you had because ... I mean, you already know that my practice is working with computers and how fraught they are and how impossible they are to make ethically. But then Lakhóta use stones in a very ethical way and communicative way. Sometimes it's hard to pull out what I wanted accountable, because it seems so simple on one level. You go you find a stone, you leave tobacco. But that's just one ... It seems so simple, but it's not obviously. It means something.

Clementine Bordeaux:

Yeah. Well, in that sense, right, it's still performative, right? I think that's the other part that I'm trying to grapple with, is this level of performance. But it's still an acting ...

Suzanne:

The action of reciprocity, which is not just ... It seems like a symbol on this dimension. But just like the basic thing of trying to give more than you receive, maybe that sets off a chain reaction.

Clementine Bordeaux:

Or understanding that it's not extractive, right? I'm not just going to take, take, take to have an abundance. But I'm taking and I'm giving and I'm creating and it's beneficial for everyone and everything, because then we see rocks as animate parts of our lives, as opposed to just adornment. And the same way that, right, trying to draw these connections between things that then perform a level of connection. There's the visceral connection but not theoretical connection. Right? How do we-

Suzanne:

Maybe it's like a cosmo ... You know how the ... I'm thinking about in Lakhóta world, there seems to be so much microcosm and macrocosm where there's, oh, I put tobacco down for this. But that's reflective of, oh, my entire life should be the act of ... Every conscious thing should be the act of trying to give more gifts than you were receiving. So maybe that's it some sort of depending or something.

Clementine Bordeaux:

Yeah, yeah. I don't know.

Suzanne:

So let me see of the ... Are there any other questions that you want to speak to a little bit? I mean, a lot of them have to do with very materiality, but they don't have to be answered right now. That could be answered in discussion, I think. Anything you have to say?

Clementine Bordeaux:

And for me, thinking about the longevity of cultural transmission, right? How do we share and receive and sustain culture and language and connection, to place and to language and to culture? Thinking about listening to advice. I want people to listen to other than human kin and be reminded that it's not ... Right? I feel like there's this dichotomy that has been created of over spirituality, right? Native people are often stereotyped as overly mystic, right? There's a mysticism.

Clementine Bordeaux:

And I'm like, but I don't think it's mysticism, this is real. It's there. It's present. So for me, it's like, how do we tease out that over spirituality and mysticism that's in place by settlers, to really listen? And be like, you have a connection to place. You were raised by the land around you, even though you didn't see it. So for me, I want my great grandchildren to remember how to listen. And I don't know what that looks like, but I want them to be able to remember land and remember other than human can and remember those cosmologies that exist in a place regardless of what's around it, right? Like things we have placed around it in our current climate of living.

Clementine Bordeaux:

Because even other folks ... And everyone should have their connection. Even people who are in diaspora. Historically, even before the European enlightenment, everyone listened to the place that they were from, to the land that raised them. I have a Vietnamese friend who was born and raised in Minnesota, in Minneapolis. And they've talked about a lot of times, their elders who came over as refugees, really trying to understand the waterways and seeing it within their worldview. But really trying to make space for Dakota and Anishinaabe worldviews of water.

Clementine Bordeaux:

And they're like, oh, it's a pond within a pond. You come with this specific knowledge but if you take the time to listen, you can really understand why someone is fighting for their land or their water in a particular way. Even if you're not from those places. And I think for me that's what I'm trying to get. I want everyone to get to that point, whether you're historically from there or not. We all have the ability to stop and listen, if we just get settler ideologies untangled. And so for me, that's what type of ... How do we untangle the white noise of settlers, to then remember how to listen to the land and listen to place in a particular way. But I don't know what that looks like.

Suzanne:

Yeah. I mean, it reminds me of this thinking when I was teaching this semester. We were talking a lot about where songs come from, why they come from anywhere. And it becomes really clear that they have to be learned from non-humans. You can't just ... It doesn't come from ... Nothing comes from us. That kind of becomes really clear. And when you were talking, I was thinking about, who are the best listeners in the non-human world? Probably rocks but maybe something a little more with four legs or something. I'm thinking about cats and how they listen.

Suzanne:

They're really good listeners and they don't interrupt generally. And I guess they fight each other if they put each other in their place hierarchy-wise. If listening is a methodology and we're trying to be better listeners to each other, especially places of contention. Do I need to be a better listener? Or do they even notice me?

Clementine Bordeaux:

Well, my partner and I were talking about that. You can tell the people who've never been pinched, right, by their elders, right, for misbehaving. Because they just keep wailing out and they keep putting their foot in their mouth, or they keep acting entitled in particular ways. And it's like, damn, these folks have never been pinched either ideologically, emotionally, or physically. They've never been pinched. They've never listened, right? How do we get people to that point of listening? And yeah, I'm not sure.

Suzanne:

Yeah. That pinches you.

Clementine Bordeaux:

Yeah. That pinches you. That pinches you emotionally, or mentally. Shut the fuck up and listen.

Suzanne:

You're speaking too much.

Clementine Bordeaux:

Be quiet. Be quiet for a second. Yeah.

Suzanne:

I'm glad I'm the one editing this because ... I mean, I've been on multiple panels now which where he doesn't let women speak and talk to somebody.

Clementine Bordeaux:

Never been pinched.

Suzanne:

I'm like, who raised you? Where's your listening skills?

Clementine Bordeaux:

Yeah.

Suzanne:

It's strange.

Clementine Bordeaux:

It's frustrating. Yeah. I don't know.

Suzanne:

I know you have a lot of your uncle's stonework, but do you ever think about rocks?

Clementine Bordeaux:

Oh my God, Suzanne I have rocks everywhere. I have rocks just in my office. I can even remember where I got this ... I have three rocks that I don't know where ... They're not quite spare rocks, right, because they're round but it's not quite ...

Suzanne:

You guys are hiking a lot?

Clementine Bordeaux:

We were. But I can't remember where I got this rock, I shouldn't ... And like, where did I get you? And then I have other kind of roundish. These I got, I know near water. You could feel the water on them. But I can't remember. I need to start documenting where I get things. They're probably just sad. They're like you took us. And I've taken rock since I was a kid. I don't know. And I can't specifically remember how or why I started to do that.

Clementine Bordeaux:

And that was before I was wearing ... I get sprayed for wearing my uncle's stuff. Because I feel like I started wearing his jewelry in the late '90s, early 2000s, right, when I graduated high



school. So yeah, rocks have always been ... And maybe it was the inplacement of the Íŋyaŋ creation story, right? I'm thinking about Íŋyaŋ giving of themselves and becoming a rock. And thinking about everything that has come from rocks. So yeah.

Suzanne:

I think that's a really common ... To collect rocks, seems to be an extremely Lakǰóta pastime. There's my aunt for sharing this meme. And it wasn't even meme. It was a picture of a jacket, like a big jacket had million pockets on it. And they're like, oh, we wish our mother was still alive because she would love to wear that to collect rocks, because she was always coming back with handfuls of rock. Too bad I can't ask her why she ...

Clementine Bordeaux:

Collected rocks.

Suzanne:

Possessively collect rocks.

Clementine Bordeaux:

Yeah. Maybe I can just ... Because I remember hearing the Íŋyaŋ story, right? An omniscient being that then had a thought. And from that thought, things came. And they gave of themselves so much that they turned to stone. Maybe that always just stayed with me and formed my obsession with rocks.

Suzanne:

That's interesting for me, because thinking about the mechanism of the rock also can decay. If you heat it up enough it'll start to disintegrate or the end life of my grandfather, grandmother stones. And how much time-wise like a lot of geologic time is all the rage. Right now, settler studies.

Clementine Bordeaux:

Also funny is that, everyone's using anthropomorphizing, right? Is that how you say it? And I was like, I don't know what that is. I had asked Terry. And I was like, "What is that?" I looked it up. And I was like, "Why don't they just say a present day? I don't understand."

Suzanne:

We're trying to de-center the human by re-centering the human. Are you?

Clementine Bordeaux:

Like why? Why. Anyway. And what sense of time is that for the rocks?

Suzanne:

Right. It's a blip. I mean, my aunt said something really great. Melitta, you know Melitta?

Clementine Bordeaux:

Yeah.

Suzanne:

She said something really great to me once. She was like, "You spend your whole life looking for a certain rock and that rock spends its whole life looking for you." And it blows my mind because my life is quite short in comparison. That rock is millions of years old and I'm 30, which is insane. Hopefully rocks that are, clearly they're very patient.

Clementine Bordeaux:

Yeah.

Suzanne:

Yeah.

Clementine Bordeaux:

Well, the same is like water, right? Water has always been here. Just keeps getting recycled. It has so much memory.

Suzanne:

Similar to stone though. It's the subduction plates.

Clementine Bordeaux:

Yeah.

Suzanne:

It's one kind of rock and then the second time it comes around, it turns into a different kind.

Clementine Bordeaux:

Yeah.

Suzanne:

Altogether a little bit or a lot, which is so insane.

Clementine Bordeaux:

Yeah.

Suzanne:

Sure.

Clementine Bordeaux:

We suck. Humans suck.

Suzanne:

It's just boring.

Clementine Bordeaux:

I know we're. We think we're so great. I'm like, we kind of suck. We are not that cool.

Suzanne:

No. Yeah, I mean, I guess I'm kind of thinking about this question, what the stones or raw materials have to teach us, the ones are less animate seeming.

Clementine Bordeaux:

Yeah. Maybe it's that, to be patient. That we don't have to know right away or that what we know now, is not like...And that's why I say these things and I'm like, I don't want to over romanticize or oversimplify, but I think about historically, right? It's like the seven generations. But really, if we're thinking seven generations from now, what is that? 100 years. Thinking 100 years from now. If we actually are patient and waiting and putting things in place, that will impact 100 years from now, looks are very different than, what is my immediate gratification?

Clementine Bordeaux:

And that's a different type of listening, that's a different type of exchange, that's a different type of movement through the world that I think is reflected in what the other than humankind are trying to show us, if we just listened and paused. I think about, right, which TV station does it? Where they're like, this is what unmaintained city will look like in five years and 10 years, right? It's just overgrowth and the land is taking back and breaking down settler and placement. So I'm like yeah. Well, if we actually tried to live with the land around us, what would it look like? We

wouldn't all have allergies, because we wouldn't have fucking male plants everywhere. I don't know. How do we listen?

Suzanne:

We have a male plant.

Clementine Bordeaux:

Patriarchy is killing us everywhere. It's in our way all the time. Did you know that? That's why we have so many allergies, is because this ... I don't remember what point it was. But a lot of places will plant male plants because they're prettier. And they don't produce as much seeds. Yeah. There's producing pollen because they're trying to spread, germinate more plants. But so it's just male plants. Male plants are ruining our lives right now.

Suzanne:

I agree.

Clementine Bordeaux:

Yeah.

Suzanne:

I don't know what you're talking about, but ... Okay. Let's see. I mean, we can expand on these questions another time, but the kind of thinking like, oh, you're so, when you start to work, usually I think the first step is consultation. And the last step is having a good death cycle where it ends in a good way.

Clementine Bordeaux:

Yeah.

Suzanne:

I'm wondering what you think about how you begin a new artwork or a new thought or?

Clementine Bordeaux:

I don't know. I think it also depends on the work. I think some things take longer, or you have to ruminate longer. And I think also candid in a good way or the death cycle just via transformation into something else. Thinking about right, like you said the rocks that become other rocks. Can art pieces then become other art pieces? So they might end one cycle as one thing and transform into something else. But that also might be a way to thinking about how things progress or move through space in a particular way.

Suzanne:

Yeah. I mean, you get more thoughts. You can keep going. I just want to before I start editing this, what your preferred pronouns are for publication.

Clementine Bordeaux:

She, they, we. I don't ... It's hard. I identify as a cisgendered woman, so she is fine. But I also think about, right, Lakḥóta doesn't have pronouns, we have relational terms.

Suzanne:

I will only call you cousin.

Clementine Bordeaux:

Cousin, I know, right? I would rather be a cousin than that girl over there. But I also think about the need to disrupt hetero-patriarchy. So I'm like, I'll use this gen, men can call me they, just to be uncomfortable. So yeah, either flexible, but she is fine. Yeah, or cousin. My cousin.

Suzanne:

Trying to think of anything else I wanted to ask.

Clementine Bordeaux:

Yeah. I guess because then we can write there's continuation of this. So talking about the other things later.

Suzanne:

Yeah.

Clementine Bordeaux:

Stones are cool.

Suzanne:

Big fan.

Clementine Bordeaux:

Big fan. Big fan of the rocks.

Suzanne:

I'm going to stop recording.

Clementine Bordeaux:

Okay.

### 8.2.3 Corey Stover and Becky Red Bow, Interview Transcript

Suzanne Kite:

All right, so to give you an idea, these are with this visual language kit or whatever, they suggest. It's like: these are earth, these squares can mean things, but we know feather. So, obviously for the feather, it can mean so many things: a ward of honor, a milestone, name, count, remembrance, ceremonial item. That's like, so much stuff and same with these. Is it a star or is it a powerful being? Is this a spirit? There's so many ways to think about it. But then she [Sadie Red Wing] does this thing where, by combining them, a cloud and the lightning, you get a storm, but then this means more than just a storm, right?

Suzanne Kite:

It's like this whole, all the symbolism that comes with the *wakiyan* and then here, same thing with this. It's like a home in the clouds, two homes in the clouds. So, this is the woman who invented this or made this thing. This is her extreme version where you zoom in on one little part. So, this was her thesis, her master's thesis, this design. So, she's going to university. And so, all of this stuff is connected together to make her degree. But just to show a really complex one. Mostly I've been making really small ones, just simple, to try to tell something really simple.

Corey Stover:

She got horse tracks in there.

Suzanne Kite:

I feel like we could tell a simplified version of the Iron Road walking away from the...

Corey Stover:

Yeah. Running from Wounded Knee, Iron Road ran from the gunfire at Wounded Knees and that was Evelyn's grandmother.

Suzanne Kite:

Okay. Who is Iron Road's [parents]?

Corey Stover:

We don't know who her parents are.

Suzanne Kite:

And who are her children?

Corey Stover:

Nelly Hungry and then there was two other ones. Nelly Hungry is Bill and my mom's grandmother.

Suzanne Kite:

Okay.

Corey Stover:

And she was Iron Road's daughter.

Suzanne Kite:

And then who is her child?

Corey Stover:

Evelyn and Martha.

Suzanne Kite:

I thought it was her grandchild.

Corey Stover:

Who?

Suzanne Kite:

So, it goes Iron Road, Nelly-

Corey Stover:

Evelyn.

Suzanne Kite:

Evelyn? Oh, okay.

Corey Stover:

And then Bill.

Suzanne Kite:

And then Bill.

Corey Stover:

And then Cynthia and then you.

Suzanne Kite:

Okay.

Corey Stover:

So, that's your direct lineage, is you, Cynthia, Bill, Evelyn, Nelly, Iron Road. So, they named her Iron Road because they found her along the railroad tracks, which the significance of naming, sometimes, is they use that to determine, or not determine, but sometimes the circumstances around a situation would have determined somebody's name at a second or third part of their life.

Suzanne Kite:

But she had her name her whole life?

Corey Stover:

I don't think her name was Iron Road when she was younger, and I don't know if she ever told my grandma what her name was before that. She ran at Wounded Knee and ended up surviving and going to Rosebud and then, that's where she settled. And that was around the time when they were still putting people on reservations. So she just stayed there, even though she was traveling with Bigfoot, she wouldn't have even been Rosebud, Sicangu. She would have been...

Corey Stover:

She would have been... I think they were Two Kettle Band that were traveling with Bigfoot down to the agency in Pine Ridge, because he was going to have a council with the Red Cloud. And so, a lot of his followers came with him because he was dying of pneumonia. -I mean, not dying. He was sick with pneumonia and so, his people came with him. So, they would travel that way, and they all traveled down, and then they were camped around Wounded Knee when the massacre had happened and her parents were killed. But her uncle and I'm pretty sure, I think it was her uncle, his name was William Black Thunder, he also ran. Then, I don't know how, they ended up meeting back up in Rosebud; she ended up going to Rosebud. So, they must've had relatives there. Some way, somehow, there must have been inner marriage or something and so, they must've went to settle there with relatives. And then that's how Rosebud became where my grandma, where Evelyn, was from.

Suzanne Kite:

So, I mean, you can see what some of these look like.

Corey Stover:

They look like the designs that I come up with in my head.



Suzanne Kite:

Right. Exactly. These are really pretty.

Corey Stover:

The purpose of the symmetrical design is to show the mirroring of what is above, is so below. And that's a significant part of Lakota design. This one's a little bit different, but usually-

Suzanne Kite:

That's a bag.

Corey Stover:

... usually what they would probably have done is mirrored it this way, and the same with that. They'll mirror it the other way or they'll use them as significant points in the design that tells a story. So, they use the designs to tell the story. It's almost like a pictograph that told a story of their adventure or their war party or things like that.

Suzanne Kite:

So, there's a lot of ways we can think about this.

Corey Stover:

I know. I need to kind of play around a little bit with them and see what...

Suzanne Kite:

That's so pretty.

Corey Stover:

For me, it's weird to actually put a design together because I never really plan my designs. When I do beadwork, I just sort of open myself up to what I feel like is going to come out. It's just freehand.

Suzanne Kite:

I think that's really how it happens or people have a dream or they have a need to tell something.

Corey Stover:

But a lot of times, like the pipe bags, what they would do is put the dream that they had on the pipe bag. So that when they would take the pipe bag around, they could actually tell the story of their vision on the bag. So, I guess in a way it could also have been a way, like they say they

didn't have written language, but we did to an extent, but it was in symbols. Because before beadwork, we would have done it with quill work and those patterns and stuff could be very intricate. You could do pretty much anything in beadwork that you could do in quill work, but quill work is more intricate and takes a lot more skill and beadwork didn't really come into play until the traders would come through and do the trading. I'm also wondering... It's kind of hard to line them up how I want. There's so many layers. It's kind of tricky.

Corey Stover:

I guess I've never really thought of the designs as telling stories. So, I'm still learning how to adapt to that, even though that's the purpose of them. I've always just sort of done it intuitively. So I guess in my beadwork, I'm telling stories, but I never really knew what story I was telling.

Suzanne Kite:

Oh, it's okay. They get lost.

Suzanne Kite:

If either of you want to tell a story, I can give you a-

Becky Red Bow:

Hm?

Suzanne Kite:

If you want to tell any... Do you remember about Evelyn and her rock collecting?

Becky Red Bow:

Her rock collecting? Like my story about what she gave me?

Suzanne Kite:

I don't know that.

Becky Red Bow:

My mom told you to. Did she tell you? That one's amazing. Amazing story. I'll have to tell you about it one day.

Suzanne Kite:

My mom told me some interesting stories, but-

Becky Red Bow:

She what?

Suzanne Kite:

She told me a bunch of stories, but I'm not sure if she told... Do you remember that one?

Becky Red Bow:

Do you have them recorded?

Suzanne Kite:

When I talked to her, I did, yeah.

Becky Red Bow:

Did you record them?

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah.

Becky Red Bow:

Let's see. Sam got one of these stuck into his arm when he was a little boy.

Suzanne Kite:

Oh.

Corey Stover:

But the long way too, like this.

Suzanne Kite:

Crazy boy.

Corey Stover:

Well, she's just asking because she has funding she has to use. So, if there's any stories you want to tell, she'll pay you money if you want to tell stories about anything,

Suzanne Kite:

Tell me a boring story.

Becky Red Bow:

Huh? I have lots of stories.

Suzanne Kite:

Tell me a nice, boring story about rocks.

Corey Stover:

Oh, okay. Here's this one.

Becky Red Bow:

I can't remember that story about this rock, and I still have that rock that Angie gave grandma. She said Angie brought it to her. Angie went on some trip for the church, and she brought this rock back and it was real pretty and different when she gave it to grandma. She had this long story about this rock and grandma told me it, but I can't remember it.

Suzanne Kite:

But Evelyn would walk around and carry, and pick up rocks all over, right? And bring them back?

Becky Red Bow:

Everywhere she went, she had rocks. She always had rocks. Always. I wish I would have brought my rock. I would have showed it to you. But she went to visit her when she was at the state home, in her room... Where is he? Oh, he's in that room. Did you shut the door?

Suzanne Kite:

What room?

Becky Red Bow:

Your room.

Suzanne Kite:

No, I didn't.

Becky Red Bow:

Or the office. Do you have to go potty?

Corey Stover:

Come on.

Becky Red Bow:

Do you think he has to go potty?

Corey Stover:

Come on, Chuck. Come on.

Becky Red Bow:

I think he has to go to the bathroom, but he can't go or something. He's scared to go out because his body isn't reacting the way... Because he's not drinking water. He can't bark right.

Corey Stover:

He always yelps like that at certain times and so, I thought he was getting arthritis and so, when you pick him up and move him, it hurts his joints or his back or wherever you're feeling it.

Becky Red Bow:

How did he get in there?

Corey Stover:

He walked in there.

Becky Red Bow:

He did? I think we should bring him a pee pad.

Corey Stover:

I'm just waiting for the Tylenol to kick in and when it does, he should be able to use the bathroom. Kobe makes really good pineapple cake.

Corey Stover:

It's delicious.

Corey Stover:

Oh my God, those jalapenos are so hot.

Suzanne Kite:

Some of them are.

Corey Stover:

I mean, yum, but frick.

Becky Red Bow:

What time did those guys get back?

Suzanne Kite:

Hm?

Becky Red Bow:

What time did they get back?

Suzanne Kite:

She didn't even arrive yet.

Becky Red Bow:

She didn't?

Suzanne Kite:

Mm-mm (negative).

Becky Red Bow:

I mean, her final ride. So, I don't know what time they're going to be back.

Suzanne Kite:

Wait, what were you saying, Beck?

Becky Red Bow:

His little body is shaking. He's trembling.

Suzanne Kite:

What were you telling me before he yelped? Maybe about grandma Evelyn?

Becky Red Bow:

Oh, she used to pick up rocks. Everywhere, she used to always look for spirit rocks, like those real round ones, and she could never find them. One time I came down, and her and I were walking the road, and I said, "Look, Grandma!" I could see that spirit rock sitting there. So, she really looked and she grabbed it and she was all happy. She couldn't believe it. It took her years to find one and she finally found it. Well, I actually showed it to her but, I hadn't touched it. I let her find it. I just said, "Look." She was so excited. She couldn't believe it. So, she found her spirit rock. I always wondered what she did with it, because I never seen it again from that day on, but I went to visit her in Hot Springs.

Becky Red Bow:

One time when she was at the state home in her room and my boyfriend was in the car just smoking cigarettes. So he said, "I'll wait," because he didn't want to go up there. He's shy anyways. So, I went up there and as soon as I walked in she was so happy to see me. She said, "Come here, I got to show you something. Let me show you this rock that I found." So I was like, "Okay." So, I went in and I sit on her bed and she had this shoe box sitting on the window sill. So, she took that shoe box and she set it down next to me. And so, I was looking at that shoe box and I reached in and I grabbed this rock and I was holding onto it, looking at it. I was like, "Wow, that's a cool rock."

Becky Red Bow:

And I was holding it. So, she started going through her rocks and she tells me where she got each one of them, where she got them. That's when she told me the story about the rock that Angie gave her. And I was like, "That is gone." That just completely went somewhere. I don't know where. So, I want to ask Angie about that rock because I still have it.

Becky Red Bow:

And so, then because she gave me that rock and this other rock, but so she went through all of her rocks, told me a story about every rock. She got to the end of the box and she's like, "That rock is gone." And so I said, "Is it this one?" And I open my hand and she's like, "How'd you do that?" She thought it was magic or something, but she didn't see me take it and she's like, "How'd you do that?" And she got all scared. And I was like, "I just sat down and picked it up when you put those rocks there." So, she told me the story of this rock, how she got this rock. And I don't know. I don't remember what it was.

Suzanne Kite:

I was planning on calling Angie this week, but she was busy. So, I'll call her next week.

Becky Red Bow:

And so, this is a totally different rock from the Angie rock. This is a rock that she told me she found and she had a story that went with it because every single rock that she had in that box, which was a big shoe box and she went through every single one of them, she had stories for them. And so this one, she told me the story and I started looking at it while she was telling me the story. And there's a woman on this rock, just a perfect picture, like somebody drew it on that rock, but it's just naturally made inside that rock. And so then she got done with the story and I said, "Did you know there's a woman in this rock?" And she said, "What?" And I said, "Yeah, there's a woman right here," and I showed it to her and she was trying to see it and she's just looking at it and she goes, "Ooh, that's spooky. I don't want it. Take it," she said.

Becky Red Bow:

And she said all she saw was spooky things on it. She didn't see a woman. And she just said, "Take it. I don't want it." And so, I was like okay, but this is a beautiful woman on this rock, how

could she say it's spooky? So, I got the rock and she told me to take it. She told me to tell Everett hi. And so, I got out to the car and I told Everett the story that she told me on this rock. So, he might know it. Whatever, if he remembers, but I showed him the rock and I said, "See that woman?" And he's like, "No." I said, "There's a woman on this rock," and he couldn't see it either.

Becky Red Bow:

And so then he said, "All I see is like spooky faces," and I said, "No, you're looking at it wrong." I said, "There's this real, pretty woman on there." There's this woman and she's sitting, she has long braids in her hair. You could even see the braids. They're both braided down. She kind of looks like Deanna Provost in a way with her long, thick hair, but she had her hair braided on both sides. And then she's holding a pipe like this. She's holding a pipe and it's coming up like she just pulled it away from her mouth, because there's smoke coming out of her mouth, and there's lightning and smoke coming out of the bowl of the pipe. And that's all on that rock. And so, then I took that rock to the Sundance. Oh no, before I took it to the Sundance, I went to my mom's house and I showed it to her and Ronnie both before. It must've been at my house in Rapid or something.

Becky Red Bow:

But when I took it to them at their house a week before Sundance, I was happy and I'm prepared for Sundance and I said, I told my mom the whole story and she's like, "Well, where's the rock?" And I said, "I brought it. It's in my bag." She goes, "Well, let's go look at it." So, we went. Ronnie had gone to bed, it was midnight. He had gone to bed, so her and I go into the bedroom and I pull it out. And I said, "Here it is," and I showed it to her and I showed her the woman. And she said, "Oh," she handed it back real fast and she said, "That woman's trying to tell you something," and she gave it back to me. And so, I got it and I had it in this hand and she said, "Put it on your heart and then hold your hand out like this."

Becky Red Bow:

And she said, "And just listen. Just listen real hard with your mind." So, I closed my eyes and I was sitting up right on the couch, or on bed, and there's nothing behind me. So, I was sitting straight up and I held that hand back like that and I went like this. All of a sudden, from the ground up, I felt this energy coming to my feet and when it hit my feet, it went all the way up my body, like numbness. Just like remember how whenever you fall asleep and your arm goes to sleep or your hand goes to sleep and it's numb and tingly? That's what it felt like, but it was moving. And so, it started moving up and I was still sitting there like this and I could feel it coming in real fast. I mean, I was probably sitting there like two minutes.

Becky Red Bow:

I had my eyes closed and I was holding that rock and it hit me and when it hit me right on my chest, I was falling into darkness. It wasn't in that room no more. I was falling into darkness and when I opened my eyes, I just saw her, that woman in the rock. And I knew her. She knew me. And I knew her. And I just said, "unči! unči!" and I just started crying and it wasn't tears of fear.



It was like overwhelming happiness to see her again, because I knew her and she knew me and I was just crying.

Becky Red Bow:

And my mom was sitting there watching me and she said I was sitting straight up. I didn't fall or anything. She said, I was still sitting like this, but when they took me out of my body, they took my spirit to the spirit world. When they took me out, it's like falling into the darkness. It's like you're just falling, falling, falling and then she showed me, she pointed and there was this sweat lodge sitting there and there was lightning coming down from the sky and it was hitting the top of the sweat lodge and it was blue. And she said her name was Blue Lightning Woman.

Becky Red Bow:

And then, just like that, my mom would say, "Becky, are you okay? Are you okay?" And I was just sobbing. And I was back in that room, sitting there. Sitting there still just in that same spot, like this, I was sitting like this and tears were just running down my face. And my mom said, "Are you okay? What's wrong? Were you okay?" And I said, "That's my grandma." I said, "That's my Unči. She's my Unči," and she said, "Let's go smoke." You knew how she is. I didn't even smoke at the time, but I was like, "Okay." So, then I went to put her away. She said, "Put that rock down." That's what she said, first thing. She said, "Put that rock back. Put that hand down," she said that. And so, I was looking around my room like that and here, she had a Ziploc bag with material in it.

Becky Red Bow:

So, I reached in there and I pulled out this blue material and I wrapped it up. I tried to put it back in the bag it was in when I brought it, which was a little blue, it looked like a little blue backpack, but it was like a coin purse. And so, I was trying and it wouldn't fit. I had all my other rocks in there too and it wouldn't go back in there. So, I wrapped it up in that blue material and I put it in my bag and we went out and smoked. Here the next day, she said, "You have to tell Ronnie. Tell Ronnie that nothing else happened that night. You went to sleep. You smoked and then we went to sleep." Next morning, I took a cigarette and I gave it to Ronnie and I said, "I have to tell you what happened last night."

Becky Red Bow:

And I showed him that rock to look at and I said, "Can you ask grandpa what I'm supposed to do with her?" Because I had her for years ever since grandma gave her to me and I would take her out and show her to everybody that came to my house. I'm like, "Look at this pretty woman." Some people would see her and some people wouldn't see her. Even Paul. I said, "Paul, you got to see this woman on this rock. She looks like your mom," and he's like, "I don't see it." He didn't even think it looked like his mom at all and he didn't see the woman. So anyways, I asked Ronnie what to do. I have to pray and ask what to do. So, he smoked that cigarette I gave him and I went outside and then he called me back in there and here, he said, "She's an old medicine woman. She's my grandma, but she's many years old, like so old."

Becky Red Bow:

He said, "I can't believe that your hair didn't turn white instantly," he said, "Because she's so old and she's so powerful." And he said, "She told you not to show her to anyone because she came to you and she's for you and she'll tell you what she wants you to do and she'll tell you when she wants you to do it and you're not supposed to show her to anybody and you're supposed to keep her in blue material and you're supposed to keep her with your pipe." And so, I put her in that blue material and Ronnie was totally shocked because grandpa told him that she was so ancient, like she was really, really old. And her name was Blue Lightning Woman. Right. And yeah.

Becky Red Bow:

And so, then I took her to the Sundance and your grandpa came and he came straight up to me. I wasn't dancing. I was outside praying with the dancers, but I wasn't dancing. And here he came up to me and he said, "Can I see?" And he said her name. So, Ronnie must have told Bill or something or my mom probably. My mom probably did. And so then I said, "Yeah." I had her in a leather pouch tied to my wrist. So, I took her out and I gave it to him and he said, "I'm going to take her to the tree." I was like, "Okay." So, he left and went to the tree and prayed and stuff and came back and gave her back to me. And he said, "Nobody can tell you when to dance or if you have to dance or what she wants you to do. She'll come to you and she'll tell you when you're ready." So, I still have her. I have her with my fight bag. I keep her all ...and I stopped showing her to everybody. [crosstalk 00:30:51]

Corey Stover:

... witnessed because I was right there along the whole thing, pretty much.

Suzanne Kite:

I like how no one could see her, even if you tried to show them.

Corey Stover:

Because I remember Beck would ask people if they've seen it and they wouldn't see it and some people would, some people-

Corey Stover:

Ask people if they've seen it, and they wouldn't see it and some people would, some people wouldn't. And she had that.

Becky Red Bow:

The first time I saw her, all I saw was her face and her hair. This long braid, it's just thick and just long and it goes way down, it's just sitting there. That's the first thing I saw and that's the only thing I saw. Then, when I kept looking at her, because I'd bring her out and I'd smudge her, I keep her wrapped in sage, and she's wrapped in blue cloth and then she's in that bag, and there's a blue bead on that bag. I take her out and I change her sage all the time. Clean it, put new sage in every year, wrap her back up. It forms around that rock, like an Easter egg, it almost looks like

an Easter egg and you pull it apart, that sage and could see her. I always check to make sure she's there because I've had rocks before that had things on it and then they'd disappear.

Corey Stover:

The significance to it too is sometimes they come, they'll be with you and when they're ready to go, there is nothing that you're going to do about it. They're going to go. That's the purpose of the spirit rock. Sometimes they stay forever. Sometimes they come, sometimes they go.

Becky Red Bow:

Yeah, Oli's had his since he was 13 years old.

Corey Stover:

How old is Oli?

Becky Red Bow:

Almost 30.

Corey Stover:

Almost 30.

Becky Red Bow:

Next year he will be 30. And he's fed it every single day and wore it every single day. One time he'd had it at school, not even at school, at college and these guys in the class was teasing him, saying it was drugs that he carried around with him. He's like, he can't hear anyways. He's like me, he's worse. He can't hear. So he just ignored them. He knew they were talking about his spirit helper, but he just ignored them here. The teacher pulled him outside and asked him to open it, so he could see it.

Suzanne Kite:

I had a border guard who made me do that with my rock.

Becky Red Bow:

And Ali was like, "No. I'm not opening it. This is my spirit helper. I don't do drugs."

Corey Stover:

I flew to North Carolina that time and remember, mom, they took my pipe and everything out.

Becky Red Bow:

Did they?

Corey Stover:

And I just had to stand there and watch them. And I'm like, oh my god.

Suzanne Kite:

It's ridiculous. TSA isn't even defined-

Corey Stover:

And that was in Chadron, Nebraska

Suzanne Kite:

Because they're racist.

Corey Stover:

And they scanned my bag and, it was taking forever. And it was the littlest plane I ever flew on. Well, probably besides when I was born, but they had their kids and then they take my bag out and they start taking everything out and I'm just watching them like, are you really going to search my entire bag? And then they get my pipe bag out, take my pipe bag out, take everything out and look at it. And I'm just like, oh my god.

Suzanne Kite:

It's always the places where they're bored.

Corey Stover:

Yeah. They've definitely had enough time to do that. That was the first and last time I ever flew with it, but I didn't want to leave it. I wanted to take it.

Becky Red Bow:

It was the craziest feeling though, whenever I saw her, because I've never been that happy to see somebody. It wasn't... This, me? It was like my spirit that knew her. It wasn't my physical me. I never even heard of anyone named that in our family tree or anything. And so she's got to be really, really old. And our spirits knew each other. She was my grandma, or is.

Corey Stover:

When you communicate in the spirit realm, it's on a different level. It's so different. Because when I met my spirit helper in a dream, it was like I knew him. Not how Beck's describing it, it was different. It was like he was talking to me, but he wasn't talking out loud. It was like energy vibrations coming out of his eyes and coming into my eyes and I was understanding what he was saying, even though he wasn't saying anything. It's really strange, but he's an owl man. He's a man and he's an owl. And he looks... in your human way of looking at him he's vulgar because he's got little fluffs everywhere, like it's been plucked out. And his body is halfway between

someone who would be turning back into a human if they were an animal. So he's got the body and everything, but his head, the way his face look and even his eyebrows and stuff, but it was just like an owl.

Corey Stover:

And his nose, it was almost like he was morphing between an owl and a man maybe. But, what got me was when I was sitting on the edge of this hill, I felt something real soft rubbing against my arm. And I look and I jumped because I was like, oh my god. And it's a man. And his arms are like all fluffy, like little white fluffs all over. And then I look at him in the face and I was so afraid of him. And I was just in my mind, I was like disgusted because... Not disgusted with the spirit or anything like that, but just his appearance was so unnatural. But I was like, "What are you?" And then all of a sudden he was like looking at me and he just started communicating and he just... It was just pure love.

Corey Stover:

It was the most love energy I've ever experienced. What he showed me was that there's, it's pure. It's unbiased love. And maybe that's what he was teaching me when I seen him was that his appearance was a certain way, but his spirit was... And I don't know. And then I prayed, and prayed about him and asked him to come and tell me his name and he did. And his name is, it's in Lakota, what he said was Hehauwanaogmani. Which means, now he walks without. And then certainly after that, I ended up getting an owl tattooed on my arm and ironically, his eyes were blue. That guy drew this up and put it on. I said, "Just put something on there." And that's what he put it on there. Now the owls got blue eyes.

Corey Stover:

And his eyes were blue and I seen the energy in them, even in the color, I remember it vividly. And I was out here in Wanblee, here's Eagle Nest Butte. And I was in a pit where they catch Eagles because they used to put rabbits and tie them and they would have wood that goes across, almost like a cage, and then tie rabbits up there and then the Eagles would come and fly up to catch the rabbit and they would pull out a feather, because to get a feather from a live Eagle was so much more powerful than a dead Eagle because the Eagle still goes up to fly above everything. So that was how they would get Eagle feathers.

Corey Stover:

So I was in there first and then I had come to the edge of the Buttes, like this... What would you call it? Oh, it's a Butte, I guess. Eagle Nest Butte. So it's like a Butte and it's long. There's a lot of land there and I'm sitting on the edge and looking off into the horizon as the sun's setting and I felt so, I can't even describe it. It was like a feeling of despair. It wasn't something in particular that I felt, it seemed in my dream like it was so general, but that it was just such a hard time or I just felt so insignificant and pitiful, I guess. And so I'm sitting there and I'm feeling this way and then that's when he came and I was sitting there and he rubbed against my arm and then he communicated with me a little and then I woke up.

Corey Stover:

And so, that was the first time I ever met that spirit helper. Then I have others, I have one that your grandpa gave to Bernie and this was in 90... When did me and Tony go out there? 90...? When me and Tony went out to Igloo, what summer was that? 93, 94 maybe? I don't even know if Clayton was born yet. He might've been, he might've been a baby. But me and Tony spent the summer and there's this little ghost town, it's all blocked off now. Mary was actually, she wasn't born there, but grandma and grandpa lived there, because it was an army... Was it a base or was it a...? It's like an army base or something, and they call it Igloo because they have all these.. What's in there? Radioactive material?

Suzanne Kite:

Where is this?

Corey Stover:

Out by Edgemont. So where Hot Springs is.

Becky Red Bow:

It's like a Uranium town now. The water's bad from the Uranium.

Corey Stover:

We went there as kids and we used to go around and explore all these buildings. They had these cool governor's houses-

Becky Red Bow:

It was deserted.

Corey Stover:

It was deserted. And people did live there and it was a flourishing little town at one time, or probably more like a base type of thing.

Becky Red Bow:

I think there's like four people that live there when we were there.

Corey Stover:

And Bernie had a friend and she was a psychic healer and she did massage and stuff and different things. And she was non-native but she had... Actually I remember the first time I'd seen her and I think this was before I met her with Bernie. She went to my Mark Zimaga Sr., my hunká grandpa, who was a pipe maker. And his, his family is actually from Wanbli. And he was a fourth generation pipe maker.

Corey Stover:

And she had got a pipe made and it had an Eagle carved on the bowl. It was so, so beautiful and she used to stay up with the pipe Igloo. And there was controversy because some people felt like she shouldn't have a pipe because she's not Lakota, she's not native. But my grandpa Mark was always one that just believed that anybody should be able to pray. So that's a little backstory on that, but she lived in this duplex that she had bought and remodeled and took the other half out and made it... So I have two staircases and there was two sides. So she lived on one side and then she would rent rooms out on this side where people would stay. So Bernie stayed with me, and Tony went and stayed for the summer, and we put up a sweat lodge and Bernie had us in that sweat lodge and I took a pipe in there and blessed it. I still have it.

Suzanne Kite:

How old are you?

Corey Stover:

I am 20, 30, how old am I?

Suzanne Kite:

No. How old were you then?

Corey Stover:

Seven or something-

Suzanne Kite:

Seven!?

Corey Stover:

I was a little boy and Tony was a little boy and we're in this sweat and we're singing and we're being really Lakota. Right? Because that's how we grew up, that was life for us. So we're out there with Bernie and we're doing this and I take this pipe that Tony's dad had made into this sweat, it wasn't even finished. The bowl was all chunky and square and I put the stem in and I want it to have,... I was ready to be an Indian. I was just destined. But I go in that sweat and bless a pipe at that age. Not knowing that, by the time I was 20, I would be sun dancing because it pulled me in that direction, no matter what, because I did that.

Corey Stover:

I guess you could look at it in those terms. I was a kid. I was innocent, I didn't really know what I was doing, but if that was a significant thing-

Becky Red Bow:

You used to pretend to be a priest-

Corey Stover:

I did. I was super spiritual, like super spiritual. Out of all my cousins, I was the most spiritual one. My grandma wanted me to be a priest so bad. And so we're out there and Bernie, okay, so Bernie had this rock that your grandpa gave her. And that's the one that I had out last night at the sweat that I put on the altar. And it's perfectly round, it looks like a baseball, but smaller and smooth, round. So he gives it to Bernie and Bernie says she threw it in the trash and she did. She threw it in the trash. Well, I ended up with it.

Suzanne Kite:

Why did she throw it in the trash?

Corey Stover:

I don't know. How do you explain Bernie? Bernie is the type of person... She'd just do weird... Bernie is-

Becky Red Bow:

Whatever she feels like at that moment.

Corey Stover:

Yeah, if she's really manipulated it in a certain direction, she's real strong. She's about that and she believes that.

Suzanne Kite:

Does Bernie have a hatchet man tattoo?

Corey Stover:

Yes.

Suzanne Kite:

Why did she have a hatchet man tattoo?

Other Voice:

That's so cool.

Corey Stover:

For the perfect reason of why she would throw something in the trash. Somebody gave her a hatchet man tattoo because they told her it was really cool. So she didn't know what hatchet man was and they would tell her. And so she gets this tattoo of it on her arm. And then she tells me, "Well, it's a little heyoka." I'm like, "Well I guess." But why he has a hatchet? I don't know. Is it



going to go get that puppy like that or what? I'm pretty sure that's not how you do it. I mean, you need the hatchet to cut it up.

Suzanne Kite:

I'll never forget being at the funeral and then handing a plate to Bernie, and I never met her in my life, I don't know anybody in the whole family. And then grandma, oh, she looks very old. She's a grandma, reaches out and this huge hatchet man tattoo...

Becky Red Bow:

That's so funny

Corey Stover:

Bernie was always-

Becky Red Bow:

She's very influenced.

Corey Stover:

She is.

Becky Red Bow:

She is lonely and somebody comes around her to give her attention, whatever they're into, she's into it.

Corey Stover:

Yeah. She's all about that.

Suzanne Kite:

So she threw the rock away?

Corey Stover:

Bernie is gifted in... She's real spiritual. She's really strong in sun dance to all this stuff. But when she was little, she hit her head on a... They were playing on a merry go round and Bernie had accidentally fell off and hit her head really hard and Russ always said she was never quite the same. And then my grandparents struggled a lot with her because she had a lot of depression. I think she just dealt with a lot of things and she was one person they prayed really hard for in the ceremony because she needed so much help to find her path.

Corey Stover:

And you know, the craziest part of all of that is I always called her Bernie nuni and in Lakota, nuni is like lost. It means you're lost. And ever since I was little, I called her Bernie nuni. I don't know why. I didn't even know what that meant. It sounded cool because I called her auntie Bernie nuni. And when I got older and we were talking about that and she said, "You know, you always called me that." And she said, "and I was so lost." But she found herself later in life and she Sun danced, she did a lot of good, good things, but she's also teetered back and forth because of her journey-

Becky Red Bow:

Just over 10 years. And real into AA and real into sun dancing and all that. And then she just one day decided to drink.

Corey Stover:

She struggled with all that-

Becky Red Bow:

It doesn't help because she takes meds. So when she drinks, it really makes her off balance.

Suzanne Kite:

Where is she living?

Corey Stover:

She's in a 24-hour care facility, like a nursing home basically, in Hot Springs. It's beautiful. What she gets to look out of her window. She's got the Seven Sisters, which are seven Mount Hills. They call the Seven Sisters, which is the best place for her to be because her and Russ... Once Russ moved into the Evans, they were.

Becky Red Bow:

Feeding on each other.

Corey Stover:

Yes. And alcoholism is something we face on the rez and I don't think there's a single family around here, no matter how, whatever, that hasn't been affected by it on some level.

Becky Red Bow:

I don't think there's a single family anywhere.

Corey Stover:

Well anywhere, true. But here, it's a close-knit, small town, everybody knows everybody. And the alcoholism has affected a lot of people. And in third generation it was a lot different than it is

today. So I think a lot of that is masking some of their pain from probably experiencing racism and different stuff growing up and being poor. My grandparents weren't-

Suzanne Kite:

And everyone forgets about boarding school stuff.

Corey Stover:

And they're boarding school.

Becky Red Bow:

You don't even know about... Like last night, Tim talking about when he has in boarding school. And that was just...

Corey Stover:

It was really sad.

Suzanne Kite:

Your mom told me some stuff about it.

Corey Stover:

I mean, women too, have a really hard time. That's why the whole MMIW thing is coming to the forefront because not only were they missing and murdered and stuff, but they were also sexually targeted and abused a lot in boarding schools, and even within the families and the communities. And it was a hard cycle, it's still a hard cycle to break, but I feel like the women of this generation, the younger women are stepping up and they're not tolerating it anymore, they're saying- "enough". They don't want the younger ones to experience that.

Becky Red Bow:

That's why I think those classes, totally off subject but, those classes that Waze teaches when you have those teachers that teach you about alcoholism and drug abuse and stuff, and they have to take those classes. And it's really good, interesting to hear it from an Indian perspective from the teachers, because they can tell you what they really experienced and it's a shock sometimes, especially for men because I'm a woman and I experienced it as a woman, what we go through. But then he started telling us about what men go through when they're all sitting around drinking and partying and start having blackouts and who knows what they do after that. And he started talking about stuff like that. And I never even thought of that. I never thought about the man's side of it. How people get molested, how they get raped, how they get... you know? And then they have to live with that in shame.

Corey Stover:

And it's a cycle, it feeds the cycle and then they end up doing that. Not always. So it creates that cycle. And for natives, it's hard because we struggle with alcoholism and now the communities have changed drastically because of the meth epidemic. We went from, in the nineties, people drank to deal with... We were one of the poorest.

Becky Red Bow:

Are you okay?

Corey Stover:

See whenever-

Becky Red Bow:

He needs water.

Corey Stover:

Whenever he's like that, he'll come and lay right by my head. And he's been doing that. And I think it's arthritis, but-

Becky Red Bow:

Maybe it's too cold having the air on so cold? Maybe, because my bones hurt when it gets too cold-

Suzanne Kite:

You have a heating pad?

Corey Stover:

I think so.

Becky Red Bow:

I bet you that's what he needs.

Suzanne Kite:

That's what I need.

Becky Red Bow:

My bones hurt so bad when it gets cold in here and I started cramping up. Poor baby.

Becky Red Bow:

But there's so much stuff. You want to take some of those classes, they are really interesting.

Suzanne Kite:

At the college?

Becky Red Bow:

I enjoyed all my classes.

Corey Stover:

If you get a chance, you should take a few or all, see because the level of... It's just- they're really good. All of them, no matter if you're taking Lakota culture or anything, it's really, really good stuff.

Becky Red Bow:

Last guy to teach Lakota culture, he died this year. You know, the Lakota culture teacher. He was so good. He knew a lot of the old ceremonies. He used the book, *The Sioux* but he would smudge us when we all came into class, he'd stand at the door with his little smudge and smudge all of us. And then he would mostly just lecture.

Corey Stover:

I think I have one at my house, I'm going to go grab it. It's in the drawer.

Becky Red Bow:

Okay. And he'd give us a little assignments from the book, but most of his stories were passed down orally from his family. And so then he would lecture and he would tell us all these stories and all that. I used to just sit there and take notes. I wish I would've recorded him because Corey had him, I think last year. And he was blown away by him too. He's just an awesome teacher. And I hear he passed away. A couple of semesters ago. He passed away from the same thing that grandma died from.

Suzanne Kite:

What's that? What'd she die from?

Becky Red Bow:

She had a hernia. So they had the surgery to get the hernia out and then gram never woke up from the surgery, she passed the next morning, 7:30. Well, he got up and was released from the

hospital. Went up to the college center to put some grades in for his students, went home and died.

Suzanne Kite:

Wow.

Becky Red Bow:

So basically a result from that hernia surgery. I always wondered if he had same doctor as grandma.

Suzanne Kite:

Oh no.

Becky Red Bow:

I'll be here. I can make a good cake.

Suzanne Kite:

He's probably uncomfortable in some positions because his back...

Corey Stover:

And he doesn't go bathroom until he stops with these episodes. We've been doing this for a while, this pain thing I don't know what it is, I thought it was the kids being rough with him.

Suzanne Kite:

Let's just do two more things. So, we would finish the story about Bernie's rock. We got sidetracked with Bernie's tattoo.

Corey Stover:

Right? Yes we did. So anyway, the rock. She throws it in the trash, apparently that's what she tells me, and I don't have any recollection actually of the rock or anything. I didn't even know I had it. So this was in Igloo, I want to say... We'll say it was 94, maybe 95, even 93, anyway, early nineties. And she throws the Rock away and I live with my parents, right? I'm a kid, we ended up moving to Oregon Washington area. We had stuff in storage, whatnot. And I had this big, I think it was, it's like a piggy bank. It's like a piggy bank, but it was a crayon. And it was like real long and it had a top that came off and stuff-

Suzanne Kite:

I think I had one of those.

Corey Stover:

Yeah. And I had a big piggy bank, it was a blue one and it had the eraser, it looked cool. I thought it was awesome back then. And a little top comes off. So we move in here and we had brought a bunch of storage stuff and my mom built this house in 2000... Three? Four? Three or four anyway. And we're moved in here and I'm in my room downstairs and I'm going through all this old, old stuff right? From when I'm a kid and just nostalgia, just looking at everything like, oh my god, all this stuff. And so I'm like, oh, I wonder what's in here, right? So I open the lid and I spill it out and everything falls out and the last thing that comes rolling out is that rock. And I just look and I'm like, wow. I'm pretty sure that that is a spirit rock-

Suzanne Kite:

That's just rolled out to me.

Corey Stover:

Because it's perfectly round and I didn't know anything about it. I had no idea where the rock came from. I thought, well, I must have found it somewhere as a kid and, and put it in my thing, but I don't remember this. So I take it to sweat with Bill and he just looks at it. And he said, "Where did you get that?" And I said, "I don't know. It just came to me." And he said, "I gave that to Bernie." And so then I asked Bernie and that's when I found out Bernie threw it in the trash.

Corey Stover:

And I'm like, okay, well, I guess it was meant to come to me because Bernie didn't want it, obviously. So I took it to your grandpa. He was really happy to see it. And we talked a little bit about it and they told me to put it in a red bag. So I did, I have it in a red bag still to this day. And yeah, it was a spirit helper. And he's a Buffalo man actually. He's a Buffalo man and his name is One White Horn. And he goes by a lot of other names too. And he's helped a lot of different people, but he chose to come to me in this realm, I guess in this life.

Becky Red Bow:

He made a design?

Corey Stover:

Yeah, we're going to do so. Look at this woman did this for her doctorate degree and it tells a story right?

Suzanne Kite:

Mm-hmm (affirmative) It's the story of her Master's. So we know that our whatever, designs or stories or dreams or visions. And so she broke it down. I knew a little bit about this, but she was trying to... So people can learn it.

Becky Red Bow:

That is so cool.

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah. So looking at these and then maybe we can read them. Oh, swallow design.

Corey Stover:

Yep. That is actually.

Suzanne Kite:

That's cool.

Becky Red Bow:

That's cool.

Corey Stover:

Scottie Clifford actually sent me a picture of his because that was on his regalia. I've thought about putting it on mine too.

Becky Red Bow:

That's cool. I didn't even know.

Suzanne Kite:

We look at that and what does it say? That we can see the four directions here and there's a home in the clouds, but what are these arrows?

Corey Stover:

Well he could jump off the couch.

Suzanne Kite:

Number two, They're numbered, I guess that's colors.

Becky Red Bow:

You just don't want to be alone.

Corey Stover:

He doesn't. Whenever he's not feeling good, he doesn't even let me sleep. He comes up to me and he lays right by my head and then he'll move to the other side and he'll move a certain way and he'll yelp.



Suzanne Kite:

Right. So let's just make this design.

Corey Stover:

I wonder if... That little design in there, I don't know. I guess this one could be my interpretation of a swallow design.

Suzanne Kite:

Do you want to see the swallow design?

Corey Stover:

No, I said this one could be my interpretation.

Suzanne Kite:

True.

Corey Stover:

I never actually thought of them as symbols. So to me, it kind of... I mean, not symbols... This means a storm?

Suzanne Kite:

Isn't that...

Corey Stover:

This one's lightning. But then see if you put them...

Suzanne Kite:

It can change but that's thunder.

Becky Red Bow:

I thought this was lightning.

Suzanne Kite:

Thunder.

Corey Stover:

Thunder and that one's lightning.

Suzanne Kite:

Lightning. Last night I had a dream that I looked out the window of my home and there was the worst storm I'd ever seen my whole life, like funnel clouds and dark clouds coming to the ground and tornadoes and the worst storm ever. And then I went to tell him how bad it was outside and he was teaching a class which he doesn't teach any... and he brushed me off. He was like, "Okay, whatever." And then I went back and looked out the window and it was all fine. And I was like, "Oh no, what if I hallucinated it?" But it's a dream so that's what... Wasn't hallucinate... I am hallucinating.

Corey Stover:

In a way, yeah.

Suzanne Kite:

In a way, in a way. And then there are these people who march in my house and started taking stuff. And I was like, "What are you doing?" And then I realized that they weren't real people. They were acting funny. They were acting funny because they're dream people. They're not real people. And I was trying to diagnose what's wrong with them and eventually I was like, "Oh, I know that's wrong with you. You're all robots." And they're like, basically, "The gig is up. She knows we're robots." But looking out that window, it was like looking at hell. The storm was so bad.

Corey Stover:

So what kind of story would we want to tell? I guess I've never really used... I guess I have used them to tell a story, but I just didn't realize that's what I was doing.

Becky Red Bow:

That's what they used to always do.

Corey Stover:

What is this one? We're all over moccasin designs.

Becky Red Bow:

I should look at my designs that I made and see what they meant, because I just do whatever.

Suzanne Kite:

Because you can reinterpret them.

Becky Red Bow:

Yeah because I just... Whenever I did Barney's pipe bag, he asked... I went up there early for Sun Dance and he asked if I could fix his pipe bag, put some bead work on it. So then I went and I just prayed about it that night. And then this design came to my mind. So I just put it on his pipe bag and I never did interpret it or anything. I just did what they told me to do.

Corey Stover:

There's even a design for tripe. It was cool.

Becky Red Bow:

What?

Corey Stover:

Tripe.

Becky Red Bow:

This reminds me of Chippewa.

Suzanne Kite:

We could just do a real simple running from Wounded Knee and then we can work on it more because these are... The shapes are kind of funny sizes too.

Corey Stover:

Yeah.

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah. And the real ones that they can be elongated and everything.

Corey Stover:

What would we depict as... Maybe we would do it like...

Suzanne Kite:

Because there were hills, and there's hiding, and there's gunfire.

Corey Stover:

So would that be... No, that's too big for... Let's do it like this. Yeah, I was telling him about you and the... Did you get good footage from the storm?

Suzanne Kite:

Oh, we didn't look yet.

Corey Stover:

That's going to be exciting.

Suzanne Kite:

I started to look but I didn't finish looking.

Corey Stover:

I was telling Becky, I was like, "They were out there flying that drone," and I'm like, "It's going to storm!" And then she's like, "I didn't think it was going to storm like that." It started pouring down. I'm like, "You better bring it back. You might not have a drone." And then we all had to sacrifice a finger...

Becky Red Bow:

What?

Corey Stover:

To catch it.

Becky Red Bow:

Sacrifice a finger?

Corey Stover:

Because the propellers spin.

Becky Red Bow:

You had to catch it or does it just land? You can't land it?

Corey Stover:

I wish this one was a little bit bigger. I wish it was the same size as that one. I guess it is. It's just the little square makes it look smaller.

Becky Red Bow:

Grandma always had rocks. She always had tons of rocks. I even have a picture of her when she was out rock hunting, when she was young.

Suzanne Kite:

Oh really?

Becky Red Bow:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). She's sitting on this hill and she has flowers in her hand. She said they were rock hunting.

Corey Stover:

She came from a very spiritual family. They didn't speak English. They were traditional Lakota. And then she learned English when she went to school and her life changed when she moved with...

Becky Red Bow:

The boarding school.

Corey Stover:

The boarding school.

Becky Red Bow:

When they took her, when they made her go.

Corey Stover:

Yeah. And then she got adopted by her mom's cousin and her husband. And that sort of changed her... But she never really forgot that connection. She always had it.

Becky Red Bow:

She did. She told me a lot of stories. She wrote down in journals. She wrote a lot of her memories down and then she would tell me and I would write some of it while she was telling me. I would take notes. So then for one of my classes for colonization... What was it called? Something about colonization. Anyways, it was one of my classes. I had to do a final. And so I did an interview with her. And then plus, besides interviewing her, I did her journals. I wrote a story about her life. How she went from being, living traditionally, taking sweats when she was a little girl. She said her grandmas used to put her in the sweat lodge and when she got too hot, they would just lift up the flap and roll her out. That's what they used to do to her because she was so small. She was just a little girl.

Becky Red Bow:

So she remembers that because I asked her one time if she ever took a sweat because I started going to sweats and ceremony when I was 10 years old. So I asked her, I said, "Grandma, did you ever take a sweat?" I never even thought of asking her because she was Catholic. And she said, "Yeah." She said, "My grandpa had a sweat lodge and down below..." They had a one room log home, log house and down, there was a little dip. They had a sweat lodge down there. She

said people used to come him to get doctored. And when bad storms were coming, he would go out and he would split the clouds and make the storms go away because Grandma Iron Road was scared of storms. So he would always ask if he would open the seal.

Becky Red Bow:

And we tried to draw it. From her description, we tried to draw. My boyfriend was a real good artist so he drew her grandpa sitting up on that hill and he drew the log cabin down below. And he drew the sweat lodge in the background and the river where they used to walk every day to go get water. And here when we got there, we went out to see the graves and she showed me where the log house was. We had it completely backwards.

Becky Red Bow:

And then I said, "You should redraw that for her because now you know where..." Because he and I took her out to just see the graves and stuff and then she showed us where the house was and all that. And I said, "Now that you know where that hill is," I said, "you should..." But I want to take my metal detector out there and I want to see if Grandpa Black Thunder? left anything on that hill.

Corey Stover:

That's near the graves that we went and found in Rosebud. They're up on this hill.

Becky Red Bow:

Two Kettle Cemetery.

Corey Stover:

Two Kettle Cemetery and see, that's why I think that Grandma Iron Road was actually Two Kettle because the Two Kettle Band was who was traveling with Big Foot and they ended up...

Becky Red Bow:

So they named that Two Kettle and almost everybody out there was related that's buried out there. Everybody else is buried in town. Everybody else that was related to Grandma is buried at Two Kettle Cemetery.

Corey Stover:

Her mom and her dad.

Becky Red Bow:

Because there wasn't very many Indians, just their relatives. The house that was down the road that still stands was some white people. And they used to always have grandma come over and help butcher and stuff, whenever they would butcher a cow because she was good with cutting meat and stuff. So they would go over and then they would give them some meat to take home.

Becky Red Bow:

So I don't know who got that land or... Nobody's on it. The house is gone. There's not a thing there. But Russ found a saw, an old time saw, just the blade of it when he went out there. So I wanted to take my metal detector and see if I can find anything because they had a wagon and a horse named *gnugnúska*, Grasshopper. Her horse was named Grasshopper, that would take them to town. They would hook them up to the wagon and then go into town. It's like six miles to town.

Becky Red Bow:

And she remembered... She would tell me stories about when she... her first pair of shoes because she just grew up wearing moccasins. Moccasins and long braids and dresses. She never wore shoes. They never even saw shoes. Her grandmas both made her moccasins. So whenever she got her first pair of shoes, she was so excited to wear them. She walked with her aunt into town or somewhere. She got blisters on her feet.

Suzanne Kite:

From the new shoes?

Becky Red Bow:

From the new shoes. And just that she always remembers that.

Becky Red Bow:

Poor thing, she just...It's just hard to believe that she went... I think she was six, six or seven, when they put her in boarding school and her cousins were all older. They were maybe five years older, four years older, about four years older.

Becky Red Bow:

So when they would try to run away from school, they would always tell her to hide in the bathroom outside, the outhouse, and then they would whistle and she could come running. The nuns would always catch her. And she said they would just think that she was going bathroom and so they would just make her hurry up and go inside the school. She said it was like being in a prison. All the windows were locked. All the doors were locked and all the... Everything was painted the same color. And they all wore the same clothes. All the girls, they cut all their hair and put them all in the same exact clothes, black underwear, black socks. It was weird, stuff like that. Black leather shoes.

Becky Red Bow:

And she'd tell me about it, and it was sad. I said, "What was it like? Were they mean to you?" And she was so small that she was only there from seven to nine because when she was nine

years old, her mom died. That's when she was adopted at. Because everybody died in the... All her mom, her sisters, her mom's sisters. They all died from TB. Yeah, they all died from TB at home. And so she said, when she got sick, she was nine years old and they came and got her at school and took her home because her mom was sick and dying. So she got to talk to her. She said she was laying on the bed and she said... She had her come over and she told her that she'd give her all her furniture that was in her house, in town, because she didn't live out there. She lived in town with her new husband.

Becky Red Bow:

But she said she went to give all her furniture to Grandma. And Grandma said they didn't give her nothing. They just shipped... They gave her away because she wrote a letter saying to her cousin, "Can you come get her? Because I'm dying. My sister's dying. And Grandma Iron Road is probably going to die too."

Suzanne Kite:

And then her cousin was... Who was her cousin?

Becky Red Bow:

What was her cousin's name?

Corey Stover:

Ollie.

Becky Red Bow:

Ollie. Ollie Bram? And she was married to Pete Cummings. And so then, that's how Gram got the name Cummings because they adopted her because it was Hungry. It was Evelyn Hungry. When they adopted her, they changed it to Cummings. So they came and got her and she said she was out digging timsulas with her grandma. And this car came up, pulled up, and this woman came and took her. Brought her all the way to Pine Ridge from Rosebud or White River? Is that what it was called?

Corey Stover:

Yep.

Becky Red Bow:

So she said that her first night at Ollie's, she was crying, doing dishes. Tears were pouring into her dishwater because she was crying because she missed her grandma. And then it was the first time she ever ate coleslaw in her life. And here she was so upset from being lonesome and missing her grandma so she went into the bathroom and got sick. Threw up the coleslaw.

Suzanne Kite:



What year would this have been?

Becky Red Bow:

She was nine years old. She was born in...

Corey Stover:

'23.

Becky Red Bow:

'23, so how old would that be?

Suzanne Kite:

That would have been 1932.

Becky Red Bow:

'32, 1932. But she had stories about her mom. She said, "Remember those blue bell flowers, blue bells?" She said she remembers walking down the road with her mom and her cousins and they were picking blue bells from the side of the road and popping them. Stuff like that she remembered. She would - Any kind of memory that she had from that time. Can you imagine trying to remember something when you were nine or four or five?

Becky Red Bow:

One of her funny stories was, they had to watch the river to get water. And she was little. She had to have been four, maybe three. And her and her grandma, Julia?

Corey Stover:

Yep, Eagle Feather.

Becky Red Bow:

Her grandma, Julia. She had two grandmas that lived there, Grandma Iron Road and Grandma Julia. When they were gone, she would go with- She was just always with Julia and she always treated her so good. She said she was the sweetest old grandma and that they would go down to the river and they would... She was so small, she would carry the little bucket and grandma carry the big bucket and then they would get water. And then on the way coming back, she would be tired and her legs would hurt. She said, "My legs would hurt," because of course it's going uphill. And she was like, "My legs would hurt and I would sit down and cry. Grandma would have to put her bucket down and sit and wait for me. I tried to carry both buckets and so that she wouldn't have to carry one."

Becky Red Bow:

But she had memories like that and she said one time they were going on their way down so she was kind of not paying attention. She was in a hurry following her grandma. She said she was playing pretend car. She was playing pretend horse or whatever. She said she was pretending she was driving something and she ran right into her grandma in the back side. And she said her grandma was so mad. She said, "I thought it was funny, but my grandma didn't think it was very funny." Stuff like that that she remembered as being a little girl.

Becky Red Bow:

She said they never hit her. They never scolded her. She said one time her grandma kind of swatted her because she was playing around the... What are those called? Remember? Cellar. She was playing on the cellar. Her grandma told her don't play on the cellar because snakes go around there. So stay away from the cellar. And she was playing on it. So she said, "That's the only time I ever got in trouble."

Suzanne Kite:

I can't believe she can remember all that.

Becky Red Bow:

She said they were so loving.

Corey Stover:

She was a very keen... Grandma was a very keen woman even in her old age.

Becky Red Bow:

And she never gave herself credit for it.

Corey Stover:

Most humble.

Becky Red Bow:

She always said she was not as smart as everybody else and man, she had the prettiest handwriting.

Corey Stover:

She did.

Becky Red Bow:

She was really a smart person and she had a lot of things.

Corey Stover:

She did. She had a lot of things.

Becky Red Bow:

She didn't believe in abuse or any of that stuff because she... I was raised by her. And I think I remember getting, with her hands, spanked on my butt once. And she didn't believe in hitting or screaming or hollering at kids. She was very... She just didn't believe in it.

Corey Stover:

Definitely unique.

Becky Red Bow:

Yeah. She was different. She was real. She had some good stories. She had a memory of the wind whistling. She said one time she woke up from a nap and nobody was there but her and her grandma. Not Grandma Iron Road, the other one. And she said she was crying because everybody was gone. And she said her grandma picked her up and was carrying her, carrying her and they walked around the house and when they went around this one side of the house, the wind was blowing in the window and whistling. And she said, every time she hears that sound, she remembers that. She remembers grandma carrying her, comforting her. And she said, "I think I cried until I fell back to sleep." She said, "When I woke up, they were all home." She was just a sweet little girl. She said, "I think I was a crybaby, when she told me that story." I'm like, "Gram, you were just lonesome." "I think I was a crybaby," she said.

Becky Red Bow:

Then her Grandpa, Black Thunder, he would sit up on that hill every night. When it was time to eat, they would send her up to get him. And she said he would never come down until she got to the top.

Suzanne Kite:

Make her climb.

Becky Red Bow:

He would sit on that hill and he would watch her come. He could see her all the way. And she said, "No matter what I would say, wave at him to come," and she said, "he'd just sit there," because he was up there praying. He went up there and prayed a lot. And so she said, "It never failed. I had to walk all the way to the top to get him."

Corey Stover:

He's the one in the headdress in the picture.

Becky Red Bow:

Yeah.

Corey Stover:

Black Thunder. And he was a medicine person, a healer. And he ran from Wounded Knee too, right?

Becky Red Bow:

Huh?

Corey Stover:

Did he run from Wounded Knee too? I can't remember.

Becky Red Bow:

Yeah.

Corey Stover:

He did?

Becky Red Bow:

He did.

Corey Stover:

I don't think they ran together...

Becky Red Bow:

No.

Corey Stover:

Because they fled. These represent the railroad track. This is the camp, Two Kettle camp, and then this is them traveling through the storm. And then this is the camp at Wounded Knee, and this is the gunfire, and this is them running, and these are the railroad tracks. Is that what you want?

Suzanne Kite:

It's beautiful.

Corey Stover:

Is that good?

Speaker 1:

That was great.

Corey Stover:

Because the way they do the winter camps, they sort of kind of go around like this, but I'm going like this and come back this way. Railroad tracks. Yeah, so sometimes I have to remind myself that my mother was raised by a woman who was... Not only in boarding school, but also didn't speak English. My parents, my mom, they were all real mixed blood and stuff, but we come from really true Lakota people that lived at a time that was really hard for the people and what they experienced through colonization. And they were getting their culture stripped away from them at that time. And my grandma endured that without ever, ever having anything bad or negative to say.

Becky Red Bow:

Because she was Catholic. They raised her Catholic and she would try not to say anything bad, but I would keep asking her, every year I would ask her again. And then that's because she always said, "No, they were never mean to me." And then a few years later, she'll say, "Oh, they would hit some of the kids on their hands with the ruler." And then she'll say, "Or they would hit them with a big ruler on their back." Then she would say... These were years apart because first, nothing. She wouldn't talk about it. She said there was nothing. They weren't mean to her, but she was littler than all of them.

Becky Red Bow:

So she said, "My knees would hurt from kneeling in the corner. They would make me kneel in the corner." When they would catch her outside in the outhouse, they would make her go in... Or if they caught her talking Lakota to her relatives, make her kneel in the corner because she was so small. So she said, "My knees would hurt." Then she would remember seeing other people get hit with the ruler, a big ruler and a small ruler. And then she said they never gave them anything to clean their slates when they would write on their slates. They would have to use their spit to wipe the chalk off of the slate.

Corey Stover:

If you could only... I mean, I'm pretty sure you could only imagine with everything that's coming out now and I'm sure my grandma experienced some of that.

Becky Red Bow:

Then the stories she had about Red Cloud were mostly about sneaking into the... They have these tunnels underneath where they had the bakery and they would sneak down and steal rolls, just to have extra food. They would have to do stuff like that and that was the one thing she told me about Red Cloud. She never said much about that. So then when I told her I always think, "I wonder where the tunnels are." I always think, try to look at it and see, where could it have been... Where's the tunnels? There's tunnels under here somewhere.

Suzanne Kite:

That's weird. Scary.

Becky Red Bow:

I know, right, and why? And she just said one of the kids knew how to get down there so they would sneak down there and steal, because there was a bakery down there where they did all the cooking. I don't know if it's the whole kitchen or just the bakery part, I don't know, but she said they would go down there and steal rolls.

Suzanne Kite:

Did she ever tell you that?

Becky Red Bow:

It's so weird. I've always thought about it. There was something else they took too. I don't know if it was the applesauce or apples. It's weird.

Corey Stover:

I think it might have been apples.

Becky Red Bow:

Huh?

Corey Stover:

I think it might have been apples. I remember her talking about that because...

Becky Red Bow:

Fresh buns. She said they were always hot, warm. Might've been apple butter. She used to always eat apple butter.

Suzanne Kite:

What are you doing, Corey?

Corey Stover:

Well, I'm trying to go now from them discovering her on the railroad tracks. So there's the three people and the three... He had two women with him and there was a man.

Becky Red Bow:

And Ruby our cousin, she's the one that told me that they started calling her Iron Road because she walked on that railroad to get back to White River. So whoever picked them up in that wagon...

Corey Stover:

But I wonder why she would be getting back to White River. I wonder if they were from Rosebud then.

Becky Red Bow:

Hmm?

Corey Stover:

I wonder why she was getting back. I wonder why they were going that way.

Becky Red Bow:

They were getting back because whenever they ran from the gunfire and that guy and those three women, those two women hid her, they found this wagon on the third day. They found this wagon that was headed that way. And what I think it must've been headed close to the railroad somehow. Then she walked on the railroad to get back to White River. Maybe they were going to Nebraska. I don't know how far. Because I didn't know that. I thought that the wagon took them all the way to Rosebud. But when I talked to Ruby, she said how she got the name Iron Road was because she walked on the railroad.

Corey Stover:

Because there are other people who claim to be descendant of Iron Road like Joyce Tollman. I don't know. The way people were connected, it's really hard to...

Suzanne Kite:

So this is a storm?

Corey Stover:

Yeah. The storm and the blizzard that they went through.

Suzanne Kite:

Oh, the blizzard.

Corey Stover:

So they're traveling from the camp, Big Foot's camp, traveling from the north, going through a blizzard and they set up camp at Wounded Knee and then the gunfire and so they're fleeing and here's the railroad tracks and here's the man and the two women that discovered Iron Road. And then this is them taking her back to, I guess, wherever ... to Rosebud.

Becky Red Bow:

Then the first census that I've found on her was after Wounded Knee, and her name was Elizabeth Iron Road. And she was living in the home with her grandma and grandpa.

Corey Stover:

Grandma. Yep. It says residing in the home of Elizabeth Iron Road. And it has Evelyn Hungry.

Becky Red Bow:

Hmm?

Corey Stover:

Evelyn Hungry. Living in the home of Elizabeth Iron Road.

Becky Red Bow:

No, no. Grandma Iron Road was residing in the home with Button.

Corey Stover:

Button.

Becky Red Bow:

And Owns Big Knife.

Corey Stover:

Owns Big Knife, yeah.

Becky Red Bow:

Owns Big Knife. And that was her grandma or grandpa. So that was her parents, one of her parents, either her mom or her dad. That was their parents. Next to them, in the teepee next to them are the ... However it was set up, was William Black Thunder and his wife and his two kids. So he was actually Grandma Iron Road's uncle, because he was the son of Button and Owns Big Knife. See, those were her grandparents. So her mom and dad both died at Wounded Knee.

Corey Stover:

I wonder if we could get that lineage.

Becky Red Bow:

And one of them, we don't know which one, her mom or her dad is William's ...

Corey Stover:



Brother.

Becky Red Bow:

Brother or sister.

Corey Stover:

Well, and then I guess to keep in mind, I think we overlook this easily whenever we're doing genealogy and we think it should be so this way. Women were free to choose a husband. So if they wanted to leave that husband, they could leave them at any time. It was never frowned upon. She could go. We were a society where the women were more important because they provided life.

Corey Stover:

So if a woman wanted to leave a band, if it wasn't a good situation or whatever, she was able to do that. And then a lot of times I think they would trade ... When they would have these big gatherings, powwows for example. They weren't really powwows back then, but they would have gatherings. So that would be a time of courtship for them because they could marry someone from a different band. So Iron Road, for example, could have been part Rosebud, but part Two Kettle band. We don't know any of that.

Becky Red Bow:

Well, because Button and ... I have their census in your trunk. Button and Owns Big Knife. We don't even know who Button is or where he's from. I have no idea. It could be any other tribe.

Corey Stover:

Yeah. It could, because Ben Hungry was supposedly four fourths Cherokee, it said on the census. There are Cherokees in Rosebud, like Paula's mom for example, was Cherokee. So we have to keep in mind too, that a lot of tribes were sort of... it was like an ebb and flow of different tribes coming in and out.

Becky Red Bow:

So this is the end?

Corey Stover:

Yeah, I think so, because I don't know what else.

Becky Red Bow:

Is there any census before Wounded Knee?

Corey Stover:

I don't think so.

Becky Red Bow:

There's not? I don't know. We're going to have to go to Rosebud and try to find out who her mom and dad were. But grandma Julia, that's the other grandma. Her name was Eagle Feather, Julia Eagle Feather. She was Ben Hungry's mom. So she was married to Hungry Wolf. And they had Ben Hungry. And their real last name is Hungrywolf.

Suzanne Kite:

Wait, so who's Ben Hungry's father?

Corey Stover:

So see, my mom is the one who thinks she found Ben Hungry as four fourths Cherokee on a census.

Suzanne Kite:

No, on the Dawes Roll.

Becky Red Bow:

Yeah. Yeah. It's on there. I've seen it.

Suzanne Kite:

There's so many Cherokee Hungrys.

Corey Stover:

But do you think that's the same one?

Becky Red Bow:

I don't know. It might be.

Corey Stover:

If it's on the Dawes ...

Suzanne Kite:

Then it is, and then we can all enrol Cherokee and make a lot of money.

Becky Red Bow:

Yeah, we could. We could. We could prove it.

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah. We can all register Cherokee. So wait, what's the end?

Corey Stover:

That's them taking her back to Rosebud, and then those are the feathers to the three people for saving her. Well, we don't have a design for a wagon.

Becky Red Bow:

For what?

Corey Stover:

A wagon.

Becky Red Bow:

Oh yeah. They were in a wagon and they were on the railroad walking.

Suzanne Kite:

That's okay. This is great.

Corey Stover:

Yeah, this is awesome.

Suzanne Kite:

Excellent.

Becky Red Bow:

So she said her dad told them to run when the shooting started. Her dad told her and her mom to run. And so they started running. Her dad was shot and killed. Then her mom was running next to her and her mom was shot. She kept running. She wouldn't stop running. She just kept running and running and running. Pretty soon there was this Indian guy running next to her. He was trying to get her to stop and she wouldn't stop. So he started talking Lakota to her and he said, "You can stop now." He said, "I'm with two women and we're hiding." He said, "You'll be safe. Come with me."

Becky Red Bow:

So she stopped running because he was speaking in Lakota. So she stopped and she went with them and he said it was like a bank in that little crick. Was like a bank that they hollowed out and they were hiding inside of it.

Suzanne Kite:

How old was she?

Corey Stover:

14?

Becky Red Bow:

12 or 13. We got to look up the year. But she said every day he would go out and bring back something for them to eat. She said on the third day he said, "Come out." He was all excited when he got there, he was like, "Come on. There's this wagon going back towards Rosebud. We're going to hitch a ride on this wagon. They're going to take us." So they got on that wagon and it took them however far. Then I guess she walked the rest of the way on the railroad.

Suzanne Kite:

Then who met her when she got to Rosebud?

Becky Red Bow:

Hmm?

Suzanne Kite:

Who met her when she got to Rosebud?

Becky Red Bow:

That's all she said, that's all Grandma knew. That's all the whole story that she told. Grandma told this to Betty. This was Russ's ... how do you say that, wife?

Corey Stover:

Wife, yeah.

Becky Red Bow:

Common law wife. Betty always goes up and helps when they have the Wounded Knee ride through here. She always goes up and she helps them cook. One morning, they lived in a trailer behind grandma and grandpa, they were having the ride. And so she came over and she asked grandma to watch the kids. She said, "Sure, I can watch ... Where are you going?"

Becky Red Bow:

She goes, "Well, I'm going up to help cook for the riders." She said, "What riders?"

Becky Red Bow:

And she said, "The Wounded Knee riders are coming through and they're going to stop here and we're going to feed them." She said Grandma started crying. She got all choked up and her voice changed and she had watery eyes. And she said, "Evelyn, are you okay? What's wrong?" Because that's her mother-in-law sort of. She told her that whole story. She never told me that story. All she told me was that her grandma Iron Road ran. That's all she told me. That's all she ever told me. And she hid, she ran and she hid. That was it. But she told Betty the whole story about her dad dying, and then her mom dying, and she just kept running till that Indian guy stopped her and hid her. They hid her. He was with two other women.

Becky Red Bow:

I always wonder who they were. That's why I went up to talk to her relatives that came the other day. I went up to talk to them to see if they had any stories, oral stories like that. Because I had Betty write that on my computer when she told me. She came over one day, I was over at the cabin staying there. It was after Grandma died. She said, "What are you doing?" I said, "I'm writing stories that Gram told me on my computer. I put everything that I can remember her telling me, put it on the computer. I'm writing a book to give to the family, just for us." So I have all these stories of her.

Suzanne Kite:

Do you back up your files?

Becky Red Bow:

On that computer? It's pretty old.

Suzanne Kite:

Oh no.

Becky Red Bow:

I got to get it off. I got to get it off.

Suzanne Kite:

I'm going to send you two hard drives and then we got to back these up. Because what if it dies?

Becky Red Bow:

It's so old. It's so old. It's crazy. Anyways, now I have two.

Suzanne Kite:

That is scary.

Becky Red Bow:

Yeah, it's scary, because somebody gave me a computer, a newer one. But Ali looks at them. He goes, "Mom, I can't even believe those are working." Because I have my old one that I started writing Grandma's stories in. Then I have the newer one that I read her stories on. And then now I have this that I'm putting stuff on.

Suzanne Kite:

At least print them all out.

Becky Red Bow:

I've got to get it all off. I do. I got to get it all off.

Suzanne Kite:

At least print it all out.

Becky Red Bow:

So everywhere I go, everywhere I move, everywhere I hitchhike, no, I take my computers with me. I want to get them off before something happens to them.

Suzanne Kite:

Something will happen.

Becky Red Bow:

It will. It's so scary.

Corey Stover:

Next time you come, maybe we could get Beck and me and my grandma together, because my grandma knows a lot.

Becky Red Bow:

Yeah, she has a lot of stories.

Corey Stover:

And she's a white lady, but ...

Becky Red Bow:

She has lots of stories.

Corey Stover:

I'm going to tell you what, she knows a lot of stuff.

Becky Red Bow:

She does, and she has a good memory.

Corey Stover:

She has a good memory.

Becky Red Bow:

She remembers everything that happened.

Corey Stover:

She married an Indian and she just always lived on the rails.

Becky Red Bow:

Yeah, we should do that. Go out there and see her. I'll show you this picture.

Corey Stover:

She has so much knowledge.

Becky Red Bow:

I Googled Grandma Iron Road. I just put Mrs. Iron Road because I would find stories from roles about her. And they always wrote Mrs. Iron Road.

Suzanne Kite:

She looks like your mom.

Becky Red Bow:

She looks like Donna and my mom. Look at that.

Suzanne Kite:

She looks like Kat too.

Becky Red Bow:

So it says it's in Mandan, North Dakota. But look at the photographer wrote Sioux.

Suzanne Kite:

That really looks like-

Becky Red Bow:

So I looked him up and he would sit by the railroads. And when the Indians would come to the tracks, he would pay them a nickel to take their picture.

Corey Stover:

That's amazing.

Becky Red Bow:

Isn't that crazy?

Corey Stover:

That is incredible, yeah.

Becky Red Bow:

They got a nickel for their picture.

Corey Stover:

I think it's so sad that we never got to pass on the clothing and stuff.

Becky Red Bow:

You have that other picture, right?

Suzanne Kite:

Well, we could recreate the stuff.

Becky Red Bow:

And then this one is ... Who's this one? Oh, this is Button. This is the only Button. When I look up Button, that's who Button is. So I don't know if that's our relative or not, but our grandpa, his great, great, great grandpa-

Suzanne Kite:

That's a great hat.

Becky Red Bow:

... is named Button.

Suzanne Kite:



I want that hat.

Becky Red Bow:

And I found another picture of him. If you Google him, there's another picture of him. This is a whole beaded outfit. pants and that vest. And he's standing there, it's a full picture of him.

Suzanne Kite:

That's a great hat.

Becky Red Bow:

So I don't know who he is or if he's our grandpa, but he's the only Button I've found. Isn't that cool?

Corey Stover:

That is cool.

Becky Red Bow:

He could be Grandma Iron Road's great-grandpa.

Suzanne Kite:

Can I see the picture of Evelyn's grandpa?

Becky Red Bow:

Which one? Oh, Black Thunder?

Suzanne Kite:

Black Thunder.

Becky Red Bow:

Yeah, I got it right there.

Suzanne Kite:

Oh wow. I've never seen this photo.

Becky Red Bow:

That's him. Oh, I have a good one of him. Is it on my Facebook? Remember that one I printed of him? I said, "Is this our Grandpa?" And I sent it to you. You're going to have to look at it. I'm going to ask you to compare. This is a picture of him that somebody put in the book. Right here.

These two people wrote a book. They went into the store, the general store. And they asked who that Indian guy was outside, standing outside. They said he had a day old stale bread. He was holding bread. So they went in and asked who he was. They said, "Oh, that's Chief Black Thunder." Old man William Black Thunder, Chief Black Thunder. That's what they told them. So they asked to take a picture of him. But see how his crease of his mouth and his lips? It's the same. Oh damn, that won't get bigger. It's the same as that crease. See?

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah. I believe it.

Becky Red Bow:

And those lips.

Corey Stover:

Then if you look in the one that I shared that you shared of him and-

Becky Red Bow:

Yeah, Grandma?

Corey Stover:

... Iron Road and Grandma Nelly and Martha Bordeaux in the front.

Becky Red Bow:

And see, this was from the Wild Bill show when he was in that show. And that's probably why he's smiling, because Grandma said she'd never seen him smile.

Suzanne Kite:

Just for the show.

Becky Red Bow:

So she was like, "I don't know if that's him. I don't remember him smiling like that," she said to me whenever I showed her. But it's him. And then you Google it. That's who comes up. William Black Thunder. Isn't that crazy?

Corey Stover:

It's sad that we never got to-

Becky Red Bow:

And then I got to show you these pictures right here.

Corey Stover:

... pass that regalia down.

Becky Red Bow:

The what?

Corey Stover:

The regalia and stuff.

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah. It's probably in some German museum.

Corey Stover:

I know. It just kills me. I'm like, "Ah."

Suzanne Kite:

One day we'll find it and then I'll stab the Germans, take it back.

Corey Stover:

I like that stuff so much.

Suzanne Kite:

Guilt a curator. My life calling.

Corey Stover:

Should not put those on there.

Becky Red Bow:

This picture, look at this. I need your guys' opinion because nobody believes me. But I just have this sense. I'm drawn to this picture. This woman I think is my grandma, Julia Garrier. This one I think is my grandma Jenny Robinson.

Suzanne Kite:

Look at that cradle board. It's insane.

Becky Red Bow:

I know. And see, this is Peyote. This is Peyote.

Suzanne Kite:

Oh my God.

Becky Red Bow:

Those are Peyote buttons.

Suzanne Kite:

Oh my God. That's crazy looking.

Becky Red Bow:

But look at this.

Suzanne Kite:

That baby is surrounded by psychedelics.

Becky Red Bow:

This is a Two Spirit.

Suzanne Kite:

Oh my God. This is a great photo.

Corey Stover:

That was me in another life.

Becky Red Bow:

That's Corey right there. But it looks like these two are related. They really look alike. And these two are related. And I say this could be Walter Garrier, or either his father.

Corey Stover:

That's amazing.

Becky Red Bow:

The one that left us in the ... Okay, because Julia Guerrier is our grandma. If you Google her, I'll show you what comes up. This comes up.

Suzanne Kite:

Oh, that's her.

Becky Red Bow:

If you Google Julia Gary instead of Guerrier.

Suzanne Kite:

Oh, spelled wrong.

Becky Red Bow:

This comes up. In one of the census things that I found of Walter Guerrier, who's our relative. Walter Guerrier, it says another spelling for his name is Gary. Isn't that crazy?

Corey Stover:

Remember that one of her and then that one of Eli when she's old? Do you have that one?

Becky Red Bow:

I don't know if I have that one.

Corey Stover:

Remember it was in that photo album.

Becky Red Bow:

Okay. There she is. This is her when she married our grandpa. See those eyes? See those eyes how they look? Those eyes are something. And her mouth. Now look.

Suzanne Kite:

All right. Go forward again.

Becky Red Bow:

You think it's her?

Suzanne Kite:

Go forward again.

Corey Stover:

Because they say she was Arapaho. That's what I just heard.

Becky Red Bow:

But you know what the thing says on this?

Corey Stover:

If it says Shoshone, then-

Becky Red Bow:

It says Shoshone.

Corey Stover:

... Shoshone Arapaho.

Becky Red Bow:

It says Shoshone women when you Google that picture. And they don't know who any of them are. Or the only one they know is this one. They don't know who the rest of them are. Her. She has a name, because I have a picture of her and the baby, just those two. It has her name. It says squaw, some kind of squaw. It says her name. And it says papoose.

Suzanne Kite:

Stupid. Can't even read their names, the idiots.

Becky Red Bow:

This is the one right here that I think is our other grandma, because ...

Suzanne Kite:

It does look like a young version of the other woman.

Becky Red Bow:

This one right here. Yeah, it does.

Suzanne Kite:

It really does.

Becky Red Bow:

This one looks like Jenny Robinson, because here is Jenny Robinson as an old woman. This is crazy. There she is.

Corey Stover:

No, that's my grandma.

Becky Red Bow:

Right here. That's her, isn't it?

Suzanne Kite:

I see it. Yeah.

Becky Red Bow:

It's her. That round face, those eyebrows, that nose, that mouth, her eyes. And then watch. So they got married. Wait, no which one Got married? George.

Corey Stover:

George.

Becky Red Bow:

Yeah. They got married on E.W. Wickham's ranch outside of Cheyenne. If you Google him, he has a long story. He was married to an Oglala woman who was a relative of Red Cloud. And all of her relatives would come and then he would marry them off to these whites ...

Suzanne Kite:

So they could have land.

Becky Red Bow:

Yep. To get land.

Suzanne Kite:

Asshole.

Becky Red Bow:

For reals. And they were married on that ranch. So I think ... okay, if you look at this picture, this is really sad. This part really blew my mind. I think they stole them. It's not this picture. It's a different one. Look at her. It's like she has ... like she was bound. They had ... to keep them tied up.

Suzanne Kite:

I don't see it.

Becky Red Bow:

You don't see it right here?

Suzanne Kite:

That looks like a bracelet.

Becky Red Bow:

Where is that other one? There's a picture. Now I think it might be this one alone.

Corey Stover:

But those two look related.

Becky Red Bow:

Yeah. That's what I said these two. But remember there was whole bunch of Robinson girls?  
And the Robinson girls are ...

Suzanne Kite:

So give me the names again?

Becky Red Bow:

This one I think is Jenny Robinson.

Suzanne Kite:

Jenny Robinson. Sister Robinson.

Becky Red Bow:

I don't know who this is, but that's a relative. Yeah. That's relative of hers. And then this is Julia Guerrier. And then this one has a name if you find her on-

Suzanne Kite:

And you think they're Shoshone or Arapaho?

Becky Red Bow:

The caption of this on Google, it says Shoshone women.

Suzanne Kite:

Shoshone women. Okay.

Becky Red Bow:

That's what it says. Then this one, it says Shoshone woman, Julia Guerrier, an elk tooth dress.

Suzanne Kite:



So we think that's Grandma Julia.

Becky Red Bow:

Yeah. I think it is. It looks like her in the future. Look. That's her. It's definitely her.

Suzanne Kite:

Crazy. You guys have the good stories.

Corey Stover:

Well, what I know about Julia Guerrier, and I just found out, is that they say she wasn't Lakota. She was Arapaho.

Becky Red Bow:

Which is Shoshone, right?

Corey Stover:

Well Shoshone and Arapaho are right next to each other. And Arapahos do Peyote. That's part of their ...

Becky Red Bow:

Yeah. And see that Peyote cradle board? Isn't that something?

Suzanne Kite:

Really into the Peyote.

Corey Stover:

Shoshones did Peyote too, but I think about Arapahos do it more. Arapahos are real dark.

Becky Red Bow:

There's Susie shot in the eye.

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah. She's not doing it right.

Becky Red Bow:

You have that picture, right?

Suzanne Kite:

That's my phone background.

Becky Red Bow:

Is it?

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah. See?

Becky Red Bow:

Oh, look at this one.

Suzanne Kite:

That's a great photo too.

Corey Stover:

Rick was just telling a story about that.

Becky Red Bow:

Yeah, he posted it on Facebook.

Corey Stover:

She was a badass.

Suzanne Kite:

I know. Sharp shooter.

Corey Stover:

She's killed and scalped a soldier.

Becky Red Bow:

It's on Facebook. He's he has this picture on there. And then he has a story telling about her.

Corey Stover:

That's why Sitting Bull put his war bonnet on her for that picture. But she caught a horse and ran into where the gunfire was. Then she seen soldiers running up the hill. Then she ended up fighting the soldier and she stabbed him. Then she was going in. She seen another soldier, so she stabbed and killed him and scalped him because someone killed her cousin. That was her revenge. That was her honor for her cousin. So she killed and scalped, I mean, a woman. And

women didn't normally do that, just in general. That was a specific time. So that's why they put a bonnet on her. In our tribe, women don't really wear bonnets a whole lot unless you're dignified, I guess more or less. Because women don't really wear feathers. They wear plumes. So to have that statement is like... you're way up there.

Corey Stover:

That's amazing. That's crazy.

Becky Red Bow:

Yeah. There's not very many of them that earned that war bonnet.

Corey Stover:

That is Rick's ... Well, that would have been Jenny Robinson's mom.

Becky Red Bow:

Yeah. There it is. Oh, that's another story. When she shot in the eye. That one.

Corey Stover:

I never read that one.

Becky Red Bow:

It says Unci Shot in the Eye is the embodiment of the strength of a Lakota woman. That's so small. I can't even see it. I can't see it. "She traveled to a trading post with her family and married a Royal Mounted Canadian policeman. When Susie fled Canada after a domestic violence incident with her husband, she traveled many miles with her infant son to get back to her family and homelands.

Becky Red Bow:

"Their journey was both difficult and dangerous. Through her resilience, cunningness and spiritual belief, she made her way back to her people with her son who was named Lone Hill by his Kaka. Along her journey, a Wolf spirit of helped her. He came to her in a dream. In addition to his instructions, he told her she would marry again and have another son whom she would name High Wolf, in his honor. She was an outstanding woman and mother. She was also a fierce warrior who fought in the battle of Little Big Horn.

Corey Stover:

Maybe she isn't our grandma.

Becky Red Bow:

It says, "Special thanks to you, Lekshi Rick. Kudos for sharing the story of his Unči." That's one story that was posted.

Corey Stover:

There's no way she could be our grandma then, because if that's the case-

Becky Red Bow:

And this is Lone Hill right here. This is him. This is that infant that she carried back. See?

Corey Stover:

Amos Lone Hill?

Becky Red Bow:

Yeah.

Corey Stover:

Well, if that's the case, then maybe she isn't our grandma. Because I thought that Grandpa's first cousin, Grandpa Ed's first aunt married a Lone Hill. Married Amos Lone Hill.

Suzanne Kite:

How do you write your name? How you write your name at the bank?

Becky Red Bow:

Becky.

Suzanne Kite:

Becky Red Bow?

Becky Red Bow:

Just Becky Red Bow. Where is that picture?

Corey Stover:

I'm going to have to research that more.

Becky Red Bow:

No, because-

Suzanne Kite:

Don't do any more research. I want to pretend she's married.

Becky Red Bow:

You want to what?

Suzanne Kite:

I want her to be my relative.

Corey Stover:

I always felt like she must because that's what they said. Thank you.

Suzanne Kite:

Thank you, Canada.

Becky Red Bow:

Well, Rick is saying that our grandmother is-

Suzanne Kite:

You got to sign this, though.

Becky Red Bow:

... under the stars with the stars or something like that.

Corey Stover:

If you want to do more recording for the podcast over the phone.

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah, I will. I think we'll be fine, though. There's a lot of ... you have a lot of material. It's going to take ages to get through this.

Corey Stover:

Yeah, seriously. (silence)

Becky Red Bow:

I'm going to have to get that picture off, because I don't want to lose it. (silence).

Becky Red Bow:

This is a good one. It talks about the white buffalo calf bundle.

Suzanne Kite:

Give me your info.

Becky Red Bow:

What is that?

Suzanne Kite:

That's for my PhD that you were okay that I interviewed you. And I'll send you the transcript and you can change anything you want.

### **8.2.4 Archer Pechawis, Interview Transcript**

In conversation with the author, June 9, 2021

Suzanne Kite:

I've been asking them about, kind of a spectrum of questions around, who we are when we're far from home and how our relationships with non-humans help define that. And then, kind of finally, when we make new work, how do we do that? Kind of extending on this protocols questions, indigenous protocols, how do we start to engage with those non-humans? Maybe they are materials, maybe they're songs? And then mostly, I'm pretty obsessed with stones. So, let me read you the set of questions that nobody answers directly and everybody... Talked to an elder, and she answered one for two hours straight. And then, I talked to some other folks who wanted to go rack them up, but. Okay. So, here's just a litany of questions.

Suzanne Kite:

What makes us indigenous when we are far from home? How do we define our relationship to lands when we are removed from them? If you could gift a listening device to your great grandchild, what would it listen to, or who would it listen to? What technologies do we want our next generations to receive from us? What materials should these be made out of? How do you collect materials in a good way? What indigenous people concern themselves with stones? What was the first stone you came to know or similar indigenous material? What do these stones or materials teach us? What is most important to learn from that at this time? When we make something, how do we begin in a good way? When we present something new, how do we present it in a good way? And if I follow these steps, should this artwork be seen by a general public? So, those are the kind of the world of questions.

Archer Pechawis:

You want to cover this in 40 minutes?

Suzanne Kite:

No. I'll come back to you in the... So, this is an introductory interview and we'll talk about what your initial thoughts are, and then we're going to get gathered again and try to nail everybody their gifts.

Archer Pechawis:

Okay.

Suzanne Kite:

Initial thoughts, questions?

Archer Pechawis:

Well, you've just covered 90% of indigenous worldview. So, this could take a month.

Suzanne Kite:

Hopefully it'll take two years.

Archer Pechawis:

Well, with any luck. Let's just do this in a semi-linear fashion. Repeat the first question, and we'll start there.

Suzanne Kite:

I'll do the first two. What makes us indigenous far from home, and how do we define our relationships to lands when we're removed from them? Because you're in Toronto, and so, do you consider yourself diasporic or you're a guest? How do you see yourself?

Archer Pechawis:

Guest. Definitely guests, but I feel connected to the land here, especially the land farther North. If you go a couple hours North from here, the land changes quite dramatically. And I feel quite connected to my Anishinaabe hosts because, for me, this is Anishinaabe land. I know it's shared land, it's actually historically been kind of a shared space between different nations, but I feel culturally Anishinaabe, and linguistically, we're very close to the Anishinaabi. So, I feel connected that way. And I've been learning Anishinaabe songs, and those songs ground me to this place.

Suzanne Kite:

How do you feel or maintain your relationship to whatever region you consider yourself a guest from?

Archer Pechawis:

We typically go home, once every year or once every couple of years, to do ceremony and visit family to do the things. That hasn't been possible for the last couple of years. But, I grew up making those journeys. I mean, I grew up on our home territory to a large extent, and then we moved. So, I've become very used to being physically removed from our actual territory. So, it's a space of comfort. I'm comfortable in that zone. Also, my father was an immigrant from England, so I mean, there's half of me that's just always been diasporic, if you will, so it's a natural state of being to me. And I also, for me, wherever I go, there I am, and I feel very connected to the land pretty much wherever I go. I lived on the West Coast for a huge part of my life, but mind you, I was born on the West Coast so that really informs my relationship to land. So, I'm always not at home, and I'm always at home.

Suzanne Kite:

So, you said that songs root you in the place, or? How do they... Can you describe that?

Archer Pechawis:

Yeah. It never occurred to me till I said it, actually, but being on this land, I've been learning Anishinaabe songs, or songs in anishinaabemowin I guess might be a better way to put it. And those songs make me feel connected to this land. I don't really know how to describe it further than that. They're old songs, they're old songs that come out of this land, especially the eagle song and the bear song, and connect me to those spirits. And those spirits, of course, exist on my home territory. So, there's also a lineal connection, a familial connection, that way. And before you asked me the question, it never occurred to me that those songs route me here, but that's very much the case. There are more songs that I want to learn as well.

Suzanne Kite:

So, maybe this idea of songs can take us home, because one of the questions that came out of doing the IPAI conversations and keeping those conversations going, was about technology and the kind of devices that we use to listen. I mean, I could probably confidently say that, gifting songs, those are the listening devices, perhaps. When you think about the technologies that you're passing to your children, or maybe that you could give to your great-grandchildren to skip ahead, who do you want them to listen to?

Archer Pechawis:

I want them to listen to their drums. For me, a drum is an interdimensional communication device. The teachings that I've received around the drum or the way I interpret those teachings, is that for me, they are interdimensional communication devices. So, I would like my children, and my grandchildren, and all the way down the line, I want them to have drums, I want them to use



those drums, I want them to hear those drums, I want them to listen to those drums. But also, I'm hoping that in the spirit of the great, great grand pappy, me, that they will also integrate different technologies into those devices, for purposes that they will come up with themselves. Yeah, that's my answer.

Suzanne Kite:

What are your drums made out of?

Archer Pechawis:

Moose hide, deer hide, wood. Sennheiser 604 e Drum Microphones, 8 pin XLR Cables, 8 pin XLR Connectors, 7 pin XLR connectors. Multi-strain, usually 12 Conductor Cable. Piazza Discs, wire, solder, tape, hide, rawhide. What else? That's an incomplete list.

Suzanne Kite:

Speaking my language.

Archer Pechawis:

Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Suzanne Kite:

So I mean, maybe to zoom in on the inter-dimensionality thing for a moment, when you play your drum, what non-humans are present?

Archer Pechawis:

Well, that really depends on how we define non-human. Do we consider the spirits of our ancestors to be non-human because they're non-corporeal? Is that a thing? Or do we keep them in the realm of the human because they spring from human ancestors. Or does the spirit come first? I assume spirit comes first and then we have this physical being, and then we leave the physical being. So, that's a very tricky question. Can you ask it again?

Suzanne Kite:

Which non-humans are present when you play the drum?

Archer Pechawis:

Oh, everybody. Everybody's present when we play the drum. That's kind of the point, is to speak to everyone and to gather everyone and to ask for their help.

Suzanne Kite:

So I mean, you brought up, in the material lists for your instrument, I know you've made lots of instruments that drums are just one of them-

Archer Pechawis:

Oh, you're kind of breaking up Suzanne Kite.

Suzanne Kite:

Really?

Archer Pechawis:

Yeah. Try now.

Suzanne Kite:

How about now? How am I?

Archer Pechawis:

Good, good.

Suzanne Kite:

I mean, drums are just one of the many aspects of your practice. So, you brought up in your materials list a lot of different materials that are not this easy indigenous material where you can be reciprocal to the moose and the tree, so when we talk about... I think that's the thing that I come up against in trying to make new technologies, that I'm like, oh, I can't be reciprocal to my solder. I don't know how...

Archer Pechawis:

But, we can, we can. We can feast our materials. Their materials. I mean, this is coming to me as we're talking about this, we can feast our drums, we can feast our pipes, and we can feast our materials. And there are layers of abstraction between the natural resource that they sprang from and the final product that we purchase from wherever, but they still spring from the earth and they still have spirit. So, we can feast our soldering irons, and our spools of solder, and our rules of cable, and our plugs, and our digital machinery. Which is, now that I'm talking about this, and I'm like, I better put a feast together for my studio. I have to feast my studio, yeah.

Suzanne Kite:

That's really interesting because I was thinking about some of your... Well, let's take the drum, or I don't know. I mean, when we talk about protocol or making artwork in a good way, I always think about how, you are the first to whip out the drum at any given time because everything

does need song, and we used to do that constantly. What's it called? I think the Deloria? I can't remember who it was, called it... We used to live in a ceremonial world, and I mean, we still do, but a little more hidden. And I was thinking about how, when you start a new artwork and you want to do it in a good way...

Suzanne Kite:

And I think now, I mean, when I've talked to people this week, people are making works about what's happening in the world and heavy stuff and some people, it's their whole practice. Elders I've spoken to are so... It's so interesting how they don't go to art galleries ever, but they know that they have a real strong sense that art does, do the work in the world, which is really uplifting to hear. So how do you, I mean, maybe there's an example from your practice, but how do you start a work in a good way?

Archer Pechawis:

Ideally, or really?

Suzanne Kite:

Maybe ideally first.

Archer Pechawis:

Well then ideally, because I always get my ideas from the ancestors, they're not my ideas I'm just the lightning rod of the receptor, these ideas come to me. And in a perfect world I would run outside, I would put down tobacco, I would give thanks. In a practical sense, oftentimes I just get so excited about the idea I forget about protocol and I just start making stuff. But there's always a point in the process where I go, oh, hang on a second here, the forms must be obeyed and the protocols should be observed. So, there will always be a point where I will make that... To observe the protocols, and to put down medicine, and to give thanks for all of it. That moment often comes the day of a performance where I go, oh yeah, I should do this right. But sometimes it comes before that, like I said, sometimes there's some feasting, I'll put out a feast bowl. It really depends, it really depends.

Suzanne Kite:

I mean, you bring up something that might be true for a lot of performance artists where that's the artwork, the performance day. Everyone's got their method of working themselves into the space, working themselves out of it. And actually, that never occurred to me too, because I have a real process to get into the performance head space. But I realized, after a few years when I was in my early twenties, that I did not know how to get out of it, that it was very psychologically damaging to not exit.

Archer Pechawis:

Well, this is exactly right.

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah.

Archer Pechawis:

This is critical, and this is the whole idea. When we play our drums and sing at the beginning of a process to ask the spirits to join us, it's crucial that we sing them back out at the end. And now that you're saying this, I realized that I have also been doing this open-ended thing where I also have a set of protocols that I followed before I do a performance that are ceremonial, and very much so, very much so ceremonial, but I don't have a formal ceremony at the end. And this is kind of a glaring hole in my practice, now that we're talking about it. It never occurred to me before because we put ourselves into that performative space, which is a very open and receptive and vulnerable space to be in, hopefully, and yeah, we need to be able to tie it off at the end. We need to be able to come back into our quotidian selves.

Suzanne Kite:

So, I mean, I don't want to pick random artworks from your practice, but do you have any examples of maybe performance processes or developing pieces where the method or the process by which you did it was important to you?

Archer Pechawis:

Yeah, most of them. I don't remember the specifics of a lot of the processes because some of the performances were quite a while ago, and I also have cognitive stuff around memory. I find myself wishing I could remember exactly what I did before I went on stage for the performances that I considered to be important in my work. I'm thinking about *Elegy* right now, the piece I did about missing and murdered indigenous women back in 2006, and about how... How profoundly that performance affected me, and when I came off stage, we went backstage and I just started crying, and I cried, and I cried, and I cried, and I cried, and I cried, and I cried, and I cried, and I cried, and I cried. And in retrospect, I really see how I really needed...

Archer Pechawis:

I did a ceremonial practice before I went on stage, but I did not have a ceremonial practice after, and that's what I really needed. I needed a formal set of steps, a formal procedure, a ceremonial, a formal ceremonial procedure to follow to bring me back out of that space. I really see that now. I really feel strongly that I need to do some ceremony now to go back and to get closure on all of those performances that I did, that I never did that with. And so, I'm very grateful to you, Suzanne, that we're having this conversation because I'm having this big realization. It's like, oh yeah, that's kind of a glaring hole in the process isn't it? Yeah, it is. It's a glaring hole that needs to be addressed.

Suzanne Kite:

So, by closing songs you mean traditional closing songs?

Archer Pechawis:

It could be that, it could just be a smudge and a prayer. It could be a Cedar bath. I mean, I don't know that it matters so much what the formal steps of that process are, so much is that there are formal steps that occur. Can you hear that phone ringing in the background?

Suzanne Kite:

Lightly.

Archer Pechawis:

Okay, good. I find it so distracting. I keep forgetting to take the phone out of the room.

Archer Pechawis:

That might be something I take up with an elder. I might take tobacco to an elder and say, this is what I do and this is what I do beforehand, what should I do afterwards? I might actually take that formal step. That's complicated right now because we're still very much locked down here.

Suzanne Kite:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Archer Pechawis:

Yeah. And also, I mean, even if we weren't, I would be so hesitant to expose an elder.

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah. I mean, let's see. So, I think the other questions I have are around relationships to stones. I mean, you guys sweat, I'm like, what do you guys do up there?

Archer Pechawis:

Yeah, we sweat.

Suzanne Kite:

You sweat. Using grandfather stones?

Archer Pechawis:

Yeah, with the grandfathers. And so, stones have always been really important. And I think children can really teach us a lot about stones without them having any formal practice, obviously, because my children revere stones and they're constantly bringing them home. Our house is full of rocks, and I get annoyed because I'll find these rocks all over the house, right? And I'm trying to clean the house and I'm like, aw, these rocks. And I have to always catch myself and go, your children are offering you a teaching here. It's like, these are little grandfathers that they have lovingly brought home. So, what's up with that? Where's your head at?

Suzanne Kite:

It's a real phenomenon-

Archer Pechawis:

It's a real phenomenon.

Suzanne Kite:

... The amount of rock collecting that indigenous people do.

Archer Pechawis:

Oh, you froze up.

Suzanne Kite:

Oh no. I'm still here.

Archer Pechawis:

I heard phenomenon, then you just froze up.

Suzanne Kite:

It's a real phenomenon the way indigenous people bring stones home.

Archer Pechawis:

Yeah. And there's... We also have a history of sacred rocks that were obliterated or there were attempts to destroy, like the Buffalo stone. They dynamited it, right? So, there's also been this history of... It's incredible what focused and systematic efforts have been made to erase us. Right down to this, we're going to blow up their sacred rocks. It's like, wow. Talk about commitment to cause. These people have focus. So, what we're hoping is that they can take that focus and spin it 180 degrees and apply that focus to this. They use this word up here, reconciliation, which means nothing at all.

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah.

Archer Pechawis:

The thing that always bugged me about the word reconciliation, as soon as it started being bandied about, was there's this... Feeling in English, when you say reconciliation, that we're talking about two parties who are equally, or at least partially at fault. So for me, conceptually, the term reconciliation has always been this terrible irritant. But there's this great... I was going to bring this thing up. Someone posted this, [anishinaabemowin phrase], which means the act of correcting one's own mistakes for the benefit of others. So, this recognizes that despite the English word, this is not reconciliation of two peoples at fault, this is one side needing to make amends to the other. [anishinaabemowin phrase], So, every time I see or hear that word, I bring that up and I post it. Poof. Here, let's try this instead.

Suzanne Kite:

Totally. And I mean, one thing that reminded me of is this question of, when we make work or we do things in the world, where does that action come from? And you already said that, you're a vessel, you're the lightning rod. But I was thinking about how there's a phrase in Lakhóta... It's something like, they cannot take our sacred ways, although they may try. And I was thinking, let's say they did blow up the Buffalo stone, your kids would still collect rocks. It's this endless... It's not, insidious is the wrong word.. But it's a constant creeping up of our actual processes. So I mean, all that to say, kind of off topic but not, when you get a new work, sometimes I talk to people and they're like, oh, it comes in a waking vision, or a dream, or an instant thought, or a slow deliverance. How do you experience a new idea?

Archer Pechawis:

It just comes. Bang.

Suzanne Kite:

Bang.

Archer Pechawis:

It typically just hits me like, boom. The whole thing, start to finish. Those are nice moments. And then, there's always those little moments... Oh, hang on. You froze up again. I'll wait till you regain movement. There you are. So, those are beautiful moments when the lightning strikes and that the idea comes fully formed, typically fully formed, into my head. And then, a moment later, there's the, oh, is that ever going to be a lot of work?

Archer Pechawis:

How come I'm not a painter? I could just paint stuff and then it would be done and people would buy it, or not.

Suzanne Kite:

I wonder that same thing.

Archer Pechawis:

We've chosen this very challenging road. Performance, it's a practice of ephemerality. It's like, video documentation is all well and good, but there's no replacement for being there. It can't be emulated, it can't be reproduced. It's like trying to catch lightning in a bottle. Which, some can do, but most not, most not.

Suzanne Kite:

So, do you dream?

Archer Pechawis:

Yes, but I don't typically remember my dreams. Yeah, they're very weird. Occasionally I'll have a dream that I remember and I'll go, oh, okay, that was about this, but I'm just guessing. I'm just guessing. I think we dream all day long. I think dreaming is a 24 hour a day process.

Suzanne Kite:

So, this ongoing conversation with a bunch of folks is kind of, not in the same way, but in a related way to the indigenous protocols and AI processes. I'm trying to reach out to my community and say, ah, you all tell me how to make a new work, in this really long conversational way. And in a way, because I think that, of course it's quite obvious that we have already super well-defined in our communities protocols for making artwork, and that is abundantly clear to me, but there's so many minute details. And it's not about preferences of... I guess one thing I'm trying to sort out is that, protocol is about, there are rights and wrongs, but then truth and fact are not the same thing. So it's like, I'm trying to co-imagine a new performance or new technology, to use during performance. And so, I guess my question is, what's the first step. I mean, I have many of these answers now, but what should I do first? You can be as vague or specific.

Archer Pechawis:

Brush your teeth, make coffee.

Suzanne Kite:

That's good.



Archer Pechawis:

Yeah.

Archer Pechawis:

That's the first thing. My daughter says, "Don't make coffee." What should I do first?

Archer Pechawis:

My daughter says, "Make hot chocolate and give it to me."

Suzanne Kite:

Ah, that's a really good idea.

Archer Pechawis:

So, the process of gifting. First thing we do is we gift to others, be it hot chocolate, or what have you. Then coffee, but brushing teeth first.

Archer Pechawis:

Brushing teeth first. No, I already said I would give you hot chocolate first and then make coffee. I think that's fair.

Archer Pechawis:

And the donut.

Suzanne Kite:

The donut.

Archer Pechawis:

So, there's your process. Hot chocolate and donuts.

Suzanne Kite:

This is precisely what I needed to hear.

Archer Pechawis:

Yeah, this is good information. This is PhD material here. This is backbone of thesis material.

Suzanne Kite:

It's true though. I mean, it's true. I don't know if you guys have cakes in your community, but we're fanatics about that. If there's not a sheet cake at the event and a percolator, then it not...

Archer Pechawis:

Then something's wrong.

Suzanne Kite:

Something's seriously wrong.

Archer Pechawis:

Yea.

Suzanne Kite:

Or it's not for the community.

Archer Pechawis:

Right. Now, with us it's bannock. There has to be bannock. And I'll just say for the record, my bannock is acceptable. It's not spectacular, but it's acceptable.

Suzanne Kite:

Let's see. I mean, I'm going to come back to you again for more discussion, but for today, is there anything else you want to add about material, or performance, or?

Archer Pechawis:

Yeah, I want to say that I like making jokes about performance. I guess we all do, because what we do is so... outside? Especially in terms of our home communities. Sometimes when I do a piece I just, I wonder what my relatives would think about it. You know? And often there've been times my relatives have come to my performances and I've asked them afterwards like, what did you think? And they don't answer, they don't have an answer for me. But how incredibly fortunate we are and how grateful I am that I have been given access to this... demimonde.

Archer Pechawis:

This world of performance and of technology and all those things. And to be grounded in traditional cultural practice, and then have access of the world of the Wasichus. It's a beautiful

gift, it's a beautiful gift. We're so fortunate. We get to walk in many worlds and bring the... We get to go out and we get to gather these treasures and bring them home to the people. That's it.

Archer Pechawis:

Thanks for throwing in a Lakhóta word.

Suzanne Kite:

I know one. You got it.

Archer Pechawis:

Okay.

### **8.2.5 Mary Blackbird, Interview Transcript**

Mary Blackbird:

Okay. So this is about Lakhóta people. I have a elderly man that I knew, Kyle. He told me the story about the Lakhóta people and what he told me was that the reason why they painted their face before they went into war, have you heard this before?

Suzanne Kite:

I know they did, but...

Mary Blackbird:

Okay. Was so that the creator wouldn't recognize them. And because if they had to kill somebody, he wouldn't recognize them. And he said they would rather count on somebody, their enemy, than to have to kill them. But there were times when it was impossible to do that. So then they would end up having to kill them. So that's why they painted their faces. He said they didn't want to kill anybody, but they were forced to kill people. And when they were forced to kill people, they always painted their faces first. So that they wouldn't be known for murdering somebody, when they leave this world. And he said, the people tried to avoid conflict. They were always loving. They cared about each other. That's why we call ourselves, and we don't call ourselves Sioux, we call ourselves Lakhóta because Lakhóta means friend; and, and we've always done that, and we tried to avoid the conflicts that we have with other peoples. But if we couldn't avoid it, we would have to just save our own people.

Mary Blackbird:

We would have to do things, and he said, that's how we became the savages. We didn't learn that, how to take scalps. He said the branch of the ones who taught us how to take scalps...He said they came and they would scalp people and take their scalps as trophy. And I don't know that, that if the Indians actually realized that that's what they were doing, but when it happened, they learned how to do that. So it was them that brought that here and not us. We didn't do that.

Mary Blackbird:

So I think about that. And then I think about how our people cared for one another and for the earth and for all of the things that we have here and that we're always grateful for that. And that, I pray all the time. They didn't have a church to go into that they could pray. And it was just a daily way of life was to pray, and it was all day long. It wasn't just here and there, and like on Sundays that was, or having a sweat lodge or something, they didn't have them back then. That was because the sweat lodge came after the White Buffalo Calf Woman came and brought the pipe and she said, we'd need it in the future, and I can see that now. I mean, I can see why she said that when I first saw that story, I didn't realize that, but I could see how powerful it is.

Mary Blackbird:

I can tell you something about my grandfather. His name was Wakinyan Sapa, Black Thunder. And one time, when I first moved up here to Eagle Butte, it was sitting in my living room and mom was at work and so I was there alone and I was beading some moccasins.

Mary Blackbird:

All of a sudden, I was just got this overwhelming, all overwhelming feeling of loneliness for my family, because I left the family and I wanted to be with him when I was really lonesome, and it just felt like this air came through the house and the doors weren't open, the windows weren't open, but it felt like it came into the house. And I looked over like this and it was the old man standing up. I looked at that man at a pipe and he was standing there and he was praying and I could hear his prayers in Lak'hóta and he's praying for the next seven generations. And they always say that the seventh generation would be the one that would help us to turn things around. I wasn't the seventh generation but it's old now, but I didn't know who he was. We were honest.

Mary Blackbird:

Here all of a sudden I was this little girl and I was standing on this hill with him and I could feel the air blowing. I mean, the wind blowing through my hair, and I was looking up at him and I could hear him praying for the seven generations into the future. And it made me realize how long, how powerful that pipe is, that they would pray for the next seven generations like that. And that I was part like... So there, at that time, it would have been him, my Unchila, which was my great-grandmother and my grandmother and my mom, and then me, five generations then.

Mary Blackbird:

When I had this vision and I mean, I was just beading then. And I couldn't believe that I, that this man had taken me and put me on this hill with him and I could hear him and look what they're telling me, oh, praying for all these generations to come. And he was looking at me. And so all of a sudden I was back in that house and I was sitting there and I had this needle on my hands and some beads and I was beading again. I thought, wow, what just happened here? I couldn't believe it happened. And I saw, I said, I told mom about it. And she said "You know, your grandpa, Black Thunder," She said "Every day he would go up on the hill and pray, no matter what the weather was or anything." He was always at this one hill, he would go up and he knew that breakfast was going to be ready. But her Uncila, her grandma, her Unci, she would tell mom "Go up on that hill and tell your grandpa that it's time to eat." So she would walk up this hill and he would never meet her or anything, he would just stand up there waiting for her. So when she got to the top of the hill she would tell him, it was time to go and eat. And so he would walk down with her down off that hill.

Mary Blackbird:

And so, and it really makes me want to cry because I could see this. When would she have told me about this? Cause she never told me about that before. And when she told me about this, I just wanted to cry because that's what I felt like was that little girl, that was standing by that, my grandpa up there. And she said, "I bet it was, oh, grandpa Black Thunder." She said that it was, that was in that picture, or that was in that time, in your vision, whatever you had she said, because it wasn't a dream. I didn't fall asleep. So anyway, right about two weeks later, Becky sends me a picture of grandpa Black Thunder. And that was the man that was standing there. He wasn't in his, he didn't have his war bonnet, his head-dress, but that was the man. His face was the man I saw standing there.

Suzanne Kite:

Wow.

Suzanne Kite:

That reminds me of this, these stories I read about double woman dreamers whose their bead-work is connected to their vision. They have visions and they have to make the design.

Mary Blackbird:

Yeah. Uh-huh (affirmative)

Suzanne Kite:

That connected the art making and the dreaming.

Mary Blackbird:

I don't know, do you know Carlene Hunter? She's from Kyle. She's my hunká sister. Anyway, she has a daughter named Steph Sorbo. Do you know Steph? Steph works for the college. She's worked for the college for years. Anyway, they were a cowboy family. They went to rodeos all the time and that was their life. And all of a sudden... I don't know if Steph started going to sweat, or what... You wouldn't believe the bead work she does, the quill-work she does. Everything that she does is awesome. And she's Carlene said one day to me, she said, she said, well, I was congratulating on her because she'd won a, won an award for a South Dakota Native American art contest or something, some kind of contest. And for one of the things that she did, but everything she does is just perfect. She puts her flow- I mean, her flowers are in there, but then it looks so perfect and, and you say it, they say that you always have to have a flaw in anything you do. And so you put a different colour bead in it or something, pick up a different colour bead. And you don't even know until afterwards look at, oh my gosh, I got to have different colour bead in there. It's not the dark blue, it's a black or something. But anyway, she makes horse mass.

Suzanne Kite:

Oh cool.

Mary Blackbird:

And they're all quilled.

Suzanne Kite:

Mm-hmm (affirmative) Wow.

Mary Blackbird:

And she makes these throwing out the ball for the ceremony, out of Buffalo hair and Buffalo hide and she quills it, and it's awesome. I mean, everything she does, and she never learned, knew how, I mean, Carlene doesn't know how to bead. She lived in Denver home, grew up in Denver and, and everything she does, she can't figure out where her daughter learned how to do this. She won an art contest for some artwork she painted, and she won first place in that.

Suzanne Kite:

Wow.

Mary Blackbird:

And she said, "I didn't even know she knew how to paint." And she just has this creativity about her. Her mind is just like, working. So I said "Steph how do you do that?" I said, and she showed me, her bedroom is huge. It's probably about from the living room to the kitchen. It's a huge bedroom. And she's got projects all over now.

Suzanne Kite:

Wow.

Mary Blackbird:

That she's working on. And she gets things done, I don't, I said, "How do you do that? How do you get it done?" Because I try to work on one thing and I can't even get that done. And she said, "When I get in a place where I don't know where I'm going to go from there," She said, "What I do is I go to another project." And she works on that. And then she, then she eventually gets back to this one and gets it done. And she could get a lot of things done. I mean, she's an amazing woman. And, but Carlene says she has to have grandmothers or something, that are teaching her how to do this because quill-work is hard to learn. You have to have a teacher, but she never took a class in that or went to somebody and asked them to teach her. She just sat down with these quills one day and started quilling. And she does these humongous, humongous type projects, in quill-work. And then she does bead work. She found this old buggy that they used just because antique buggy, that had the hood silver, like that. She beaded the whole thing.

Suzanne Kite:

Oh my gosh. I can't believe people can do that.

Mary Blackbird:

I know. I mean, that's artistic. And to be that creative and to do anything, she sings, beautiful Lak'hóta songs, especially the Sun Dance songs. She'll be chanting them, and she's got this real hoarse voice. But when she chants, that voice is gone. It's this beautiful voice. Wow. And it's loud, and it's powerful. It's just, she's an amazing woman. I can't, I mean, I've known her since she was born and, I just... It seems like, to watch her mature that way in, into what she does. Wow. I wish I can have that much of her talent.

Suzanne Kite:

You've been blessed.

Mary Blackbird:

I touched him on the shoulder to greet him and here. He turns around and looks at me and the bossy look in his eyes was like he wasn't there. So I came back up here and I - Ron was with me then- on the way back, we were talking and we was talking about his spirit left him. And that another spirit's in him because he's just mean. Really mean. He's just really weird. It was just weird. So they had a ceremony for him and brought his spirit back.

Mary Blackbird:

Ron and his helper went in a sweat lodge with him and they called his spirit back. They used medicine and it came back. It came out and he said, "Hi sister."

Suzanne Kite:

Just like that.

Mary Blackbird:

After not knowing me. And I was going like, "okay." So that's what's going on with him. But anyway that was years ago.

Mary Blackbird:

They always said that your grandpa and me were supposed to be twins. Mom was going to name me Clover and him Grover. He was fooling around in the spirit world so then he missed the boat.

Suzanne Kite:

That's funny.

Mary Blackbird:

But I always sense when something's going on with him, even today. It's like I can feel it. Something inside of me just tells me that something's going on with him.

Suzanne Kite:

Cynthia always knew where I was.

Mary Blackbird:

Huh?

Suzanne Kite:

Cynthia, she always knew where I was.

Mary Blackbird:

Is that right?

Suzanne Kite:

It was freaky. She always knew exactly where I was.



Mary Blackbird:

Sometimes it's hard for people to show that love.

Suzanne Kite:

Well if no one shows you love then you don't know how.

Mary Blackbird:

A long time ago, I read a story about this college that was evil. Where there was actually really evil things going on in there.

Suzanne Kite:

So many of them.

Mary Blackbird:

I didn't believe that at that time. I read this story and it was about spiritual warfare, about the good and the bad and they were having a war and it was causing all these things to happen at this college. The people were really greedy that ran it. That book stands in my, I mean I could remember the book, but I don't remember the name of the book. It just freaks me out every time I go by a college, I look at the college and think, "What's going on really in there?"

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah, but any schools, they can be very dangerous. Because I've been living in Canada and then this week, they found those kids. I know a lot of people who are from there, but all those schools. They're all evil.

Mary Blackbird:

I went to a Catholic school. At Red Cloud when it was nuns that ran it and the priests and their helpers, whatever they are. I don't know what they are. I was young. But that place was so evil. I was thinking about that and I was thinking about those kids and about the things they went through. I always had spirits that watched over me so I never got in that big of trouble. I know I've had my hands beaten with rulers, but it wasn't as bad as what some kids went through with the molestation... there was all kinds of stories there.

Mary Blackbird:

This priest took us up to the cemetery. Me and a couple other girls, and he showed us this tombstone at Holy Rosary or Red Cloud and it was called Holy Rosary then. I'll never forget that. There was a tombstone that had these scratches on it and I was trying to figure out why those scratches were on there. And here when you look, you could see they were scratching out

something. What it was was like a face of a devil or something that was on this tombstone. So they took the tombstone because they kept scratching it out every time they'd go back up there it'd come back out again on stone. They threw it outside the fence of the graveyard. They didn't take the body and move it out there, they just threw the tombstone out there.

Mary Blackbird:

So I was thinking about this and I was thinking, years later, "Why did they do that?" And I wonder if that stone's still lying outside of that fence.

Suzanne Kite:

Go walk around there. Look for it.

Mary Blackbird:

It seems like when there are spiritual things going on, even with the Sun Dances that happen in families that people that are sun dancing that all these bad things start happening to them. Well Ron and I over the years, we've all gotten used to that. So when there's all this trauma in our families we sit back and we think about that and we share with each other about how we're feeling. And one of the things that I noticed was that we've learned to deal with that because we know what's coming. So as soon as you get close to the thunders come back, it's like all this stuff starts happening in the families. Then they all call us. Only time they call us. It's crazy.

Mary Blackbird:

This year was a hard one, but we got through it so we're ready to move on now.

Suzanne Kite:

New year.

Mary Blackbird:

Finish what we're doing. It's like something tries to block you from doing what you have to do.

Suzanne Kite:

Then you know you really have to do it.

Mary Blackbird:

Yeah. So the blocks to me are just saying, "You're not going to do this." But I say, "I'm going to do this." And so does Ron. He does that. He said, "Is it going to quit?" And I say, "Yeah, it's going to quit. It's going to be okay. We just got to get through this." And focus on what we have to do. So that's how we get through every year.

Mary Blackbird:

So what were we talking about inside?

Suzanne Kite:

We're going to talk about stones.

Mary Blackbird:

Oh stones. You want to know about stones.

Mary Blackbird:

I know some things about stones. I don't know a whole lot about stones. I know that stones are...  
Oh, I didn't even know it fell. Thank you...

Mary Blackbird:

So anyway, like I was saying, I know some things about stones. I don't know a whole lot about stones. I was reading a text that was sent to Eileen and how the songs about these stones come to be. The things I know about stones is that each stone you find has a spirit. Each spirit has its own name. They let you find it. It isn't something that you can go out and just say, "Okay, this rocks I found it and its name is." You don't do that. They tell you what it's for. The songs that I know of are used to call those spirits.

Mary Blackbird:

And Yuwipis and the Lowampi, do you know the difference? A Yuwipi is when a medicine man ties up-

Suzanne Kite:

I've been to one of those.

Mary Blackbird:

And the Lowampi is where they just sing and they're in altar.

Suzanne Kite:

Oh.

Mary Blackbird:

Well, they're in altar with the Yuwipi, too, but they're tied up.

Suzanne Kite:

Right.

Mary Blackbird:

You use those songs to call those spirits. So that they can help with that, whatever you're asking. A lot of people are asking. To be a medicine man, you don't actually find these stones and you're a medicine man. Stones come in different ways. I have a spirit stone and he has a name. One of the things that I know is that when these spirit stones come to you, they choose you to come to. Not just anybody. So you can have a lot of stones, but maybe they weren't chosen for you so you have to give them away to somebody else or not have them have anymore. Put them someplace. The songs that they sing, I think it's to bring that stone there. With those gourds they have the wagnua, what they call it. Those stones have so many, I'm going to use Ínyañ instead of stones. They have a number of stones inside the wagnua and those are all the spirits that exist that come to help you. Certain ones in there will help you with that ceremony, and not all of them. They don't all have their own separate names.

Mary Blackbird:

Then there's others that have their name that come to you personally. So those songs for the Ínyañ are sung in those ceremonies to bring them in. They're not sung in a sweat lodge unless they're calling that specific spirit to come in to help with something, a healing and that. There's a lot of people that want to be medicine people and they gather all these stones, but they're not really for them. Because not one specific spirit will say, "I will be your spirit helper." Or, "I'll help you with this ceremony."

Mary Blackbird:

Another thing I know about them is that with our own experience, we were thinking about that and we needed these stones. We were making these wagnuas and ceremonies here. Those are the ones that they use in the lodge a lot of times, but they also use them in the Lowampi and Yuwipi. The things I know about them is that if you pray for them, for these spirits to come, that they will come.

Mary Blackbird:

Anyway, but I say that, but it's such a broader spectrum because I pray for stones for the wagnuas. We lived down there then and our driveway is just dirt or gravel. The next morning after I prayed for these stones, my whole driveway where the car wasn't parked was full of stones.

Mary Blackbird:

It was full of stones. I went inside and I said, "Ron, come look at this." I said, "They weren't there before. There was just gravel there." It had stormed that night and all these stones were

laying in that gravel. It was just covered with stones. So I said, "Ron, here's our stones. We got our stones." So we got enough for these two wagmuas that we were making, one for him and one for me, and... we was thinking, "Wow, we really have a lot of stones out there." Next day, we went out, there wasn't one stone like that out there. Not one. Never been ever since in that area. So I know that about the Ínyans. When they call spirits in, they use their names and the songs come from the names that they use. So they include that in their songs. It's pretty amazing. I think that for stones to do that, to just come like that was amazing.

Mary Blackbird:

I remember one day where my nephew... he came up and he was going to Afghanistan. They were sending him to Afghanistan. He came back one week before he went and he wanted the spirit helper. So I prayed and I asked for the spirit helper for him. I already had a stone, but I didn't know where it was supposed to go. So I took that stone, I had found that somewhere, but I knew it was for somebody and I didn't know who it was for. When I took that stone, there was a storm coming that night. So I thought, "Well, I'm going to set it out here where I remember where it is at so I can check on it." I prayed and I asked the wakinyans to come and bless that stone.

Mary Blackbird:

We went to bed. It really rained and hailed and everything else. The wind was really bad. All the sudden this thunder hit that stone. I knew it was that stone it hit, because it was right outside the trailer down there. It was right outside of there and it just hit and it cracked so loud it just sat Ron and I both up in bed. I said, "They blessed my stone." I said, "Go out and get it." And he said, "You put it out there. You go get it, because I'm not going out there." So I bundled up and I went out there and sure enough, I knew that they had blessed that stone because I put in a certain place and it was still there and I knew it was blessed.

Mary Blackbird:

So I took that stone. I wrapped it up and made a prayer with it, wrapped it up and I gave it to my nephew before he went to Afghanistan. He never had any kind of injuries at all. So that spirit watched over him all while he was in Afghanistan. I don't know how many tours he did, but I know that it watched over him and he came home safe.

Mary Blackbird:

It's kind of interesting how things happen. The stones are, people don't believe that they actually have a spirit. It's hard for me to throw stones now. Like just take them and throw them. Pick them up and throw them. It's hard for me to do that because I think about the spirit of the stone and some of these Ínyans have been here for a lot of years. Millions of years. So they're dense but it still has that spirit inside, just like every plant, blade of grass has a spirit. Every weed down there, dandelions, everything has spirits and that connection. We have to stay connected to the what is everything. Like the birds that come and sing to us. We have one that says, "Cheeseburger. Cheeseburger." And every time we hear it, Angie said she heard it because they

always hear it at the Sun Dance while they're dancing and then they're all hungry. This little bird comes and it sits on this post by where the dances are and it does that. It says, "Cheeseburger. Cheeseburger."

Suzanne Kite:

Fries. Fries.

Mary Blackbird:

So the other day, she said, "Well, my bird the cheeseburger came." Well, came that sings this cheeseburger. But it does. It sounds like cheeseburger. So she said I know it's time to start preparing even faster. It's coming. It's like a reminder, when we hear these things that we hear at the Sun Dance. The birds that are there that, everything that's there, is a reminder that we have to take care of ourselves. Care about each other, help each other, and connect with those things. The people. There's nothing that we can't connect with. Just like Exley and those bees this morning. They have these little hands. She was shaking its hand, and she does that with things like that. If they land on her or whatever, she acknowledges them and makes that connection with them by doing that. It's really interesting to watch that.

Mary Blackbird:

Hial, our other Sun Dancer, he has a connection with hummingbirds. They come back every year and they have their nest there and their birds are born there and then they leave his home. Fly off some day. But even having the raven and the crows out there, there's all that connection with those birds. One day I came out here, I was going to tell about those, but they'll be good to you, if you're good to them. If you're not good to them and you try to mess with them, they'll mess with you. This guy had, they take clams from the ocean because he lives right by the inland, there's like another island out here but then the ocean comes around.

Suzanne Kite:

Peninsula?

Mary Blackbird:

Yeah, kind of like that. Anyway, it's right in front of their house a little way, maybe down to the road from their house and they'll take clams and they'll throw them on your car or really mess up your car. And you've got all these clams, great big clams, on your car.

Suzanne Kite:

From birds?

Mary Blackbird:

There was a guy that did that, he said, at his sweat, he kept messing with that, and he said, "Don't do that." He said, "Just let them be." They would get the clams and they must have watched people, like they know. Because he was kept doing that, trying to raise heck with him. They must have watched him when he got out of the car, because his car was the only one that was sitting. There was a whole bunch of cars, but his was the only one that had these clams land on them.

Suzanne Kite:

They're really smart. Birds are really smart.

Mary Blackbird:

So you think about that. We have a skunk that lives under this thing. We call it Pepé Le Pew.

Mary Blackbird:

And then we have a great big bunny around here and usually when there's a lot of people here, the bunny doesn't come out. But we can walk up to the car and bunny will just sit there and stare at us, so he doesn't even move. We get close to him or something, he'll take a hop or something but we never threaten him. And the skunk's the same way. So we have two pets and that's what it is: a skunk and a bunny. And that's a big bunny.

Mary Blackbird:

But it's funny how you connect with animals. We talk to the skunk all the time because we have to walk up that ramp and it lives under the storage bin. If we don't tell it that we're just coming home and we're going in the house, we have to talk to it. It doesn't spray. But if somebody just walks up on that ramp, it'll spray. It lets them know that it's there.

Mary Blackbird:

So one day, Ron was in the hospital and I don't know that she's going to use any at this point.

Mary Blackbird:

One day when Ron was in the hospital in Sioux Falls, we had to be gone for six weeks and so my sister in law came and she said, "Your skunk's still here." And I said, "Yeah, of course it's still there." I said, "It's our watchdog."

Suzanne Kite:

Guarding the house.

Mary Blackbird:

Anybody that comes up here it'll spray, but it doesn't spray when we're around. We come up and it doesn't ever bother us and I said, "Besides that, if it did spray." I said, "It just cleans off your sinuses anyway." It's good medicine. It's some of the powerful medicine, the stink bags that a skunk has. That is really powerful medicine, heal just about anything. I've seen it used and it's amazing.

Mary Blackbird:

One of the medicine men down in Rosebud, he uses that as his medicine. I've been in ceremonies where he's used that. Those guys that have to take that medicine, that are sick, they just like, "I know what he's giving me." And sure enough, he'll give them that and it works, but it isn't most pleasant smelling. So that odor in there is medicine. There's so many medicines. It's just unbelievable. The purpose of them and how much you use, because they could be a poisonous plant but it depends on how much you use that is helpful to a human being. So you have to know those things before you mess with them.

Mary Blackbird:

Should we go back to stones?

Suzanne Kite:

I can look at my list of questions. See if there are any ones I wanted... I'll look at what I sent Eileen. Eileen.

Mary Blackbird:

I know you had something about the stones. The songs, and what it felt like.

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah, I think like-

Mary Blackbird:

For the person that's singing the song, if they know that spirit that *Ínyañ*. I think that a lot of it is personal to them and they have a connection to that spirit. Like Ron's spirits that come into the lodge, he has a connection with each one. So when he sings that song, he knows exactly what he's doing to sing that. I can tell you a funny story.

Mary Blackbird:

I have a spirit helper. He's a little heyoka. You know what a heyoka is? Okay, it's a heyoka and then I have another spirit helper that's a bear, but it's a grizzly. I mean, it's big. So when they call those spirits in, Ron has his altar sitting in front with all his *Ínyañs*, his spirit *Ínyañs* on an altar. All of those stones move under Ron's legs, because he's sitting there like this and so they all



come rolling under his legs when that bear comes in. They won't do that when the other spirits come in, but when that bear comes in, they all just take off. They don't want to get stepped on or something. I don't know what it is.

Suzanne Kite:

They're scared.

Mary Blackbird:

He looks down and his altar's gone and all his Ínyans are under his legs. Anyway, this went on forever. Here, one day, my little heyoka spirit, he wanted to know why he was the last one in every time they have a ceremony. Because they're singing these songs for the spirits to come in. He said, "I'm the first one waiting here, every time you have a ceremony. I'm the first one waiting here. How come I don't get to come in first? The bear goes over me." He was telling all the things that will go over him and he'd be standing at the door yet and they'd all be in there.

Mary Blackbird:

I was telling that story to this little girl one time. She came and she's like a granddaughter to me. I was telling her this story, and she must just have this vivid imagination and she saw the whole thing happening in the sweat. Because she came into the sweat and she was really young and anyway, that's how she remembers me. I'm her grandma and that I told that story about that bear coming into the sweat lodge and all those Ínyans rolling. Being under Ron's legs. Anyway and she just laughed and laughed and laughed. One time she was in the sweat and it got really, really hot in there. She touched her mom and she said, "Mom, I'm melting." She said she felt like she was melting in there. I still think about that.

Mary Blackbird:

"Have you melted yet?" I would say to her every time I saw her.

Suzanne Kite:

I had a dream about a bear last year. I was reading a lot of this Blackfoot writer, Leroy Little Bear, and he writes about Blackfoot language. And I had this dream that we were trapped in a school, but he wasn't himself, he was a really, really, really big grizzly bear. We walked for miles through the school until we got there, and he was explaining things to me, and I understood but then we got to a classroom or a lunchroom or something. He sat me down and he explained the answer that what language is and how it works. Then when I woke up, I couldn't remember anything that he said.

Mary Blackbird:

Oh no.

Suzanne Kite:

But he was huge.

Mary Blackbird:

I had a dream about the grizzly bear before I got that spirit. In this dream, it was a long time ago, way before European influence or any influence of any kind. People would gather and they would make these temporary shades and they would have this gathering. I was married. I was a woman and I was married to this man and he was really mean. He was hitting this horse and it really made me feel bad because that's the way he was. He took a younger wife because I couldn't have kids. He took a younger wife and I can remember her saying, "Take me with you. Take me with you." And I said, "I can't. I can't take you. You're going to have to find your own way to leave, but I can't take you with me."

Mary Blackbird:

And this young man came out behind us and he said to me, "It's time to go." He was a young warrior. I can remember running from this place and this young man was with me. He wasn't really a mature man yet, just a young warrior. We were running down this hill and I remember having my arms out. And I said, "This is what it feels like to be free and be an eagle." I had my arms out and I was just running. He said, "You have to hurry. You have to hurry. We've got to get down in that canyon."

Mary Blackbird:

So it was a big canyon and he said, "We'll be protected down there." So we kept going and this man was coming. The horse would kind of balk him because he was so mean to him. We got down in this canyon and all there was a straight up the canyon wall, trapped. So I said to him, "What do we do now?" He said, "Just wait. Something's coming, but it isn't that man." I was waiting in there and all the sudden this great big grizzly came out from somewhere in that canyon and it stood in front of us. It was so big that it covered both of us and you couldn't see us. All that man could see was that grizzly when he got to that area and saw the grizzly and turned around and went back. So he became my protector. But that young man knew he was coming for me. I mean to protect. And so he told me, "Just wait. Just wait." He could feel that something was coming. He didn't tell me what it was and when I saw that grizzly, I was like, "Oh my God."

Mary Blackbird:

And I'm looking up in the air trying to see the top of it. It was huge and that man didn't want to mess with him. So he just turned around and left. It was really an awesome dream, but I was so happy to be away from that man. He was real controlling.

Suzanne Kite:

That's so interesting. I had this dream last year that I went to the movies and I sat down to watch a movie in my dream. The movie was a field with a teepee and a white horse and then there was a table covered in iron tools. The teepee, I couldn't see anybody and it was dawn. It was beautiful, dewy. But I knew in the teepee that a man was murdering a woman, and that was the dream. That was the movie.

Mary Blackbird:

Really?

Suzanne Kite:

Scary. I was like, "What year is it?"

Mary Blackbird:

We didn't have clothes on like we wear today, because I can remember having a buckskin dress on. It wasn't like fancy or anything. It was just a plain buckskin dress. The men wore breechcloths and something was going on, a gathering of some sort. I can't even remember what the gathering was about, because this man kept distracting me. I saw what I look like in this dream.

Mary Blackbird:

Don't look anything like I look now. In reality, I mean this reality. But who I think that young warrior was, was Tony, and that's really interesting because he acted like Tony. He was so sure of himself and that he knew that we were going to be okay. I knew that I was supposed to go with him, but I didn't know if we had like a past history of some sort or what but I knew that I had to go with him. It's just interesting.

Mary Blackbird:

You can shut it off for a while. I'm going to take a break.

## **8.2.6 Jackson 2Bears, Interview Transcript**

In conversation with the author, May 26, 2021

Jackson 2bears:

Okay.

Suzanne Kite:

Great. Can you introduce yourself?

Jackson 2bears:

Sure. [Anishinaabemowin introduction] I'm Jackson 2bears from the Six Nations and Tyendinaga, and I'm currently here in Treaty 7 territory where I work at the University of Lethbridge. I've been here the last seven years working in the art department where I teach indigenous art studio, and I'm also a Canada Research Chair in indigenous Arts Research and Technology.

Suzanne Kite:

Awesome. Thank you. So these questions are part of this long process I'm trying to do where I have three field studies, and this one is specifically to try to build a new body interface, because I have practice with making OSC MIDI interfaces. I'm basically asking these questions in order to ask people in my community how they think I should make an instrument, or what their ethical concerns are, and then either I'll find out it's impossible to do, or I'll find some way to do it. And then I have two other processes, one for songwriting, which is Lakhóta songwriting, and then one for a dance. So that's what these questions are shaping towards, but they're very general. So yeah, I mean, the first one is super general, and it's what makes you indigenous when you're not on your territory? Because I know you live in Lethbridge, but you're still Mohawk. How do you frame that for yourself?

Jackson 2bears:

Yeah. Well, obviously that's both a simple answer and maybe a complex answer. I think the simple answer just has to do with visiting as much as I can back in my home territory and keeping a connection with that as much as possible. Visiting family, friends, participating as much as I can in things that go on in my community, and generally being just knowledgeable about stuff that's happening. Except for this last year, I visited quite regularly actually. A lot of my practice, a lot of my work, my writing, my art practice is rooted there. I have, over the last few years, been doing site specific work and really connecting with home and with story and with that as much as I can in all my practice.

Jackson 2bears:

I suppose it's a way I comport myself while I'm here in this territory. I always begin all my classes talking to my students about what it means to be a guest here in Treaty 7, or what it means to be a guest anywhere. Like anything I bring with me, what I know of as a Haudenosaunee person, I bring that with me in how I conduct myself here. In a way, as we say, not really speaking for Six Nations or for everybody, but in a way that's a representative, right? I mean, you're here, and there's responsibility that comes with that. So I always talk about responsibility. I think there's something really important about being responsible in that way. I was just saying about connecting back with home all the time, but also responsibility of being

here, which in every way means respecting culture, protocol of the people that are here in this territory.

Jackson 2bears:

Learning as much as I can, as I have been over the last few years, participating in community things here, talking with elders and knowledge keepers here, working with them in different capacities. Bringing with me as I conduct myself as a Haudenosaunee person, but also being very mindful that this isn't my home territory. So I think that's what it always has meant.

Haudenosaunee people, as far as I'm aware, used to travel to this territory all the time hundreds and hundreds of years ago, a few centuries. Used to travel here and had relationships with the Blackfoot. So there's something there that I think a part of that, both looking back and looking forward and to the present, I think is really important as a way of continuing that and respecting those things and that responsibility.

Suzanne Kite:

Thank you. Yeah. I mean, I think the word protocol gets very heavily used. I mean, I was just listening to Leanne Simpson do an interesting critique of the word protocol, but I still think it's the most useful word to say that there's a process by which we do ethics. Yeah. I think that, yeah. Sorry, I'm going to move around in these questions, but what's great to talk to you about, and this is you actually deal with instruments. You understand what midi instruments are and what the limitations are. I would love to hear about your art making practice, and if you see protocols as having a role in them. Yeah, I'll-

Jackson 2bears:

Yeah. Yeah, I agree that the word protocols is maybe problematic I suppose, for some people, but yeah. I think it's a useful term, or at least that's the term that we use here all the time. Our university is maybe different than a lot of others in the sense that it was built, Leroy Little Bear was here since the beginning, and a lot of the ways that the university is structured actually was already structured with indigenous ways of knowing built into the foundation of everything here. So that's part of the conversation that's always ongoing here in terms of how we use those terms and how we use those words. But in terms of, yeah. I mean, yeah, I've built some instruments over a number of years. Usually when I build things, it's because I've run into some kind of roadblock that technology does not exist.

Jackson 2bears:

I'm not a big fan of reinventing the wheel, so I've never really delved into programming. I'm not actually naturally inclined to programming. I've done a ton of it, but I do it out of a necessity, that I have a creative goal in mind or a creative idea or inspiration in mind. So I've always approached it in that kind of way, that this thing doesn't exist, so I'll have to build it. But yeah, I mean, does protocol have a, I guess it has in different ways and with different projects. I feel like the turntable piece, the live cinema piece that I did for many years, I don't think it actually played a huge role in the construction of that instrument itself. Since then, technology has caught up

with that. I think I built that originally in 2001 or something like that, before Serato and all that stuff was around. So it didn't really have a huge role in that.

Jackson 2bears:

I was just really interested in bringing my practice away from art galleries. You make the artwork in your studio, you bring it to the gallery, you place it in the gallery, and there it is, and it lives separately from you. I really, really, really wanted to be present with things. So that was a way to bring parts of my love with sound and video, but to do it in a live way, a live context that responded to who was in the room at the time. I only started to think about that later. In the beginning, the only goal was to do some live things and to be able to edit stuff live. But as I started performing that piece, I got invited to go to different places to do it. I both perform that stuff in community, but also at art galleries and museums and other places.

Jackson 2bears:

I found more and more that it was about creating a conversation with the people in this space. So it wasn't so much of it that the instrument was changed or invented in some kind of way, but the content certainly changed later on. It was really about the content. If I knew that I was going to go perform in a certain context, I would gear stuff towards that way and try to create a conversation between the Cowboys and Indians samples and stuff. Some places you go to, the Vancouver Art Gallery, and a mostly white audience would be analyzing the piece in a certain kind of way and be looking at it. And then you take it somewhere else. I performed that piece at the Talking Stick Festival, and it's primarily native people there, and they're hollering and yelling at the screen. A different kind of relationship starts to build up there. So it was really in the performance of that stuff that really is what that meant.

Jackson 2bears:

See, the other instruments I built, I built a powwow drum interface. That piece was I think maybe the only one that got me thinking about what would it really actually mean. I had the drum built in Cowichan, and then I moved in and I had it installed in Victoria. It was only really then that I started thinking about, well, what does it mean to use this particular thing built in this place, built by these folks, and bring it to Victoria to a different location? And then that was on my mind a little bit in terms of how that would be received, but also about letting other people play it. That was an interactive piece that it wasn't just for me to perform with or use, but when I let everybody use it, I don't know. I don't know if that was maybe misused in some way, that object and what that had meant, because I guess really every other thing that I've built was only just for me to use.

Jackson 2bears:

But then extending that out to just the general public, yeah. I didn't make a piece like that after that. I was really, I don't know. Because those ideas sort of came up. That drum in particular was made for that piece, so it didn't really have any history or meaning to it but beyond the fact that it was a drum. What does it mean to have just regular people from community come and play it,

and play it however they wanted to? So yeah, I mean, I suppose moving forward, those would be some of the things that I would continually think about if I was building a new instrument. Who would be using it, how would they be using it, and the context of the places which they were using it.

Suzanne Kite:

So what do you think the limitation you came up against was with that object? Is it because of the context of powwow drums usually, or more of a material thing? What was the thing that you would say like, "I'm never doing this again because..."

Jackson 2bears:

Yeah, well, it was the only time that I made something that wasn't just for me to use, and so maybe there's some element of control there going on, but I think mostly it had to do with what I saw as misuse of it. People coming in and interacting, let's say. Not really playing it, but interacting with it in a way that was, I don't know, dishonest to its objectness, that somehow changed its context too much. I guess I didn't like that. I didn't like the fact that a powwow drum could be used to play out different tunes that it maybe wasn't supposed to. There's something about its essence, that it shouldn't be used like that. I only came to realize that after it was there in the space, and people would come in and play The Little Drummer Boy on it or something. Part of its objectness was in misuse, I felt like at that time. I made other interactive drums that I played, but I suppose something about the content and the context to me, in hindsight, was inappropriate. Very inappropriate use of that.

Suzanne Kite:

That's really interesting. I mean, that was two, three years ago now that we were on that conversation, yeah.

Jackson 2bears:

In Ottawa. Yeah.

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah. In Ottawa, that was the first time I tried to get half cohesive thoughts about Lakḥóta objecthood and art and AI and stuff. I remember that conversation being around this idea of what is an object, and I think maybe that's what I'd be interested to hear about. As instrument players, we know the instruments are definitely alive in a way, especially when they're made of wood or something. You really have to play the violin, or else it goes bad, but yeah. That's what's great about instrument making or using, is you know that there's a real blurred line between the object and the person who plays it, and then what gets played through it. They're these entities. But yeah, I wanted to know what you thought about instrument objectness.

Jackson 2bears:

Yeah. I can say this has actually been really on my mind recently. I'm doing a collaborative project here with a few colleagues, and we're working with a number of different elders, knowledge keepers from here in Blackfoot territory. We've been looking at some of the things that were taken from their community over the whole early colonial period, And they live now in museums in London. So we've been looking at those and 3D scanning them, and we went over to London a year or so ago with everybody and we're looking at these things. So what's really been on my mind is of course, as I'm sure you know, the real big difference between how we and our people and our ancestors looked at objectness and what those things mean. It's really interesting the way that the British museums see these, the word artifact and the word object. Everything's reduced to its material qualities in terms of value, and how it's supposed to be kept and stored. A lot of the stuff's been sprayed with arsenic and all kinds of stuff.

Jackson 2bears:

So one of the people that we were there with just brought this up again to me, right to the forefront, there was a beaver bundle that was there and it was falling apart. It's returning to dust. So she was saying, this thing, our beaver bundle is not supposed to be kept like this. It's supposed to be used. It's supposed to be opened, and the oils from your hands and various things like that are what keep the material good. It's supposed to be in use and in practice. There's ways to keep these things, not in museums. So this idea of things being alive no more. So there happened to be some Haudenosaunee masks while we were there that I got to see, and pretty much the same kind of experience. Those are, to us, living spirit. That's a really different way of thinking about objects and objectness than the particular Western worldviews of things and materiality.

Jackson 2bears:

I think that's always carried over to the way that I practice. When I make instruments or perform, or do any of that kind of stuff, I think about those kinds of connections a lot and what they can mean. So I suppose coming back to that drum and that thing in Victoria, I think to me, it was at the very least a disconnect between those ways of thinking about instrumentation performance and material practice. I suppose, as both the builder and the performer of the instruments, there was a really easy connection there that I could always make that, to me, made a lot of sense and to what I was doing with those things. So those kinds of communications and connections were always there. I suppose that's the reason why I stopped making things for general interactive purposes, that I couldn't continue to make those kinds of connections. The content's so important. The instrument's there, but what is it actually doing? What are you playing? What's the content of the story that you're telling? So those are always really important things to me, and even more so now, I suppose.

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah. That's really interesting. I find this difficult to articulate that there's this thing where I know that the materials and the non-humans that are involved in the making of things are important, but then the process of using them to communicate is so tied into that, But it's difficult. I mean, I feel like there's a Leroy Little Bear answer to this conundrum, but I don't know how to. The communication with and through this simultaneous thing seems to be pretty



key to that, and so when we try to take that and think about technology, I mean, it's a super vague question, but do you have a definition of technology that you work through?

Jackson 2bears:

Yeah, in a way. I mean, I always have been in this weird intellectual soup, let's say, of Western world philosophies and thinking about what I know of how Haudenosaunee think about and do things. I mean, I always start with this idea that it's impossible to think about technology technologically. Technology can not be thought about properly on its own terms. That comes from Heidegger, reading Heidegger in my early days studying and stuff. So I've always really been rooted in that, that technology can not be thought about properly on its own terms. And then I always go from there, that technology actually can be better thought about as a cosmology or it could be thought about theologically or spiritually or other kinds of ways. So there's other kinds of ways to think about the things that we're already very intrinsically interconnected with. As Leroy would say, there's no real separation between us and our technological devices.

Jackson 2bears:

I think that's entirely true, like the history of technological development. There's a really good book by Katherine Hayles actually, called *How We Became Posthuman*, that really traces the history of what was cybernetics. Norbert Wiener and these early guys doing cybernetics studies, and thinking about this epi-phenomenon between the mind body split. This early idea, this Cartesian idea of eventually we'll be able to download consciousness and everything. This whole idea of this, as Loretta Todd said, it's like this escape of the body, rapture sort of idea of technology as savior, how deeply it intertwined with these Western religious ideas of humanism and various things, and how that flows all the way down to what then was called cyberspace. Of course, now we have different terms for it and stuff.

Jackson 2bears:

But those are really interesting ways to think about the history of those things that aren't technological, right? Those are kind of theological. And then from there I, in a lot of ways, have been rethinking about all the things that Loretta Todd was talking about back in 1990, in particular when she was writing about Lawrence Paul's piece at the Banff Centre. Lawrence, of course, had made the *Inherent Rights, Vision Rights* piece. He had made the sacred ceremony as he called it, the sacred ceremony inside the long house. You'd go in and you're participating in this stuff, which brought up not only on the one hand questions about can technology re-import colonial ideology and colonial forms of oppression further, as Jason has written about and other people have written about, really, really interesting ways about the language of technology itself and how it re-installs those forms of colonial power.

Jackson 2bears:

But on the other hand, another really interesting question arises from that, which is what about the idea of sacred space? Can those things be created inside virtual environments? What do those kinds of things mean? If you talk to Loretta, it's really interesting, because she'll say, "Well,

actually, our people had a way to sort of time travel anyway. We used to always practice these things. We were able to practice these things without these new technologies. Our people were already doing that. We have centuries and centuries of experience with space travel and all kinds of stuff." So in a lot of ways, she makes this really nice and easy comparison, or way to think about new technologies in a way that we already know how to relate to them in that context. We already know what these interconnected spaces mean.

Jackson 2bears:

Not to say that they're always good. That's not to say that this is a utopian vision again, but actually, from there, and I'm just giving you the landscape of where my thought goes. From there, it's interesting to start thinking about ghosts and hauntings. Arthur Kroker has written about this for the last 25 years. He wrote his book, *The Possessed Individual*, and what possession means, and what does it mean to actually not. I don't possess the technology, but rather it possesses me. There's this way that it has transformed the way that human beings think and will and conduct themselves socially, individually, all that stuff. So what does it mean to be in that kind of relationship with both spirit ghosts and hauntings, and how can we think about technology in those kinds of terms? I think from there you get a much more expanded idea of what technology does and its effects on us, and then further to that, how we relate to that.

Jackson 2bears:

As I tell people, or I don't have to tell you, but I tell people all the time, our ways of doing things have always been rooted in bodied experience. From there, I always think about Vine Deloria, who talked about indigenous, what did he call it? Tribal spirituality as being rooted in space rather than in time. This idea that all of our, as he said, tribal philosophy, tribal spirituality was based in this idea of something that was dimensional rather than durational. He always said the Western worldview is about this idea of manifest destiny, and everything unfolding in this chronological order, which really meant this divine narrative for the western European world. Everything happens from one to the next thing. But ours is a spatial one, and ours is an embodied one. So the question that always does arise is well, how do embodied dimensional experiences occupy virtual spaces, which in fact don't have those things? I think that's where the interesting questions start to happen. Of course, on the one hand they do, because embodiment doesn't necessarily need to be thought about as a corporeal experience.

Jackson 2bears:

But also on the other hand too, I think that as I was saying before, when you stop thinking about technology on technological terms, it gives you all these other entry points into ways that you can theorize that and think about it. That get closer to, I think, how we have always thought about our technological devices. It's like the same thing. We didn't really have a word for that, nor did we have a word for art or various things, as they were interconnected with our, as Leroy said, I keep going back to Leroy's term, but so much connected and part of our practice in our societies already. So to look to those things, I think there's a lot to be learned. As Loretta is always teaching me too, and I get to talk to her, those are things we can look to. What were our practices and ceremony that spoke to those kinds of ways of doing things? Here's that word

protocol again, what were the kinds of things that people would do when something new came along? What were the processes that one would go through to do that?

Jackson 2bears:

I've been thinking a lot about our Haudenosaunee medicine societies, which were from our faces societies and things, that had deeply interconnected with dreams and the way that our people would dream things. How those became, rather than sort of pushed aside as things that would happen at night or whatever, those were actually sort of incorporated as part of our ceremony and became ways that we could think about stuff outside of material space, dimensionality. I think those are the kinds of things Vine Deloria was always talking about. Those are the kinds of things maybe some of the post-structuralists in Western theory were trying to think about, that operate outside of those material, embodied slash transcendent or immanent versus transcendent, and they were trying to work in between those binaries, I think it gets a lot closer to. An even better answer, you'd ask Leroy. He could talk about quantum physics and stuff, which I can't, but...

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah. Actually, that gets to this thing that came up when I spent a lot of time talking to Scott Benesiinaabandan about dreams. I had this horrible realization, in a way. A late PhD, too late in the game to change the structure of the PhD, where I realized that I saw these questions that you have are about material and the non-human state of objectness, but it occurred to me that instead of asking about protocols to use materials, I maybe should've been asking about protocols to dream the thing into existence, and that the questions are a little too far along.

Suzanne Kite:

Because yeah, same thing with Lakhóta. The question is if our instruments are objects that help communicate and make new knowledge, is the best framework dreaming something into existence first? So yeah, I mean, I guess one way I've done this is think about, okay, take the framework of the sweat lodge, I know it's done ethically, and then think about what kind of object I could make following that. Not how to make a sweat lodge, but the clear protocol, the clear steps that are ethical. So I was wondering if you had any thoughts about frameworks, maybe more about the dream stuff. But I think that that's a real key aspect, is that how do we make new knowledge? If instruments help us do that, where does the knowledge begin?

Jackson 2bears:

Right. I guess maybe I would answer that by saying, I think that the approach to that in terms of what we were just talking about, dreams, spatial philosophy maybe, and those kinds of things, I think the first thing I would say takes patience. I know that seems really strange to say, but also, where I think about Vine Deloria and I think about dreams and I relate that to what I know of. I mean, I'm not part of the medicine societies, nor do I take from, but I know some of that stuff as they do. But I don't practice that stuff, because it's not proper for me to do so. So I find other ways around that in my own sort of process.

Jackson 2bears:

I collaborated a lot with my friend Janet Rogers back on Six Nations, and we worked together. So I guess I would say I've been finding more and more, in my middle age, I would say older age, my middle aged-ness, that it's really good to take time to do things. It's okay. I used to when I was younger, and when one's doing a PhD, there's a sort of urgency often to get things done and to produce things and to do stuff. That used to be really a thing part of my early career too, because of course, you're really excited to get shows. You want to go and do stuff. But I'm finding now that it's really, really important to take the time it takes to do something. Whether that means that a project gets started, and maybe this is something that you're going to finish in a year or two or five or 10 or a lifetime, it's really, really worthwhile to take the time it needs to do those things. Maybe it takes time to dream into existence or to think about them or to experience them.

Jackson 2bears:

I know it was really, really difficult for me the first time that Janet and I started collaborating a lot. We really wanted to do, what did she say when we started? We really wanted to deal with the stories that were on the landscape, and well, how the hell do you do that? We don't have any experience with figuring out how to do that. So the only thing that we could do is to go to these places, into these sites that we wanted to work in, and spend time there in that location and to experience it. So I think the first thing I would say is it was really, really important to let things in their durational cycle happen. Things can't be forced through in that particular kind of way. The answers will appear as they need to. As somebody that's shooting video or something, the scene will happen when it happens, or the audio will, will come to you when it does.

Jackson 2bears:

I think the other really important thing, too, is I've been noticing the real necessity to operate in a collaborative capacity, which I've been doing, again, way, way more of. I don't mean just, we hang out as much as we can with our knowledge keepers and stuff back home. We go hang out with them and talk, and make soup, and have these really good conversations. But I think generally in collaboration, myself and Janet and many others, people that I'm involved with, but not project specific. Just ongoing conversations. I think it's really important to have a collective like I'm doing with you right now, these collective conversations that inspire the development of things. I think that's now become an integral part of the way that my entire practice, it's inspired by that and shaped by that all the time. The importance of something appears more. Yeah, I mean, that's the best way I can answer that, I suppose.

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah. I mean, I think that's what's interesting about these dream concepts that seem to continually come up in conversations. I wish, I mean, PhD's, it unfolds the way it unfolds. But yeah, to see this conversation evolve, and yeah. I would like to ask you about this concept of listening. I think that it's very exciting what's happening in indigenous sound art, that it exists now.

Jackson 2bears:

I remember another moment too, when I first arrived here in Lethbridge, I don't know if you know Lethbridge fairly well, but it's really windy. It's possibly the third windiest place on Earth. It gets really, really windy here. I remember complaining about that one time when I was at Leroy's house, and he says, "You shouldn't complain about the wind. That's where all the Blackfoot people were. It's where we get our songs from. The wind taught us all these songs, so you shouldn't complain about it when you're here." I said, "Yes, that's right." So it's about those listening moments. The Blackfoot, for thousands of years, were here to the wind, and the wind was teaching them songs. I really, really liked that as a way to think about all that stuff in a really different way, or it helps me reorient my way of thinking about stuff too, in those kinds of contexts. Sometimes, again, it comes back to that time to do something.

Jackson 2bears:

Also too, I've been doing this too, paying attention to my dreams and things that happen and how those things interconnect with the things that I'm thinking about, because they help us get outside of the sensory experience of this version of reality and help us think about things in that sense. Also too, as maybe I'm sure many others talk about as well, is not making artwork necessarily just for human consumption. That's a lot of what I've been trying to think about also too, is non-human interactions with things. It shifts your orientation to what you're doing and what you're thinking about.

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, maybe I'll just ask this question outright. Two questions in one. You do make listening devices in my opinion, but if you're making a listening device for the future, what do you want people in the future to listen to? Is there a way of listening? Which is the same question as, what kind of technology do we want to be creating or have in the future?

Jackson 2bears:

Right. A device for listening. These are complicated questions. Yeah. I think maybe that would be a circle back to this idea of responsibility, which I'm maybe, in some ways, just starting to understand at this point in my life, and what that kind of means. I've maybe my whole life been saying this, words of the seventh generation, thinking about stuff in the future. I've been over and over again talking about this responsibility to those that came before us, but it's maybe only in the last few years that I'm starting to really get a handle on what that means. Maybe that has to do with having my own children, and seeing what is there that gets passed along and what happens, and the importance of listening. I've learned that, as I've not actually lived on my home territory for many, many years, and really, how it's really, really important to be doing that. I think that's, again, part of our responsibility as being a guest in the territory is that listening is probably one of the most important things that you will do, rather than to put into action.

Jackson 2bears:

But it's important that listening isn't seen as a passive thing. I mean, I think a lot of people put those two things in opposition, talking and doing the thing is the active thing and listening is the passive thing. I think those are some really useful ways to think about that. I think listening can be a very, very active thing, in order to transmit or pass those through oneself is just as important as the person speaking. To hear it and to bear witness to those things is just as important, you know? For a long time, I've been thinking about the way John Cage, for instance, thought about sound and music and composition.

Jackson 2bears:

I think actually the way that John Cage thought about that stuff aligns quite a bit with what I know of how my Haudenosaunee ancestors thought about sound when they were playing their drums. When they played them, and where they played them, and who participated in those kinds of activities, and what they were for, what they were meant to do. Those things were always thought out in a very specific way that included all that stuff, and I think our ancestors knew much better than we do about how to listen and how to be part of a conversation. that's the two pieces of that. It's the listening and the action of that activity.

Jackson 2bears:

But yeah, I think about that too, And the responsibility to those after that. I don't know if I have a really good answer for that. I don't know, I don't know. I don't often divide things. I know this is indigenous futurism stuff and everything else. That's some really, really interesting work being done in that kind of area. But I myself don't actually, I don't know if I think specifically in those kinds of terms. I think I try to see myself and the things I'm doing is part of a continuum or a circle. If I am now what somebody's future was, I don't see what I'm doing as anything really any different than what would have been happening a few hundred years ago, nor do I really see what's going to happen in the future as being a whole lot significantly different than what's happening now.

Jackson 2bears:

I mean, this is a really great Loretta Todd answer, which is our ancestors had those ways of doing things already. I suppose it's too bad that it took me two months to program something in Max/MSP that does essentially the same thing. So I guess it's like that. I try to see stuff like that, in a continuum, in a different kind of way. Those things are all very, very present now. They're not things past. So maybe the future operates the same way, but I can only, I suppose, speculate on that.

Suzanne Kite:

No, that's true. I agree. That's totally valid. I think the questions that come up for me are about, I mean, most of these questions are formed around anxiety of making things with computational

materials, and wanting to, as we understand more and more about the real material cost of doing anything with technologies right now, how disconnected they are from reality.

Jackson 2bears:

They have a cost, right? A huge cost ethically, yeah. Yeah. Environmentally, all those things. Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. I honestly do not know how to particularly grapple with that. I don't know. Is that part of what your research is looking at, in terms of-

Suzanne Kite:

Well, I'm not qualified to analyze. I mean, one answer that I hear about dealing with this as artists is, well, one thing I was swayed myself with, is that we just invented computers. Computers are very new, and we don't have to keep it. Hopefully it's just going to be a blip on the radar that we used mind materials like this, and that we'll invent something new very quickly. So I mean, maybe that's what's interesting to me about making instruments. It's this beginning impetus. It is such a good place to start. The Lakhóta, we get our songs from prairie chickens. Prairie chickens first and foremost I think that knowledge comes from, and then it's very clear the ethics. You listen to the land and the air, the ethics become really obvious. You have to listen to get the song. So I hope that there's a similar way to answer this for making technology, even if it doesn't seem obvious right now. Yeah.

Jackson 2bears:

Yeah. Maybe we're just not aware of the spirits that possess our technology. Maybe that's the problem. We spent thousands of years, where our people get masks from, for instance, it had do with talking to the trees. Or you dreamed them first, and then you go talk to the tree and you know how to talk to this tree, and that's where you carve your mask from. There's a whole process, takes several months, and you're feeding the thing tobacco and you've got the corn mush. There's a whole series of things that happen that spent thousands of years to develop, thousands of years. These masks are eventually made, And these masks, for instance when I was back home recently, we were talking about these four masks that were made in Six Nations territory after our people had been moved there, and they're supposed to control the winds and stuff in that territory. They've been taken now by various museums, they're split across the world.

Jackson 2bears:

But anyway, we're talking about them and how many years it took to develop that and develop that technology, essentially, to help control the wins. Those took thousands of years of I'm speaking to those trees, and those organic things, and those spirits. So maybe it's about that. Maybe it's just about now, at this moment, as you said, that particular technology is so new, we just don't know how to talk to those spirits just yet. So maybe the instrumentation, maybe that's a nice way to think about it, is that those forms of instrumentation are what, again, in a kind of way, it's like making instruments out of those things is a way to think technology non

technologically. It's about forming a different kind of relationship with that thing that is not necessarily the same as we normally think about how technology is meant to operate.

Jackson 2bears:

All the things that we do now with computers were never part of their original design. None of that stuff was part of its original computational machines, but now they do all kinds of stuff, video editing, and they've transformed stuff in very significant ways. But maybe it's about that in some ways. I guess that's maybe why, I mean, I've been interested for a long time. I've been doing only site-specific work now, because place has become more and more and more and more important to me. I used to do that live cinema piece. I'd travel all over the place. Didn't really matter where I went, I would go perform and do other stuff, but now places become integral to the point where the artwork couldn't be shown anywhere other than the place that it was made for.

Jackson 2bears:

We're talking about the same sort of things here now. We've been scanning these Blackfoot objects from the British museum, and we're wondering how to share those scans, the 3D scans with the community. Rather than just putting them up anywhere online, we've been trying to make these little localized area networks where you'd have to go to the place to actually see the thing, to access that data, to access that information. Not only to protect it so people can't steal it and throw it into a video game, but also to redirect to a centralized momentary element of place. So maybe it's about our return to some of those things, a return to some of those. Again, this idea of things taking time. They were just part of that cycle. It wasn't always that our people knew how to talk to those trees to make masks with them. People like us perhaps spent a few generations to figure that out.

Jackson 2bears:

I have no problem in this confused moment of being one of those many people over the centuries that take time to figure this thing out. So it's a nice way to think about that, again, as part of continuum, as part of learning. Some people place, I think, far too much emphasis on this present moment. I know that's important to do that, but too much emphasis I think distorts one's view. It's like those camera lenses that are too warped on either side. So I don't know. That's an interesting way to think about it.

Suzanne Kite:

No, that's a really good point. Yeah. I think it was my grandfather who told me this, or maybe it was my aunt, where they said that, "When you find a stone, you spend your whole life looking for a particular stone, and it spends its whole life looking for you." But what just messes with my head is how old stones are. Millions of years reforming and reforming, and then to think that it's looking its whole life is pretty mind blowing.

Jackson 2bears:



Yeah. I know. Have you ever talked to Michael Bellmore about this stuff? He's really, really cool. Because he works with stone and all this stuff, and he was talking about stones over their life. They travel across these massive distances, right? It just takes them a millennia or whatever to move these few feet or whatever. But they're constantly in motion. They're always moving. The way that our narrow vision, we look at a stone and it seems like it's just fricking sitting there. But as a matter of fact, if you see it at a different non-human scale, that stone has moved all over this huge geographical area in a different kind of capacity. I like that too, the ideas of scale and stuff is really interesting. Not to mention, I was just thinking about that, but that John Cage piece that he made, that composition that's supposed to last 99 years or something. I think the third note was just played a year ago or something. Next one's not for another few years. So it's this different glacial, global scale.

Jackson 2bears:

I think maybe our ancestors knew how to think that way. I know we've seemingly lost that ability a lot to be able to see. It seems a lot in a lot of ways, our vision is narrowed to this very, for lack of a better word, human centric perspective on the world. It seems like a lot of people, a lot of friends that I have and other Native artists, people that I know are constantly trying to think outside of that stuff. How do we think about non-human ways of thinking about us? Actually, because that's what we hear about. That's what we hear about whenever I go home and I hear about what my Haudenosaunee ancestors were doing. I try to find strategies and ways to do that now, because I realize how limited my way of seeing the world is. It's like they had a different approach to that stuff, that I think was a glacial scale or something, or a different global universe scale, and it seems, now, a very narrowed way of receiving that stuff.

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah. Wow. I mean, I might cut us off now, because this is already a lot. But yeah, it is very, very interesting. Yeah, I think that's one aspect of thinking about stones that I haven't factored in, a serious look at timescale, the reality of that. I mean, there's this concept in Lakhóta cosmology where you have a cone shape, it's like the twisty vortex and it's like an hourglass where there's the timescale of the stars and the timescale of the locations on the sacred sites, everything lines up. It's perfectly mirrored. Where we're really confused now is we don't move on that cycle. We don't go camp to camp, and so how can we be on, we're totally off schedule, you know? So it's much more difficult to think star time, stone time. Yeah.

Jackson 2bears:

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, some of our older people, when I go back home, know how to talk about that stuff. Again, it's best we know to be able to learn from that as much as we can and pass that on, maybe, in some kind of ways. I do, however, think there's lots of value in pursuing the things that you're doing. I'd like to think there's value in doing the things that I do. There's value in that sort of stuff, I think, those kinds of communications. It had to be the first groups of people going to those trees to talk to them, and it had to be the first groups of people that go do that, that didn't know what they were doing, to pass that stuff on.

Jackson 2bears:

I think those ideas of change, transformation, all that stuff Leroy's always talking about. Transformation of ceremony, ideas and that stuff. All that stuff is still part of that larger story, I guess. But yeah, I think the scale is a really, really important one to think about. I think that's where you start to think spatially, right? You can't think about that as a temporal dimension anymore almost, at that moment. I think our old people know how to do that really well.

Suzanne Kite:

Wow. I'm going to stop the recording.

Jackson 2bears:

Okay.

### **8.2.7 Santee Witt, Interview Transcript**

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah. But I guess I should introduce myself to you. I'm Suzanne Kite, and Bill Stover is my grandfather, but I was raised in California because my grandmother was Carol Jean Mesteth and she had Cynthia Friedman and they're both... she was adopted and I was adopted. But I come back a lot. Came back and found everybody.

Santee Luke Witt:

Right.

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah, yeah. When I stand here my mom is Katt Stover. She's also my great-aunt, but...

Santee Luke Witt:

Oh, okay.

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah. And then Clementine Bordeaux and Mary Bordeaux are my aunts through marriage.

Santee Luke Witt:

Yeah. Okay.

Suzanne Kite:

So yeah. But yeah, let's start with introductions for the recording. Who you are and where you're from.

Santee Luke Witt:

My name's Santee Witt and I grew up in Allen, South Dakota, Pass Creek community of the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. Born and raised right there. My Lakḥóta name was Wiyaka Tokahe which translates to a Leading Feather. A proper introduction of me would be like, Santee Witt emaciyape, chante waste cheyuzapi, Sharp's Corner el wathi, that's where I live now, reside here in el wathi is home. I'd greet you with a proper handshake good to meet you. And obviously as you know we're all related somehow, on the rez and it's good to meet relatives.

Santee Luke Witt:

Yeah, born and raised there and grew up around the ways. Like I said, it's like a walk, since I can remember, I've always been, I was introduced to it was... But yeah, I grew up in Allen, where my grandfather was Jimmy DuBrays grandmother Florine DuBray. They were well known for their spiritual practices. And of course on the other side, my dad's side, my grandparents were Daniel Witt Junior, and Eva Witt Goes in Center. So I have family goes out to Wanblee area. I did a lot of my own history of where I come from and I consider myself a little bit of a mixed blood.

Santee Luke Witt:

Mostly I grew up traditionally, but as I look back on my time in history, the name Witt and Duprees and my lineage. So I looked at it and there were fur traders who came over and snagged up on Lakḥóta women. Our vicious Lakḥóta women, irresistible. So anyway, that's kind of where it comes about, but nevertheless, I've always grew up native culture, Lakḥóta ways, traditional ceremonies. There's a great medicine man by the name of Dawson Has No Horse, and of course our Chief Fools Crow. Those were prominent leaders back in the days as far as making headway of praying with all men.

Santee Luke Witt:

Today it's more like, the way I see it is, everyone wants to... they're really closed minded. There's so much within our ways going on right now. It's flourished, it's good, but at the same time in there, there's a lot of egos going on and that's not part of our culture, it's not what we're... Especially whenever they benefit off of the ways as far as their own selfishness and money and things like that. So those things are a whole other topic.

Santee Luke Witt:

But just saying I grew up pretty legit in the ways, and I seen how the grandfathers did it. We were humble. Old broken-down truck, old shack. But always pray, hold on in our prayer. Wake up in the morning and pray with nature. So that's what I've always seen. So growing up I seen my

grandfather. Like I said, he's Sun Dance chief. He was a minister. He walked with all faiths. I kind of have that in me. I seen the way he did things and seen some of the elders, how they done things, and man, it was something that I held onto, and I'm still holding onto and trying to teach. So I dedicated my life and I went to school for art, went to France for art.

Suzanne Kite:

Oh, wow.

Santee Luke Witt:

It was all for art at first, when I was young age. This kind of way I'm going on, my life, or what, is this good?

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah. No, this is great. I mean, I didn't know-

Santee Luke Witt:

It's not even background, who I am.

Suzanne Kite:

No, because I thought, this is all art stuff, this is all about art, so yeah.

Santee Luke Witt:

Well, that's cool, because yeah, I was always... Well, first of all, when I was a kid, I was, how do you say, a prodigy, because I was a dancer. I was a traditional dancer boy maybe at three, four years old, I was kicking it out with my dancing, and everybody was like, "How can this kid dance like that? He has this rhythm." I had my own style. But I always had that with me as a kid, and I was such a quiet kid. My mom raised me a single mother, only child to my mom. I never had any brothers or sisters. She raised me, so I never had siblings. That's probably where a lot of... I had a lot of spiritual friends around me growing up. Wanagis I used to call them. I had imaginary friends and things like that. My mom would tell me some of these stories about me playing with people that weren't there, entities, whatever, but that's just part of life.

Santee Luke Witt:

But regardless I grew up with, I had cousins, a lot of cousins, that I considered brothers and sisters, so I always had people around. My dad, he didn't raise me and he wasn't too much in my life, but I got to know who he was and make a relationship with him, but he was lost in his ways, addictions and what-not. I still knew him. Unfortunately he passed at a young age, so he didn't get to see a lot of accomplishments I had really. My mother, she raised me tough. She would

always give it to my uncles to give me that part, because I never had a dad, so she would just throw me to the wolves, as far as my uncles were tough with me.

Santee Luke Witt:

They helped raise me. My grandfather helped raise me. It was a tough upbringing. But at the same time it was good, because traditional. So I got to go through the rites of passage, like at 13 years old, and I've always been involved in a Sun Dance, so I could wlaak. At four years old they took me out there and they pierced my ears, and they give me the things at that time.

Understandings. So I had knowledge growing up, as a young kid. The people would tell me, "Oh you were always knowledgeable for a young guy," but serious too. I was engaged and I always observed what was going on, observed a lot. Such a quiet kid, but always wanted to see what was going on around me.

Santee Luke Witt:

Especially within the ceremonial ways, I really caught on. See what these men were doing, what they were about. The peyote ways of my grandfather, he was a peyote priest at one time, and I have lineage and bloodlines that ties to the peyote ways. Allen community is one of the first places it was brought to. There's a lot of history. A lot of history. So in there, walking around, on my bike, hearing my grandfather, he was a pesha maker and he would listen to peyote music in his room and I was like, "What is that, grandpa?" "That's our music." "Tell me about it."

Santee Luke Witt:

But he wasn't active in it at the time. But on my own, in my little village there, I would run my bike, and I heard... in the house one evening. "What is that song, man? I know that song. My grandpa plays that song." So I heard that and I was like, man, it just drew me. It drew me to the point of, "I have to know what it is. It's calling me." What I heard was the drum beat.

Suzanne Kite:

Water drum.

Santee Luke Witt:

Water drum. This is an elk hide and this is a brass kettle. Many songs on this...tie it down to a water. Lot of meanings behind it. So that called me. First I heard it, so I walked in and said, "What's going on?" I was a kid, probably like eight, nine years old. "Oh, we're having prayers here. We're having a peyote meeting." A member of the church was getting ready to start it. "Oh," I said. It was like elders and a grandma. It was older people. He was like, "You could be a part of it, you know." I said, "Yeah, I like that." He was like there is a fire outside. Right away they made me be a fire helper. "You got to help the fire man because he needs a helper. All you got to do is follow directions. It's going to be all night long."

Santee Luke Witt:

I go home then. I was excited. "Mom" "Well, go ahead. Whose house is it?" I told her. "Oh yeah, that's your Lekshi. Go do it. That's good things." So they helped me get ready. They put a little... they dressed good. You had to look nice in the church. I was happy to be a part of something great. Sure enough, when I ate the medicine, that's what kind of... boom, you know. But all night long, my grandfather's...

Santee Luke Witt:

It just led me to... It called me right there, and then they said, this person right there, if this young man comes near you, so this young man's going to hear you. I want to learn these songs, I want to learn these ways. Then when you eat a lot of that medicine, I threw up and everything. "Eat more, it's good. Teaching you right." Sure enough, by morning I see things in a totally different way.

Santee Luke Witt:

As a young kid, to have your eyes opened like that, to feel you're in this place with these elders and you see things and know things, like maybe I shouldn't be doing, or comprehend, whatever. But I liked it. Ever since then I've been in it, and they took me in, the relatives, and to this day I am a peyote priest myself. I'm an ordained minister in the Native American Church, I have paperwork, I got the everything. I have done burials. I have the authority to do marriages, baptisms, but I didn't pick that out just yet. The baptismal, there's somebody for me to walk later in life because I don't want to pick... it's a tough road, you know.

Suzanne Kite:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Santee Luke Witt:

But I know I am a prayer leader. I do peyote meetings. They need a helper, any member of the church can call on me now. So I carry that, walk with that. My daughters help me out with the morning blessing. So it's like a family in prayer, and I love it because my kids, my boys, learned how to drum from me, and my older boy, he's back visiting he was 21. So they take care of fire. It's like a family unit with this fire. I don't know if you're familiar with the Native American Church or not.

Suzanne Kite:

A little bit, yeah. We're coming from Oklahoma, so-

Santee Luke Witt:

Okay, yeah.

Santee Luke Witt:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. So it's all... Here, people guard it and we pray with it, all tribes, from the universal two tribes. One, it grows in Texas, Mexico. It's huge for us to use. It's a gift. But there's so much to it. That's a whole other conversation. To walk with. Like I said, we've been versatile and...

Santee Luke Witt:

All right. My son. So, like I said, there's so much to... growing up here with the Sun Dance ways, the church, my dad being Catholic, I was baptized Catholic. I know the Wowake Wakhan Bible and everything. To me, the entire, it all connects. People don't realize. And so you have all these Christians and these people saying, "The Sun Dance is bad. They're worshiping a false idol. That's bad, what they're doing. This is the only way." And then you have your traditionalists saying, "These guys, they killed our people. They used this way to rape and pillage, to hurt our people, to wipe us out. They used that Bible to do that." And you have that argument, you have that with the hate.

Santee Luke Witt:

So there's a lot of different ways of looking at it. There's just so many different, I tell people one-sided. It only takes a certain heart, a certain mind, understanding, to know that it all connects. You guys all don't see it. Nobody hardly sees it. But Creator God Tunkashila Wakan Tanka, he's a great mystery. He put so much for us on this earth, but it's up to us to understand, to grasp it, to take it, to live it, to walk with it. So I've come to know that from these old... Our old people, they knew these things. They were so in tune, so connected. That's why I dedicated my life to being a teacher. I got educated. I said, "I got to dedicate our life to showing our youth about what's going on, and what they need to... how to walk about to be a Lakǰóta, modern day Lakǰóta."

Santee Luke Witt:

So that's what I did. I've always been involved in education. I've worked with special education and autism, special needs, but my path took me to where I'm at now, which is seven miles from here in the Lakǰóta Waldorf school. I'm going on like four years out there now. It's been awesome. Everything connected. If there was a position made for me, that would be it. They gave me freedom to do whatever I want. They gave me a classroom. They didn't throw a curriculum at me, it's like, "What do you want to do? How you want to teach these kids the culture and what you know?"

Santee Luke Witt:

And I created the position. All over the rez was always just language, Lakǰóta language teachers, never culture. Just language teachers and they gave them these coloured sheets of how to say colours in Lakǰóta, and how to say numbers. Just simple stuff and it's so big schools it's hard to reach these kids, and these teachers are overwhelmed and there's only one teacher for the whole

300, 400 kids. It's not working. For years it hasn't been working. You can't teach like that. You can't teach these kids language like that.

Santee Luke Witt:

So here at Lakhóta Waldorf, a small setting private school. Everybody knows about it, but the whole concept is teach the kids around the culture. Culture first. Language first. So I said, "Well, I'm going to be culture. I'm going to show these kids who they are, culture, identity." I'm not even beat around the bush about the older ones, the eighth graders or seventh graders, about how we got to this point where we're at. It's tough. It's a bad history. But they need to know it, to really, truly know. So I teach all that, history, the songs, the music, the culture, the dance, you name it, on a daily basis. Star knowledge.

Santee Luke Witt:

So much to being Lakhóta. You can say you got the blood. "I'm a 100 percent full blood." But does that really make you Lakhóta? Or you can be mixed blood, iyeska, half-breed, some new blood in you, but if you've lived a Lakhóta way of life, I reckon you're Lakhóta. Lakhóta is a way of life. I grew up that way and I seen relatives who just moved here like 10 years ago, learned the language, and they'd be, "I'm Lakhóta!" They'd get these big heads. You're not Lakhóta. Maybe you are, but you're on the wrong way. But you can't really tell people that. I had to humble a lot of people. Because I don't do that. I grew up, and I don't go around saying, "I'm Lakhóta!"

Santee Luke Witt:

More or less, I just try to help these younger kids find themselves, find out there is a pathway, find out that you are something great. You come from a great ancestry, you come from a great people. You are the keepers of this land. Hasapa is the center of the universe, heart of everything there is. There's so much teachings in that, and we are the keepers of that. We are some great people.

Santee Luke Witt:

Yeah, it all ties in, and I tell these kids, man, it's such a great thing that you guys are part of. You got to know this. Don't even try to... how do you say... associate with other cultures, which is all right, but they got to remember who they are. And the language is the... our fireplaces, our sacred fireplaces, are the key. I tell people that. That is where it's at. Because we are the Seven Council Fires. We are Teton Nation, we are Oglála Scatters Their Own. So they got to know all this. We come from clans, we come from warrior societies. We had all that go somewhere along the way, but we got to get that back.

Santee Luke Witt:

We got to get these lawyer societies back going, to be this modern day lawyer, and these songs, the drum, and that's where it's at. That's the way I walk with. These drums, the big drums, the ways, the songs. That all ties in to how we're going to carry on and keep going, and so these kids



need to know that. These children, not just my kids who I reach out to, all kids, all youth. I have mentored young adults in their 20s, teenagers, to young ones. Not just that, but elders, because we can't forget about elders, they're like kids too. So they need help, they need our attention and they need our love, and that's what we're supposed to be about, Lakhóta.

Santee Luke Witt:

All Lakhóta, there's a reason why we call it that. Our values. We lost a lot of that along the way, but we're trying to get that back. It all ties with our elders. They're the ones who know, they're knowledge keepers. They know. And our kids, they can teach us so much. But I taught other men, "Man, you guys got to step up now." We got to make a movement. We got to get everything going for these kids. Get these addictions out of here. That's our modern day enemy now. They gave us so... they took so much from... We got all the smallpox, so this COVID thing was like, yeah, it's nothing new. Tried to wipe us out before.

Santee Luke Witt:

So now, it's just the modern day battles, but now you got methamphetamines, you got alcohol, suicides, all these things that are weighing our people now, but we can get past it. Prayers, Sun Dances, our ways are getting stronger. So that's why I come in with the drum. I've always walked with it. I haven't really found it till maybe in my early 20s, the power and the medicine that was given to me. So it was all derived from the universe and everything and it's been a good road, man. There's been stories I can tell behind that drum. Things I have sung. Things I have felt. It was pretty cool.

Santee Luke Witt:

So I'm trying to share that. When I run my meetings, that's what I bring. I bring all that power, like everything, that energy that I've felt all the years. Everything these elders that fed me, I'm feeding that back to the people. Then the spirits come in and they help. That's where it's at. So I make all these songs. I start making songs along the way, and somewhere along the way... If you want to ask me anything.

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah.

Santee Luke Witt:

I just wanted to tell you that-

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah, definitely about songs.

Santee Luke Witt:

That's where it's at now.

Santee Luke Witt:

... and go from there, but see? That creativity has always been with me because I made pow wow songs to begin with. Since I found out I could sing, I was making pow wow songs, cultural songs. Somewhere along the way, it went to the prayer songs. And once I started making these prayer songs, man. It just you know, people followed it and they're like, just knew it. There's something special here, something good is happening.

Santee Luke Witt:

So then at a young age I started becoming known as you know, this composer and my songs are always utilized in the ceremonies and Sun Dance. It became this power and became a movement. It became anthems. These songs were literally, traveled, and they'd start in other tribes, other Sun Dances. That's when you're like, "Man, there's something powerful going on here. There's something beyond me that's going on."

Santee Luke Witt:

And then my songs started being used in Native American church. They start taking the Sun Dance songs, I start hearing people making them into Peyote songs. But it had this bridge... I've always done that. I could take a Peyote song and make it into a Sun Dance song. Take a Sun Dance song and make it into a Peyote song. Take my song and could work either way, and that's where I'm bridging everybody. See? We're all connected. We're all, there's something going on with people here and I'm trying to be this bridge to tell people, "Man, it's all connected."

Santee Luke Witt:

Even in Native American church, I use the Bible wanike. Our lord savior, Jesus, was the man. He walked this earth, he shared good things. He came from somewhere good; that's all I know. However you look at it, he was here. You know, he walked this earth.

Suzanne Kite:

Have you ever composed with multiple people? Have you ever written a song, not just you?

Santee Luke Witt:

Like collaborated?

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah.

Santee Luke Witt:

Yeah, yeah. Yeah. You know how many times people send me stuff on my phone? Different singers? "I have this idea. Help me out." I try to, I'll throw what I can in there and help them, but I say, "That's your song. Don't even say I helped you."

Suzanne Kite:

You're a ghost writer.

Santee Luke Witt:

Yeah, for real. And then people would take a little bit of my song and make a song out of it, you know? "Bro, I took your song, a little bit of it. Is that okay? And I made a song." Like, "Yeah, that's all right."

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah, because I feel like that would be really amazing to get people together. Because I'm interviewing lots of people and it'd be really interesting to try to make one song because Mary's, you know, they just built that new recording studio. And I think it would be to try to take people who are a little further disconnected. I don't know, I'm talking to you, I'm talking to a bunch of family members and Mary told me, I'm going to go try to see Mike Marshall. I don't know him, though.

Santee Luke Witt:

Yeah, one thing my dad taught me is to play guitar and melodies. He'd sing to me. When I'd go visit him, at my bedside when I'd go to sleep I was kind of like, used to my mom. You know, I had to go back and forth, see him on weekends, whatever. But he wasn't traditional at all. But he did play guitar, so he would get a guitar and play for me while I sleep. He would play Beatles songs, country songs, 70s, whatever. But he was just singing and as a kid I caught onto that, the chords and the melodies.

Santee Luke Witt:

So at a young age, he encouraged me to sing too. He's like, guitar was like... I don't know, one day he had his karaoke machine out and that was it. I don't know how old I was. I was a kid, like just got my deep voice, though. When you're 15 or something, like got out of puberty. It was all right, but he was like, "You'll be learning the song," and he taught me some chords. He was kind of an alcoholic and he was always just very moved. But at the time I didn't know that. I was just kind of... He was hiding his drinking, but I didn't know that part. But he taught me how to play guitars and chords. And he's like, "You're going to... A George Strait song. You're going to ham this, okay?" And he taught me how to do it, Amarillo By Morning. "Keep doing it, keep doing it." And we kept practicing.

Santee Luke Witt:

"Okay, now we're going to do it." He said, "Get that mic." I put the thing on, started out and I was like, "All right." He's like, "Sing it." And it sounded pretty cool and I said, "Hey, that sounds all right, doesn't it?" He's like, "It does!" He said, "You have a voice!" He said, "You have a good voice." So he encouraged me then, and ever since then I found I had a voice.

Santee Luke Witt:

And then like I said, creativity though, I wrote songs like that all the time. So, it wasn't just personal. I didn't create it or do something just to be creative. I was always an artist, a painter, the creative side of life. Poetry, you name it. I did a lot of poetry. I just wrote a play for my school.

Suzanne Kite:

Do you think that like, because I feel like a lot of Lakhóta people... I mean, not everybody's just an artist, but it seems to me that art is how we make our knowledge.

Santee Luke Witt:

Yeah, look at our regalias. How we, everything was songs. Everything was dance. Everything was creativity. Everything, our teepees. Before colonization, how much art was in our people. We were living art. You know, our music, our songs. That's what I'm trying to hold onto. A lot of us, we're all artists here, you know? Our people. Look at our dance. You see our people dance at pow wows. You see that rhythm, that drum, the heartbeat. You see the colours, that's all art. Living, moving art.

Santee Luke Witt:

All these people. So you have the songs, you just got to connect yourself and that's what I do because I'm connected with Tunkashila and I connect with myself. That's why I have this energy. That's why I can create these songs.

Suzanne Kite:

So when you sit down to write a new song, you smudge, you pray and you sit, you meditate and then wait?

Santee Luke Witt:

Mm-hmm (affirmative), and it'll come in. But also like yesterday, it's crazy because believe me or not, but I wake up every morning and I open my window and I have my tree there. And I'm so happy I have a tree. I don't know why I'm so proud of my little tree. I talk to it and the birds, but I have birds in my wall. I found out I have birds in there. So the other day, they're chirping on,

they're scratching on it, but early morning they start singing and I get up. Like, "Wake me up, get up."

Santee Luke Witt:

So I open my window and I'll come in here, and I'll burn sage, and I'll greet the sun, I'll pray. And I go in that room, and I'll sit there and I just kind of feel the breeze and go meditate. Sit on the edge of my bed. So I seen this post on Facebook; I'll scroll on Facebook. Do a positive post, try to be encouraging because a lot of people vent to me and tell me about things in their life. I try to all on a whole, encourage everybody, you know?

Santee Luke Witt:

So anyway, I sit there and I'm thinking yesterday, I seen this post, says, "June, our Sun Dances are opening up. Now it's time to pray." It's like, "Yes, it is. I can feel it." So I start singing a song outside my window, a good morning song, you know? So I start singing it; it's just good morning song. Talks about honoring the sun. You hear these birds, man, right outside my window. They're chirping. All the sudden when I sing this song, they start chiming in with like the Sun Dance whistles. Have you been to Sun Dance before?

Suzanne Kite:

Hmm-mm (negative).

Santee Luke Witt:

You never been to Sun Dance before?

Suzanne Kite:

No.

Santee Luke Witt:

Oh, my God.

Suzanne Kite:

I know.

Santee Luke Witt:

Anyway, everybody blows these whistles at the Sun Dance, all these Sun Dances at the same time when the song's going. Drum's going. Then these whistles. Then they're trying to... All at the same time. Eagle bone whistles like, 300 dancers at the same time. There's a certain rhythm to it and these birds are doing it, and they sound just like that as I was singing this song. So it's

Creator speaking to me. I said, "Ah, these spirits, these birds, everything is here. Something powerful's going on."

Santee Luke Witt:

So I knew right then and there, everything's going to be okay. Have a powerful season. So you know, Creator speaks to me all the time in those subtle ways; I just got to listen. Everybody, He can speak to everybody. They say, "How come I can't speak to them? He doesn't listen to me. How come he don't hear me, hear my prayers?" You just got to be connected. You got to really be in tune with yourself first. Be at peace with yourself first. Then he can speak to you, and you will go hear him.

Santee Luke Witt:

He's not going to just directly speak to you like this. He may speak to you like signs and things. You can feel it. So I know He speaks to me all the time. If you're not connected and you're having a hard time in life, if you feel lost in your own sorrows or whatever, well pitifulness or whatever; it doesn't work that way. Our people were never like that, you know? We always got to be strong and resilient, press on. No matter what happens, and especially in this modern day life. It's so hard today. We have so many distractions. Everything's so fast and so different. So we've got to adapt. Our people are adaptable. And we have.

Suzanne Kite:

Don't want to take up too much of your time, but-

Santee Luke Witt:

It's all good. You know, I'm trying to give you like the... There's so much more to everything, but I'm just trying to give you a good understanding. A lot of it's kind of hard to express.

Suzanne Kite:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Santee Luke Witt:

And that's how, I speak the language. I'm one of the last in my generation to hold onto the language. And even me, I'm learning more and more and it's like I know the different dialects and ...I'm glad I can have that. I wish more people my age would pick it up, just the kids. I'm kind of mad at my mom because she never taught me, but I just caught on once I learned it. My mom never really pushed it that much.

Santee Luke Witt:

So it's something I had to pick up in my songs. I'm just like, "I got to know this language." So I forced myself to really catch on really learn more, and now I'm playing with it. But it took a lot of self-discipline and learning to use it. Like, we can't do that, you know, do that, you know? Come on, this is who you are. You've got to admit it, but I'm just trying to share the love with the music. The ways of the people. It's a beautiful way of life, man.

Santee Luke Witt:

I go to pray in Denver next weekend. The people really like me over there, so kind of like celebrity status almost. But I liked it. It's cool, because I pray for them over there, I run lodge over there and I'm doing a Peyote meeting over there soon. But they were really appreciate it. They're like, "Man." I pray for people down here all the time, but it's a different kind of level over there. People down here, you know, it's all good too. I get so much love and so much appreciation, you know? When I go to Sun Dance, if I'm going... I get invited to every one, but I can't make it to everyone.

Suzanne Kite:

Which one do you go to?

Santee Luke Witt:

I go to almost all of them. I try to make at least a day or two here and there. But literally down the road from here, down this road, Geronimo Bow, the Denver Valley, they have theirs. Then the bigger ones that you go, right? And straight across the road you got Pinot Garcia; he has a pretty big one. Then right now, just a few weeks later just a few miles down there is a guy named Doug Patton, who's having his.

Santee Luke Witt:

So they're all different times, but I go help out. I go up and down this road, the Porcupine. There's dances out there but there's a lot of them. I can't make them all, which is two or three meetings, but when I do show up, people just get stoked. "He's here, he's here." And I don't like that because I don't want to be like that. No, I'm a guy. "He's here! He's here! Come in the VIP!" And all that. It's like, "Yeah, whatever."

Santee Luke Witt:

But then the people say, I heard it before when I was younger, "He's just a recording artist. He put these songs on YouTube and he's sounding out, whatever." You know, so these are my songs. I said, "They're my creations. My artistry, too. Regardless the prayer's in there, but I'm a share it." And people got known, too. That's why I document on Facebook and Sound Cloud. So people know I made these songs. They steal them, so they're documented right there, saying I made that song.

Santee Luke Witt:

At the same time, they say, "Well, what about these Wasichus? They're going to sing your song." That's all right. If they sing it with the right heart... They say, "You're not going to sing it the way I do, or the way you do, but they could chop it up. But if they sing it with a good heart and a good voice, man, that's good. You could use it. They could sing with it. It's what it is. I don't care who sings my song. Wasichu or what not." I say, "The power is there. You can sing it. If they learn it, they know it, they connect with it. They can sing it and they can use it in prayer, however."

Santee Luke Witt:

I get so many people that respect that, "Can I cover your song?" Maracle, Spotted Bear's cover of that song? Did you hear that one?

Suzanne Kite:

Hmm-mm (negative).

Santee Luke Witt:

Man.

Suzanne Kite:

I'll look it up.

Santee Luke Witt:

Yeah, look up Maracle Spotted Bear. She sings one of my songs, did a cover. Man, it's just a beautiful song. But yeah, like that you know? And the music just, it's getting out there and I'm just now getting started. I haven't even released an album. All the stuff I'm putting on Sound Cloud and YouTube was just, for me, it was like, "Man, these are just the..." How do you say? When you're going to have a meal, but you have something before it. Appetizers!

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah, you got to record.

Suzanne Kite:

...I have are about songs. I mean, we know on a very unspoken level when we ask, "Oh, you wrote a new song. Where does it come from?" And it's clear that it comes not from us, but from elsewhere. It comes from the unknowable. But articulating that or making that clear, talking about that, I think is what kind of obsesses me. Where can we say when I ask my grandfather, I'm like, "Oh, where does the song come from?" And he's like, "Oh, it comes from in here." But



what he means is it's coming through here. So I think that that's kind of what my questions are about. Then I guess when you're talking about the Black Hills and how they're the center of the universe, and all things come from there. I think that that's what's interesting about Íjyaŋs. The stones are so old and they come find us, but I'm trying to understand the connection between how we're able to learn from these stones and song. Because I know that there's a relationship between them, but it's just hard to understand.

Santee Luke Witt:

That's a good question. Because after you told me about that, I started thinking about it. Yes, that doesn't make sense. It's all connected. Yeah, exactly. Our creation story tells us that he was one of the ones here and how everything came about. And how he did derive out of the wind cave, the breath of life woniya, woniya wakhan. The sacred breath. That's where we're at today. The way I look at it [Íjyaŋ] on the rock, the stone, the oldest. They say they're grandfathers Tunkas, Tunkashilas, Kakas] old grandpas. They've been around forever and ever. They're still. But when you utilize them, everything was given to us. Our seven sacred rites by Pte Sa Win and we had our Chanunpa and how to take care of that Chanunpa. Before that, it was very, very hard.

Santee Luke Witt:

Everything was kind of already there, but the path was clear where we need to go and just these are things that are going to help us. And so in there we got our Chanunpa and in there we have our Inipi and in there, Inipi signifies renewal. We use the Íjyaŋs and that's where we connect. That's where a lot of our base of strength in yourself is that. So you heat these rocks up and they get hot and then you bring them in and then they're there. And you Inipi right? So you feel the heat, you feel the energy. And the elements. The elements come in. You have the water and the fire and we're sitting there, but the lodge is a lot more than what you think.

Santee Luke Witt:

This looks like a circle below it. It goes below us too. It's really hard to explain, but basically it's a circle. Here we are feeding off the energy of the eons and we pour the water, you feel the steam, you feel good, you feel renewed, it cleanses you. But then there are the songs. My grandpa used to start out with Four Directions song. So we honor the directions, Tatiya Topa four winds, which is part of the elements, the wind. So in there we're having all these elements, we're respecting everything. And with the stones, they speak to us. And then whenever the heat, the steam and the glow, and you put the medicine on there, the smell, everything of it. There's a certain energy there and you feel the ancestors are talking to you. And there's that connection right there from the stones because they are the ancestors, they're old.

Santee Luke Witt:

So they're connecting with us. As we sit in, we're feeling that energy and then we go out and then we feel renewed. Like, "I feel good, I feel Waste." Then you're taking that energy out with you and you're emitting it to everybody. So it's all connected. And in there though, when I say songs, that's what I know about the Íjyaŋs. There's more to it than that. How our medicine and we pray

with stones. Sometimes we have seven stones, 12 stones, it depends. These stones, they become alive and they help. They help us pray and they're spirits. So are Yuwipi men, they know this. And so they use these stones to help they pray and their energies that they have.

Suzanne Kite:

So when they come alive and I've experienced this, is the song what does that? It's this process and there's an action that happens of transformation and something triggers that. So is it the song?

Santee Luke Witt:

It's kind of like there's magic in the song.

Suzanne Kite:

Right. So it's like a code or something.

Santee Luke Witt:

Yeah.

Suzanne Kite:

It's required.

Santee Luke Witt:

Yeah. It's required. You have to have the song.

Suzanne Kite:

But the song comes-

Suzanne Kite:

But the song comes from somewhere too. So you get the song from Creator-

Santee Luke Witt:

Spirits.

Suzanne Kite:

Or a spirit, a specific spirit of your Spirit Helper comes in, gives you your song. And then you're able to use that song to unlock more.

Santee Luke Witt:

You enter song and it's kind of a teamwork almost with the Yuwipi man and the finger. Kind of like teamwork almost. But Yuwipi man, he holds that. He's the one that's opening the portal, so to speak.

Suzanne Kite:

I know in the old, old, old days they used to steal each other's songs. They would have medicine men wars and steal their power.

Santee Luke Witt:

Yeah.

Suzanne Kite:

Because the song contains or is connected to certain spirits. So it's like a unit that can exist outside of human body or something. So you can take it.

Santee Luke Witt:

What it is, is these songs, they come from the spirits, the old. Then I heard before, when I was growing up, I used to sing these Sun Dance songs. And they'd say, "Yeah, there was seven original Sun Dance songs. We have these pipe filling songs, all these original songs." Then I asked as a kid, "Where do these songs come from?" "The spirits." "Who made these songs?" "Oh, so-and-so did." So then as I got older and I started making songs, it's newer songs. But I said, "Man, when that gentleman made that song back in 1960 or '50, it was a new song to him at that time." It was given to him it was fresh. And he shared it with the people and it is still alive today, it's still going.

Santee Luke Witt:

Style of songs I do are... But yeah, you're right. What these songs come from spirits directly, different entities that help the people, different ones. Whenever they call these spirits, they say, "The spirit is here, he is with us." And so he might have that song. And there's certain songs we change up the spirits. That's something that I walk with. So just like I go sing for different Yuwipi men. Beforehand, I get with them and I say, "Okay, what songs do you want to use? You can sing your song you want to use or what..." A lot of times, the universe is just always saying nowadays we're all coming, so there's these... We work with the Wakiyan Oyate. We work with the spirits, the stones, the drum, the songs, it all connects. And the Wakiyan Oyate is the one that I know.

Santee Luke Witt:

So anyway, those are the songs that I use. The sense of the word, there's a lot of things I can't talk about. I got to keep secrets, but in the sense of the word, these songs, yeah. We utilize them. I use the same ones, but I change up the spirit's name within the song. I'll say that much. So when I start the song, I call the spirit, but I'll call the spirit's name that the Yuwipi man wants me to call. But the song's the same melody. But just that that certain part, the verse of the song where I'll call that certain of spirit, that changes. But everything else is the same. And then there's a beat. You got to have a certain beat that the spirits will connect to. So there's song within itself. So it's a power.

Santee Luke Witt:

A couple of times I didn't do that. I didn't do the beat right when I was growing up. And the song writer, they told me, "You got to have that down right. That's the only way it's going to connect." So I grew that, wanted to know how to get that certain beat, that certain rhythm, the certain voice. A lot of people, a lot of youth that I know couldn't get it because I tell them. He said, "How come I can't get it? I'm a good singer. I have a good voice. I could sing the songs. How come I can't get it. What's going on? How come I can't make a song. I try to make a song. How come it comes so easy for you? I sat there for two days trying to make a song and I couldn't do it." I said, "Well, I don't know." But what I know from the past, and what I know from the ways is my songs, how they come to me." Does that kind of answer your question a little bit about the stones?

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah, it does. So it's interesting you talking about Christianity because my adopted mother is Christian and she and I talk, because I talk about stones a lot. There's the rock of ages and Jesus is a rock. And I've always thought that there's some... So my cousin was joking to me about this couple who got married by the pipes. And if they ever don't like each other, they're going to have to be together for forever and ever and ever. Because the pipe is so powerful, but the pipe is stone. It's like all of the things that are most important seem to be stone.

Suzanne Kite:

We come out of the cave, it's made of stone. We pray with the pipe, it's made of stone. The grandfathers, grandmothers are stone. And our spirit stones that come to us, it's so intimate. But I guess what I try to understand is sometimes they don't have spirits. And then at some point, they can potentially. And I think that that delineation, that line is... I want to know what it feels like when you know that it has a spirit versus when you're like, "Ah, none here. No one's home." You know what I mean?

Santee Luke Witt:

As a kid, my grandpa used to tell me he used to go to Bear Butte, the Hanbleciya, the vision quest every year. One of my fascination things as a kid to do was go collect stones and collect rocks, was one of my favorite things to do. I would just find the pretty ones, whatever. But one time I found this rock and it was just a perfectly round rock. I was a kid, but it connected to me

for some reason. I'm like, "Oh, this rock, something about it." Play with it and talk to it. Took it with me to sweat, held it. But I connected with it and held it. I didn't know why I was connected to this rock. It was so cool. It wasn't no shiny, pretty... It was just a brown rock. But I liked it because it was round. But that's when my grandpa, "Hey, grandpa." And this rock and hold it. He was like, "Yeah." He said, "Use it, play with it." He said, "It's with you now." So there was a connection, I didn't even know.

Suzanne Kite:

You just knew.

Santee Luke Witt:

But then he made me at the time Wota. And Wota is a...

Suzanne Kite:

Oh, yeah.

Santee Luke Witt:

So I had that as a kid. And I walked with that four or five years. I always had that. And kids make fun of me. "What is that?" I don't know. As a kid, everyone would have braids, long hair back in the day, that long hair went on. But me, I was always proud and I had long hair all the time, big thick glasses. Wota. I was like that with the stone, yeah. My grandpa told me, "Oh, he had found you, we found each other and he's going to help you and protect you." But see, I got connected with that at time. And even now I have rocks that I collected when I was a kid. And to even tie this drum, I got to have stones.

Suzanne Kite:

Right, right. Is it six? 12?

Santee Luke Witt:

Seven.

Suzanne Kite:

Seven.

Santee Luke Witt:

Seven rocks. So we tie this drum down with seven rocks, seven council fires. And then whenever we tie the rope down on the bottom here, there's going to be a... You kind of see a little bit. But this is always a star. A star on the bottom of it. Then we use the rocks inside sometimes. I have

my energy rocks that I have. I pray with them beside the water. So I have rocks that came to me growing up. Like you say, I just connect with these rocks. I'll be at a certain prayer. I prepare... One of my best things in life is to prepare for prayers, get ready and get the wood ready. Make fellowship brotherhoods and get things ready. A lot of times we're doing that, I come across rocks. I was always connected with nature. Our medicines are all around us. I teach that, everything that we need is Mother Nature's medicines. Toothaches, headaches, it's all there.

Santee Luke Witt:

But in there, you have these rocks. But you're observing. You're observing to take care of things, watch out, look out, be aware, be connected, use rocks to speak to me. They'll find you if you find them. Need to throw this one out, but here's one, I'll be like, "Real special, it's going to help you, energy." So it's about energy. So that's why I've always these rocks, always within my prayers. Exactly right? It's hard to really explain, but that's just the best way. Because I know these things, utilize it. And I seen my grandfather to take rocks out of people. Things like that. And so energy, we're all energy here. Energy in every one of us. So how you use that energy, how to strengthen energy, how to be one with your energy. That's why I think our people are suffering so much in addiction because they're not close to their energy.

Santee Luke Witt:

Our Lakhóta people were always spiritual. How do you say? There's something I tell my kids, we've always known that coming to this world, this is a spiritual experience. This is a spiritual experience on this earth. But a lot of people don't do that. It's all ego. And they forget that this is a spiritual experience. There's a lot of them struggle in this life, live life, live life. And only to find a little bit of a spiritual experience in their life. And that's empty. To me, that's not... You could have all the riches of the world, fancy cars and your big bank account, all these riches. But that's not going to help you in the end. You can have all that. That's good, but to feed your spirit, that's what you got to do.

Santee Luke Witt:

Our people always known that. So we've all stayed connected to the ancient Makha, Mother Earth, spiritual realms, walk with that, be that way. That's what is going to keep us connected. That's what makes you Lakhóta. Wake up every day being a spirit to Creator, to the sun. Wake up to that sun every day, greet that sun, make a prayer for your people. Pray with water, purity, walk and things like that and then just stay connected. So that's what I teach my kids at school is the four bodies of the medicine bowl. You have your physical, your mental, emotional, but above all, your spiritual. You got to feed all of those. Strengthen all those four bodies, especially in this modern times, the younger emotional, man. Younger guys, you got to feed those emotions and teach them how to deal with the world. But strengthening your spirit is always the main thing.

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah. I feel like one thing that I'm trying to understand is when... So the goal is to have this balance, to live in a good way and do things. The process, protocols, all of the steps you need. So

that's the goal, to live in a good way, be a good person. But it seems to me that I feel like the first step is observing the world, observing the way that... I was thinking about how songs, like a Prairie Chicken and you learn songs can be written. Then because you know that and because you know that the Prairie Chicken is a being, a real being, an important being outside of yourself, then you can eventually get to this good... You can see that that is done. The Prairie Chicken does make new songs in a good way. And if you just use that, then you can do the same.

Santee Luke Witt:

The way I look at it exactly. Growing up, like I said, I was always this quiet kid, but they took me to prayers all the time, ceremony, take my chakpa, my belly button. They put it in a turtle and they put in a ceremony. So in a way, they kind of groomed me almost. So kind of at a certain age, it took me to the yellow bear. I'll share you a story. And everyone I know, my siblings, my cousins, they tell me these things. I didn't even know. My older cousin, he was telling me. This is what we saw. But I don't even remember that. I couldn't speak, something was wrong with me. Four years old. I couldn't talk. I could speak kind of mute. I just didn't have much to say.

Santee Luke Witt:

So anyway, they were worried, my mom was worried and they took me to a really big prayer gathering that they had these Hanblechas, so powerful. Anyway, they said that there was these spirits that came to me and they gave me something and everybody could see these spirits. They came out of the trees or whatever. And they came to me and they talked to me and they gave me something and they left. And that's just what they tell me, but I don't know. But anyway after that, I guess I start have a drum and singing. Little hand drum. So they say my nickname was Bushman. "Hey Bushman, sing us a song." So 7, 8 years old. So I always had that in me to create. But the way I look at is I look at artists, I look at singers, I look at people who have these gifts, no matter what it is. And it's just God's love emitting through them.

Santee Luke Witt:

Some people aren't as close to God, the Creator like me. I've always loved Creator. I've always been close to him. Sun Dance. I want to know who he was. I was there. He's my Ate, my spiritual father was telling me Ate in heaven, he's there. So I've always stayed connected. Maybe because of that, he kind of give to me... Kind of to utilize me to help the people. This is the way I look at it in my heart. I think people who... That's why I tell people who say "How can I get this?" Just keep your heart pure. Open your heart and then the songs will flow. Don't force it, just have a good heart and then meditate. Talk to Tunkashila about the world.

Santee Luke Witt:

How you perceive the world and your love for the world and how you want to change it. And what can you do for the world? And these songs come to me. That's how they always come to me. And quite honestly, they just come to me. I'll sit there and I'll see something and I'll say a prayer. I'll see something good, or I feel something good or sad, and it'll just come out of me. That's why I forever have my voice recorder on my phone. I have about five, six year old voice

recorders laying around. So many songs on them. If I get the idea, inspired, I have a melody on the spot. "Oh, I got to put that down." And I'll put it down and it's just the base of the song. Just a lead. And then I'll get that and I'll go with that. Hold on. My daughter. Yeah.

### **8.2.8 Alex Firethunder, Interview Transcript**

Alex Firethunder:

So Melvin Young Bear, the porcupine singer guy, he lives right over there.

Suzanne Kite:

Oh, really? Yeah. Oh my gosh. When I teach, I teach... I'm not qualified, but I teach music of native North America, which is an insane sort of a class because it's ridiculous to try to teach all of North America in 10 weeks. But yeah, I spend a lot of time on Melvin Young Bear.

Alex Firethunder:

Oh, really?

Suzanne Kite:

Oh, yeah.

Alex Firethunder:

His dad is really famous, Severt.

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah.

Alex Firethunder:

Yeah

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah. We read that book of his, *Standing In The Light*. Yeah. Okay. But what we're doing right now is basically we're talking about how people make new songs, and protocols around that. And we'll record and I'll transcribe it, and then I'll send it to you, and you can change or delete or anything, you can remove your name, you can change it, you can have a fake name, you can do whatever you want, and before I analyze it, or try to summarize and combine what people say. So yeah, it's just a loose form conversation. I went to see my grandma Mary and she answered



one question for two hours, and yeah, yesterday, Santee answered all the questions in his own way slowly, and then someone I talked to yesterday answered every question one by one, so it's really up to you. And so we'll start with your introduction, and then yeah, I'll ask you some questions.

Alex Firethunder:

Lemiye Alex Firethunder emaciyapi. Lechiye Pejuta Haka el wathi. Lechi watikiyel uyankapi. wayunkha lecheemachakesni, New York hecta. Hecha emacha, Hetahan, inawayekin letahan, Debbie Firethunder echina, tiwahe kin he sokpa, 15 miles or so down the road here, wasiche yellowbear canyon, ekta emachahe, ate na unci echahpi, upstate new york , chuke, emachake, heyate eyach, el wagalwa, hoc, wasicipi, maLak'hóta echiya. tehiya woblawan iyomakpesni, south dakota hunkipisa...

Suzanne Kite:

Put me through my paces. Good practice

Alex Firethunder:

I'm helping.

Suzanne Kite:

But I'll work on this.

Alex Firethunder:

I probably made a couple of mistakes in there.

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah, so I know that you sing and you've studied with singers and spent a lot of time with them, so most of my research has to do with stones and our relationships with them. And so I've spent a lot of time reading the old texts, the anthropological texts where songs to refer to stones, and so my questions are around that. So I'll give you the outline of the questions, you can answer the ones you want to..

Alex Firethunder:

Yes.

Suzanne Kite:

Cool. Yeah, they're like what common songs that are sung with, to, or about stones? How do you interpret those meanings? They're very vague, they're vague on purpose. But what can one miss

when translating these songs? Because they're almost Haiku? They're very clear and simple, but also not. And why do we sing about stones? When you write a new song, where does it come from? Who was the first stone you came to know? What do stones teach us as Lakǰóta people? What songs concerning stones are most important at this time? We write a new song, how do we begin in a good way? How do we sing it in a good way? And when writing a song, how do you know if it's supposed to be sung in public or not?

Alex Firethunder:

Since it's so much, I'll probably just go one by one like Santee did it. I call him Bush Man.

Suzanne Kite:

He told us that.

Alex Firethunder:

I'll just call them Bush. So the first question was, I might skip some of them too, I might just say I don't know.

Suzanne Kite:

Well, yeah. And then you can come back around, as you think about things. What songs do you sing a lot about stones, common songs?

Alex Firethunder:

So actually, I can't even think of a song that talks explicitly about stones in the song.

Suzanne Kite:

Or with. Because I know a lot of them happen constantly with them.

Alex Firethunder:

Yeah, what comes off the top of my head is just sitting in Inipi. And the way I was taught was, a lot of people don't practice this, I don't know if it's a time thing, if it's no longer practiced, or if it was only taught in the circles I was raised in, or I don't know if it's something that's being lost or something that's just different circle to circle, I try not to be judgmental. But the way I was taught was that when you bring seven stones in the beginning of the sweat, and when those seven stones come in, they're to honor the directions. And so you put them in the pit, you put them in... you start with the west, you start with the west, and going clockwise, and put a stone in each direction. And then of course, the fifth and sixth directions the heavens, the sky, and then towards the earth. And then the seventh one is, I've always been taught, was you yourself. If you guys want coffee, I can make coffee.

Suzanne Kite:

Okay, we've had so much coffee.

Alex Firethunder:

Seventh stone represents the seventh direction, which is yourself. You're the center. And when those seven stones come in, it's quiet. Everything's quiet. Everybody's... you're supposed to... the way I was taught was everybody goes in the sweat first, and you're quiet and you're observant while those seven stones come in. And there will be somebody, somebody will be delegated to put cedar on each of those stones as they come in. And sometimes there's a pipe present, sometimes just not. If there is, that person holds their pipe and they put the stem that you would smoke, they put that towards stone. And then there's no song sung, it's just quiet. And everyone's quiet and watches and observes and praying. When nowadays, I don't know if it's different in time, or if it's just me branching out to different circles and sweating with different people, but I don't see that happen a lot. I see... In fact, a lot of people have the stones brought in before people even go into sweat. In the wintertime, that's really nice because then when you get in and it's warm already, you're not sitting there waiting for the stones. But I really liked that growing up, just to be quiet there and observant of those seven stones and I miss that element of going to sweat, and yeah. So but there's a song.

Alex Firethunder:

One time when I went to ceremony in Fort Peck, Montana. We went to sweat first before ceremony. And we were sitting there and I think we did... everybody went in there first, and they brought the stones in the way I just talked about. But there was an old man that was sitting next to me, and he had about he brought his own cedar, usually it's like whoever's pouring the sweat and he had his own fancy leather bag, and had his own cedar he brought, and he was putting medicine on the stones and he started singing the song. I can't remember exactly how it went or what it said but it was about stones. I can't understand. They have a different dialect, [crosstalk 00:12:10] Fort Peck is actually... they have three dialects on that reservation, they have Assiniboine so that's the Stony Nakota dialect.

Suzanne Kite:

Oh, yeah, I've hung out with them before.

Alex Firethunder:

And then they have the Hanktua Dakota, which usually commonly gets mistaken as Nakota, but they still call themselves Dakota. But it's very similar to our dialect because they have a lot of gutturals and stuff still. So they say Dakota. And then there's also the Dakota, which is Sisseton, then further Eastern Dakota, and they lose their gutturals and it's a little bit different. And then aublot to, there was that too, but Eastern Dakota they don't do that. They just stay with the 'e'. Anyways, I could understand, I don't remember which dialect he was singing in but I think it was similar enough that I could understand it and knew that he was singing about the stones. I've

never heard of the song sung to bring in the stones and that's the only time I ever heard a song that was explicitly for the stones there.

Alex Firethunder:

There's another song at the end of sweat... or two songs actually the end of sweat that are closing songs, are going home songs, and using those to send the spirits home. I remember as a kid I heard somebody say that there were further stones. And one of them sounds like it says stone in it and that's why I heard that I think somebody was misinterpreting it, so it's funny that we talked about misinterpretations, so in that song, it says Hotahiya and I think whoever thought it was Íjnyañ talk about the stones. But it means to make your voice heard. To sing out or call out Hotahiya. And so it wasn't Íjnyañ I don't know maybe it is a song for the stones, I don't know, but it says Hotahiya means I give these too and it's talking about these offerings. I don't think it's about stones though. It could be but I don't...

Alex Firethunder:

He said a lot of things... A lot of those sacred songs, especially ceremonial songs, prayer songs, sometimes they'll be really straightforward, but there's something behind that phrase. It's like a deeper interpretation that sometimes we don't understand.

Suzanne Kite:

Right, like super short songs, two lines and then could just mean one basic thing obviously it can't just mean that.

Alex Firethunder:

Yeah, you're talking about reading and using Severt Young Bear's book and actually that book was written from 30 cassette tapes of each over an hour long. It's 30 hours of interviews between RD Theisz and Severt Young Bear, and it's in our archives at OLC in 09 and I digitized them.

Suzanne Kite:

30 hours?

Alex Firethunder:

I digitized them so they're mp3 files now. And anyways in there was a song that he's saying it was like he said it was just like the same this little phrase repeated and it was like tehiyaku yelo, tehiyaku yelo. This is repeated that over and over again the second half he named somebody he said sigmanitu ota tehiyakuyelo. And then at the end it says nithakola wiyankapo look at your friends. Look at your friend, he was telling the people look at your friend. And but then he explained what that song is, and it's actually about one of the Dakota 38 I think he must not have been... he was one of the exiles. But he escaped, and he returned back to one of the camps and he

hanktoa camp, and he had his shackles on still, I don't know, they made that song for him. His name's Plenty Wolves or something like that.

Alex Firethunder:

And so that song just says he had a hard time coming home, look at your friend. That song is about that story, but of course it doesn't tell the story in the song, it just has this one line, gotta think about that in interpretations. And there's all kinds of examples, I can go on all day but also, there's a misinterpretation that I heard as a kid about a song being about the stones and I don't know if it is.

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah, so what's interesting in... because now there's this really clear delineation between... Well, I was reading, I think it was Theisz book, I can't remember who wrote it. The author is trying to explain the difference between like sacred and secular Lakhóta music.

Alex Firethunder:

Oh, that's probably that Powers' book, William Powers.

Suzanne Kite:

It's not. It's written by a Lakhóta actually, it's a really thin red book, I can show it to you. It comes with the CD. I think it's... no, it's not written by a Lakhóta. But it's... I can see it in my mind but he's trying to explain the difference between sacred and secular music and how these are the songs that are concluded on the CD that you're allowed to sing, and here's one on a CD that you're not allowed to sing. And so, but the point that he was trying to make was that it's the way it's written determines... if you heard it in a dream, or if it came in a vision, then that might be a sacred song, and then do you... do you see the delineation?

Alex Firethunder:

I'm a song composer myself, but I've never... at least to my memory or to my understanding, I've never gotten a song from a dream, or on a hanblecha or anything like that, or a vision. So my songs, of course, we could think of ourselves as vessels, and so every song we compose came from somewhere, right? But most of the songs that I sing, that I compose, I feel honored and happy to hear other people sing them and share them. And so I share them too with everybody. I view my ability to compose songs as a gift that's to be shared. It was given to me, so I give it to others. And so I think I draw the line where if it's a sacred or prayer song, I won't put it on social media, and I won't sell it. So I do have a CD of songs, but I didn't put any prayer songs that I've ever composed on it. And then I have songs on YouTube, I have songs on Facebook again, I don't put...that's just my own personal ethics or my own personal teachings.

Suzanne Kite:

But a lot of people do.

Alex Firethunder:

A lot of people do.

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah, I just went... Well, my uncle made one before he passed 10 years ago, I think it's all prayer songs. And I'm glad he made it because we wouldn't have his voice anymore but...

Alex Firethunder:

Yeah, probably familiar with John Around Him CD, that's my... I call him grandpa John. That's my grandma's stepbrother. And like you said I'm so grateful that he did record those. And so I think I would record them if someone wanted to learn them, I'd record them and just send them to them privately and I have done that before. And I know his CD's for sale, but I don't think that was the intention when him and Albert Whitehat recorded. I don't think their intention was to sell it. Their intention was... they say it, they say it on the recording itself. He says that they're doing this so that the younger generations will learn the songs and keep them going. And I don't know if they knew that it was going to be for sale or not. I think I heard somewhere down the grapevine that they didn't know, that that wasn't the plan. But of course, how do you get it out to the people? You can't just make a million copies and hand them out, it's not sustainable. So I understand that things are complicated.

Alex Firethunder:

But also, we have a technology now where we can host something digitally and privately share it around without it costing any money. And so things are changing a little bit in that sense, but because when they recorded that it was still cassette tapes. And then now there's a CD out at Prairie's Edge, I am thankful I could go and buy it and hear it, it was like two sides of a coin. But like I said, I never received a song like a sacred context like that, so I've always just felt like these songs are for everybody.

Alex Firethunder:

I've heard like that... You're talking about that if you receive a song in a vision or something, maybe that song's just for you. That song is just just for you, for you to sing when you're praying or when you're going on a vision quest, or when you're in sweat. And then just like that, I've heard two different medicine men have their own altar songs. And so those aren't to be shared or sung in different places, it's just meant for there. But another common teaching I've always heard too is that for powwow, is that if you sing a song to the public, it now belongs to everybody. You can't say that's my song anymore. Once you've done that, now it's the people song. You can't complain when people sing it. And like I said, for me I'm honored and humbled, wow, they're singing my song. That's so cool. So like...

Suzanne Kite:

When... Yeah, just to go back to something you said about being a composer, and when you... so that's what... Okay, so that's what's in some of the readings I was doing about how a waking dream is still a dream, or waking vision is still vision. And so I think with composers, there's this really thin line between, where does it... and you ask yourself, oh I just heard a song, it came to me, I just composed it, where did it come from? And I think that's what's common amongst people, Lakhóta people I talked to, they know that we are to, why would we, why would it come from us only? It's just impossible. So How do you define where it's coming from?

Alex Firethunder:

I don't know. Because I might have an idea for a song, but there's all kinds of times where I have an idea for a song and it just doesn't come into fruition. And so I feel like there's always... inevitably there's going to be that part of your own twist on it, and so it does come from you partially. But the fact that I can have an idea for a song but not be able to make it means that there's something else to it externally. And I even feel like that for... because I'm also a song composer for wasicu music too. At least I used to, I haven't in years, and it's the same thing for that too. I think it's just a creative thing. And I think that if you get down to it, I think all artists will probably say something like that. I think if they're being honest at least, I don't know.

Suzanne Kite:

I feel like there's... So what you're talking about is there's whatever and in western music you have divine inspiration, but then you get... then once it's at hand, then you start to make decisions. What note you're going to start on maybe or what the form is going to be or if you're really composing, what guitar chord is like? And then suddenly your decision making is...

Alex Firethunder:

Yeah, there's a little bit more experimentation and just making decisions, as I guess I could see that the Lakhóta don't that too much. I have heard other singers do that, change it up a little bit. Oh, that sounds too much like this, they say, why don't you do this. In fact, I had a couple of help with some of the melodies from a couple other melodies from my kolas, but yeah, I don't know how to define where songs come from, I guess. Especially if they're not explicitly from a spiritual context, I don't know. Traditionally, a lot of... I'm sure you've read stories and stuff about getting songs from birds, the wind, or coyotes. A common known as coyote, getting songs from coyotes, and nowadays, I don't really hear too many people talk about that. The one person I hear that talks about getting song inspiration from birds, there's actually two people, and it makes sense it's them. Kevin Locke, and my wife's uncle, Brian, and they're both flutists. So they will say they listen to the birds and get inspiration for the songs.

Suzanne Kite:

Santee had a good story from yesterday, or the day before, a bird experience.

Alex Firethunder:

Oh, cool.

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah.

Alex Firethunder:

I listened to them and try to see if we understand them because they say tashignupa wakoliya waglakapi.

Suzanne Kite:

I was out at my Unci Mary's and she was like, there's this bird that comes to the Sun Dance and he sings 'hamburger, hamburger' right when everyone's really hungry. Sometimes you can hear it out in the field, hamburger. Okay, so maybe more on stones. So a lot of people carry their spirit stones. And one thing that when I first started learning about this stuff over at my great grandma's house down there, there's stones everywhere, there's rocks everywhere, because she was an obsessive mover of stones from the water up to the house and from anywhere. And I've actually found that hard to find a Lakǰóta that doesn't collect stones. Do you have a special relationship with any stones or anything like that?

Alex Firethunder:

I actually don't, no one's ever taught me about them or anything, so to have this explicit knowledge and they always... I know of the type of relationships that you're talking about other people have with certain stones, especially those perfectly round ones. To me, I always view them as this really source of power, and mystical, something that I've never really... almost scared to get into, I don't know. But one was given to me a couple years ago. I'm not going to name who it was who gave it to me, but because of that family, I got some negative vibes from them, and the guy who gave it to me, he's an older man...

Suzanne Kite:

Maybe I know who you're talking about.

Delete:

It was another set of brothers that you're probably thinking of that I'm going to talk about in a minute too.

Suzanne Kite:

Okay.



Alex Firethunder:

But anyways, the guy's son was a close bro of mine at the time. I think that's why his dad gave it to me. And so at the time I was like, "Wow, this is awesome, I'm going to take this everywhere I go with me." And like I said, I always viewed it as this kind of thing, scared of, or just not knowing. So I was hesitant about it, but I also thought it was really cool, and I kept it in my car.

Alex Firethunder:

And then I asked the medicine man that my family goes to from Rosebud, I brought him the stone. I said "what do you think about this? I said it was given to me but I just don't know." He took it and he held it and prayed over it, and felt it and he told me that it wasn't good, he said "Get rid of it." I said "How?" And he told me how to get rid of it, what to do, and then he told me what to do for protection, and so I did all those.

Suzanne Kite:

That's a good story.

Alex Firethunder:

I think that's all, only stories I have about stones, those kind of stones. I was told... Oh no, I wasn't told this, I read it. I read it in an old interview between Edgar Fire Thunder, who is my great, great, great grandpa, and Ella Deloria in 1937. In 1937 she interviewed him, he was 80 something years old. And he told her that *Íjyaŋ* is just any rock... Wait, can't remember the difference now. No. *Íjyaŋ* was the perfect brownstones, and I think *thokan*, it's an old word, you don't really hear it too much maybe in spiritual context, and that's the element of the stone or a rock, any rock or a stone, yeah. And so he was saying that he was *Íjyaŋ*, only those perfect round stones. Nowadays nobody uses it like that or something. I don't know when that changed or maybe he was mistaken, maybe she wrote it down wrong, I don't know, but I always thought that was interesting.

Suzanne Kite:

Have you read that posthumus book, the All My Relatives?

Alex Firethunder:

I know him, but I've never read any of his books.

Alex Firethunder:

My brother in law is good friends with him.

Suzanne Kite:

Oh really? He's really nice. He's very helpful. He has this interesting section of...maybe it's an essay that he wrote, where he was trying to define... he's taking it from this other anthropologist.

Alex Firethunder:

DeMallie?

Suzanne Kite:

No. A guy who's just in South America [Descola]. And yeah, he's talking about non humans or humans and non humans. What makes something... How do you define something that's alive or has a soul? the term they use is interiority or volition. So I guess... I don't even know volition, all the definitions, but I guess the ability of that stone to jump, that's like it has... How do you say, oh, that thing can jump, and this thing is not. What's the difference between this thing that's alive and this thing that's not alive? In our culture, as opposed to Western culture, where everything's dead, and only white men are alive.

Alex Firethunder:

That's a good question.

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah.

Alex Firethunder:

I don't know the answer to that. I've always thought about that because just like being raised in a culture, and getting these teachings and getting them all in English, and then learning Lakhóta later on, and then trying to decipher what what is... how things are interpreted or how things are taught in English versus how they talked about in Lakhóta, it's really interesting, because of course, in English we're... In our way of life, everything's alive, we're all relatives, and like the trees are relatives, and they're alive, they're living things, and we view everything, the earth, all this harmonious stuff. And that's how I was raised, and that's how we talk in English, but I've never heard that in Lakhóta. I've never heard anyone say that the trees are alive, are living. We'd say they're our relatives, we might say that, but I've...

Suzanne Kite:

In other native languages, you can in the sentence structure, it's very clear who's alive and who isn't. So, when you say you can't... you could say the trees are alive, but maybe grammatically, I don't know, what do you mean by you can't say or you don't say?

Alex Firethunder:

I don't think you can't say, I've just never heard it. I've just never heard it, or even stones, I've never heard anyone say the stones are living beings. But we, what we do refer to them as thunkashila, which is grandfather, which we refer to as, I don't know, the thunder too, directions and stuff, too. So I don't know, there's kinship terms used for these inanimate things. But when we talk about when we talk about them, like you said, the sentence structure, the grammar, it's very explicit, it's very clear what's animate and what's inanimate in Lakhóta. So, if I say I see the trees, I say, chankihena wanblake. But if I say I see the dogs, I say sunkankihena wawichablake, and that means you're talking about living animate things. And so there is that differentiation in our everyday speech.

Suzanne Kite:

What about... so even, I can't read the old stories, so in stories where Ínyañ are? is? alive, and that the characters or when things move between human and animal? Do you remember the sentence structure? Being flexible for that stuff? Or is it just...

Alex Firethunder:

I guess I've never looked at it. I should go back and look and see... Actually some of the older stories, trying to think of stories about nonliving things that are animate in the stories, like in that one story Ella Deloria recorded and recorded being recorded several times about... what is it? A spleen, there's one with the liver, something like that. A bladder. Yeah, bladder, joins Kea on the warpath. Little stories like that, but they're usually singular. So it's hard to tell. Okay, if they're plural, then you can tell 'wicha' but when it's singular, there's no differentiation.

Suzanne Kite:

So it gives them the flexibility there.

Alex Firethunder:

So I can say it's singular, it's the same, but if it's plural, and you differentiate, there's animate and inanimate, so that's interesting. But I'll have to look at that. And then the other thing that's really interesting is I always, when talking about old stories, I always try to look at the ones that have been documented or recorded in the language. And the story about Ínyañ and how the earth was created, and then the beginning of the universe, all that creation story, it was never recorded in Lakhóta. Oh, and so I've always been suspicious about it. And Frans Boas was too and that's why he sent Ella Deloria to collect stories in the 30s, and that's why she visited my grandpa. And in that interview with my grandpa, my grandpa told her that Walker was the one that wrote all that stuff, and that he misinterpreted all kinds of stuff, maybe he made stuff up, maybe he talked to people that made stuff up. And he said that these aren't... there's no secret. There's no secret society medicine men, and they don't have their own secret histories and stories and stuff the way that Walker wrote about.

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah. Didn't Walker write about how there are three languages?

Alex Firethunder:

I think so.

Suzanne Kite:

Yes. Spirit language, medicine men language and normal language.

Alex Firethunder:

And so my grandpa's telling Ella Delloria that. If the medicine man have a secret language, it's not between them, it's between them and the spirit helpers. And he says, there's no like "secret society" of medicine men, it's like there couldn't be. In the camp life, that would be impossible. He says, we're all divided by paper thin walls, it's just unrealistic. He's like, if there's any stories about our creation or legends, they're shared, they're shared openly, they're told for entertainment, around a fire. And like I said, he said, it's just pretty much said he's full of it.

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah, it's so tough.

Alex Firethunder:

But it is really... it gets really tough because in the 70s, or maybe 60s or 70s, I don't know, whenever the Walker narrative was published and made public and available to everybody.

Suzanne Kite:

And people started taking them and adopting them.

Alex Firethunder:

Yeah. And then passing it off as oral history. Right. And so then, and then when you have these elders, from, you know, maybe they're young at the time in the 70s. But now they're elders, and they're even... some of them are gone, we are told the stories, we can't question it.

Suzanne Kite:

No.

Alex Firethunder:

Where do you... I don't know.

Suzanne Kite:

But that's the interesting thing about Lakhóta philosophy is there's a real thin... sometimes, it's for certain things, I don't know how to describe it. The separation between truth and belief and fact, it can be blurred, but there's still right and wrong, and correct and incorrect. So once the story is adopted by a Lakhóta elder, and they just say it is a story then who's to say that it's not?

Alex Firethunder:

It's hard to question. Where did you hear that? Was that shared to you by your grandpa, or grandma? Or did you read that book? And so I'm just going to go ahead and feel bad. Okay, so two of the main, two elders that I know that really tell the stories that really enforce these stories amongst our people were both involved in tribal colleges, one here, and one in Sinte Gleska. Albert White Hat and Wilmer Mesteth, and they both taught these, and then because they taught them everybody else taught them too. And they use the Walker books, they use the textbooks in their classrooms. And so my thinking is that they adopted this from the textbook, because they felt like they needed a book to back up what they're saying in class, to make it acceptable as an institution and as an accredited course, if that makes sense, I get it. But then, just be upfront, did the story come from the book? Or did the story come from our history? At this point, it is so blurred.

Alex Firethunder:

Like I said, I like to look at... I tried to look in the archives or look at whatever documents I can get ahold of and see if any of this stuff was ever documented in the language. I really looked to Ella Deloria, because she went... Boaz sent her to confirm whether these stories are true or not, that Walker wrote. And basically what he was saying, the blurred lines between fact, belief, truth, all these things, or it's just flat out wrong. What Ella Deloria found... nobody wanted to tell her... I think my grandpa was the one that was most straightforward, like, no, that's made up. Of course, this was on the Lakhóta, too. So she wrote it down in Lakhóta.

Alex Firethunder:

And so I can see exactly how she wrote down what he said in the language. And I think that's awesome. That way, there's no confusion or interpretations. But anyways, the other people she talked to, what she reported was that most people would say, "if that's true, I've never heard it". That was the common way of, not necessarily explicitly saying that's wrong. That's yes, I made it and that's made up. If that is true, I've never heard such a thing, and I thought that was really interesting. That's like a certain humbleness that people had along time ago that we don't have anymore. We do not have that anymore.

Suzanne Kite:

Oh, my question was, do you have a favorite? I can go look at it, a favorite story from the Deloria archives.

Alex Firethunder:

My favorite story I think is... I like the...It's about a mother Meadowlarks, she has her nest in the prairie and some tall grass and she's got her babies, baby Meadowlarks and a rattlesnake comes, and basically she plays it cool, says "Oh your uncle hasn't been here in a long time, he's arrived, he came," and they all greet him, and she says "I'm going to cook for you. I'm going to cook for you." And she goes to the oldest son first, and she sends them out to get a kettle.

Suzanne Kite:

Oh, I know that story, yeah.

Alex Firethunder:

And they're waiting and waiting and waiting. "I don't know what's taking them so long, go look for your brother," and one by one she sends them all out, and then they're all gone, and the rattlesnake's waiting, hungry. And finally she says, "No one's going to cook for you, you're going to have to cook for yourself," and she flies out herself...I also like the Falling Star Boy story too. That's an awesome story.

Suzanne Kite:

That's a great story.

Alex Firethunder:

Both of those are documented from several different people, different sources, so I really like looking at all the different versions, how they differ.

Suzanne Kite:

Deloria had multiple versions.

Alex Firethunder:

Deloria recorded some, Buechel also sat down with elders and wrote down their stories. And so a lot of the same stories that Deloria collected were the same as Buechel. And then a couple other native people of the time wrote down stories in English. And so some of the same stories are documented in English. Charles Eastman , Luther Standing Bear, those are all in English. A lot of them are the same stories. And that's why I always look for other sources, I think they call that triangulating, where you try to find three different sources for the same information to confirm it, especially with oral history. And a lot of the stories and the Walker narrative don't have any other anybody else telling it until later. People retell the same... they're using him as a source, as a citation. And so even my most recent thing I'm curious about is, where is there a story about Wind Cave?

Suzanne Kite:

Oh, no.

Alex Firethunder:

It's like cognitive dissonance for me, because these are all things I grew up... that's my foundation, right? Ínyan, is the beginning of the earth. Came from Ínyan, this all started... and then we came out of Wind Cave, Iktomi tricked us. But where is that story? Where did that come from? Starting to try to delve into it. I haven't had much time. I started wondering that when I was doing my thesis because I was doing a brief history on Lakhóta, a brief history on Lakhóta language and where the language comes from. And so I didn't really get too far into it. It could be its own book, probably your own thesis of Lakhóta's belief about our language or where it came from, so I just wanted to hit on that. I just hit on that a little bit and-

Suzanne Kite:

Open a can of worms.

Alex Firethunder:

And doing that, I was like, where is the story about Wind Cave? Where is the first time that was mentioned and in what context? And I don't know, so now I'm curious about that.

Suzanne Kite:

Okay, well what about the story the prairie? Because I actually don't think this was our... I don't know, the where songs come from the prairie chicken story, I heard it once.

Alex Firethunder:

Severt tells that in the book doesn't he?

Suzanne Kite:

Maybe it is Severt.

Alex Firethunder:

I think he talks about a prairie chicken story, singing a song and he tilts his head and that's why singers do that sometimes, that's what he said. That's why they tilt their head when they're singing. I remember reading that in that book.

Suzanne Kite:

Because that's a pretty essential question, who taught us songs in the first place? And that story's very intense because it says that's how we can heal, because we learned how to make songs. But...

Alex Firethunder:

I think that could be though. I think another interesting linguistic thing is that the word for flute is siyotanka, and the word for prairie chicken is siyo. So maybe we learned... before we learn how to sing, we learn how to do the flute.

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah, that's like the complex... What is that? the Sapir Whorf Thesis that's the anthropological concept that linguistics can reveal anthropology, but that's also contested.

Alex Firethunder:

Yeah. What came first the prairie chicken or the flute?

Suzanne Kite:

That old Lakhóta... You heard it here first folks, the old Lakhóta phrase.

Alex Firethunder:

Could be a meme or something.

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah, I guess. We're going to talk a lot more in the next year. But I guess is there anything else you want to share about songwriting, collaboration with other singers, writing songs with other singers?

Alex Firethunder:

Yeah, I've only had a couple experiences of actually collaborating on songs composing. People hit me up for words all the time.

Suzanne Kite:

Yes, I have.

Alex Firethunder:

When I mean singers, song makers, they hit me up for words all the time like, how do I say this? I'm trying to make a song, all the time. And so that's a collaborative effort, I've thought about it.



But sometimes I'll hear it and I'll be like, oh, cool, that's a cool melody they made for that song that I composed. And sometimes I do it for them and I get no credit, sometimes I do.

Suzanne Kite:

I credit you. You're on plaques all over the world.

Alex Firethunder:

So those are some of the collaborations I don't even think about, I just like to answer people and ask for words because, part of the responsibility of being a successful language learner that I think I have, is just the gift of song composing, you share it. Sometimes you get credit, sometimes you don't, it doesn't matter.

Alex Firethunder:

You go...sometimes I'm like, oh, man, okay, that's cool, you get to-

Suzanne Kite:

You get to be consistently humbled.

Alex Firethunder:

But no, I'm happy to share. Sometimes I get annoyed, if I'm busy or something like that, and people don't... they just expect it or something. Collaborations: I've gotten help from a couple people just with some melodies, I don't know if I was having trouble with it. Like I said, I have ideas for songs and sometimes they don't come to fruition. And so I've thrown words, or here's what I got so far, what do you think, a couple girls helped out. So on my CD, I think there's two songs where two people helped with the melody, and I just put the words to the melody. And then my uncle composed a song, he's not really as much of a singer, but he composed a song, and he wanted me to sing it. So I spice it up a little bit. And that's the second to last song on my CD, and then the very last song is a lullaby that my mom composed for me. I don't know if she composed it for me, she sings it to all of us kids, my older brother and sister, but just saying it to me when I was little when I was a baby.

Alex Firethunder:

And so I tried to sing it the same way that she did, but she won't sing it for anyone else. She'd tell me the words, but she won't sing it. I don't know why she's shy about it.

Alex Firethunder:

And then I think what's common is just, there's a lead singer or a song composer who makes a song, and then sends it to everybody, or teaches everybody else. So it's not really much collaboration, a junk group will sing a song, it's usually only made by one song composer

Suzanne Kite:

So in them, like in textbooks about songs, they're very reductive about how well it's more... Well, I don't know, they can be very productive or very open and reductive in that way, where it's like to open, where it's like songs come through families, which is true, but when they're sung publicly, sometimes people learn them off the internet, and then they can they put them on their CDs. Do you find that there really is? It's like the push and pull of people's egos and what they feel they own and wanting to share, do you see any delineations when... or people really be like, no, that's my family song?

Alex Firethunder:

Privately. They'll say stuff like that privately, but I don't really see anything really being done about it or get them going out in public. They could easily go at the pow wow and take the mic and say, hey, that's my family song, and you guys don't have the right to sing that. Others are known for taking the mic and chewing people out like that, so it's not uncommon practice, they could do that, but you don't see it.

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah, I think it's there's a big problem of there was an opera in Canada that was written and there's a lullaby in the opera, a white man's opera, there's native people in the opera as characters, and he took a funeral song from one of my friend's tribes and made it into a lullaby in the opera and he obviously made tons of money for decades, and the only way to do intellectual property rights on it was to say, the community uses that as a funeral song.

Alex Firethunder:

That inkpata is in that Man Called Horse movie, and now that's a famous song, music teachers even teach that song. It's like in school curriculums, I think. Like (singing) it's a famous song worldwide, and it comes from here. I don't know what it would look like if someone tried to claim intellectual property. I think when it comes down to a lot of songs like that, or folklore songs or folk songs public domain. It's like the Flag Song, we know who composed the flag song, but it's public domain, anybody can sing it, record it, sell it. I think a lot of people don't... Right now, there's a lot of copyright arguments going around about... I don't know if you've seen it on social media.

Suzanne Kite:

About what?

Alex Firethunder:

About language.

Suzanne Kite:

Oh, yeah, that's constant. You're like the... your Facebook page is where it all goes down. You're like, public, tell me what you think, and everyone's got a lot to say.

Alex Firethunder:

People are not able to hear different opinions without fighting or something like that. I just think differently than you, I don't know, it's like the difference... like I voted for Kevin Killer instead of Julian Bear, we don't have to fight. Yeah, people have opinions. And then there's a lot of misinformation. So the misinformation is because LLC published a dictionary of grammar book, they're going to be publishing a collection of the Ella Deloria stories, but again, those aren't archives, those are public domain, anybody could go ahead and take those stories, write them down, format them however they want, publish it, copyright it, they don't own the stories. They just own the work that they did. And it's like if I sing the Flag Song, I can copyright it. It doesn't mean I own the Flag Song, I own my version, and so that's exactly what's going on LLC, they're copywriting their version of the track transliterated transcribed Ella Deloria stories, and anybody could go in and do that to them. But they're, what they're saying is that LLC is copywriting the stories themselves. In fact, they're saying that LLC copyrighted the language itself, which is so absurd.

Alex Firethunder:

And of course, I think the people that are the main person that's sharing that narrative knows that that's not true and how ridiculous that is, but he's maintaining that phrase, whatever, because he knows that it riles people up like, they're what? They're copywriting our language, that's our language, gets people angry and riled up to put their pitchforks. And I'm not saying that the LLC is the perfect organization.

Alex Firethunder:

They've definitely done more good than that. Yeah, I think their materials are amazing compared to any other materials, pedagogically.

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah, It makes people mad enough to go get degrees and go make their own dictionary. Are you mad? And you're like, how mad are you? Are you going to go to school?

Alex Firethunder:

That's what it comes down to, we're going to talk about sovereignty? Then go out and record your own elders, instead of begging a white man to give you the recordings he has. Take your recorder, go and talk to grandma, grandpa before they're gone. I think that the main person that started all this... of course, as you know, probably the opposition to the language consortium has been since they started.

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah, totally.

Alex Firethunder:

But on social media as well, there's one person that has really riled up everybody, and his grandma passed away. And she was somebody that really helped as a consultant with the LLC. And so I think he's just resentful. Resentful that he didn't have that relationship with her while she is still here. He is starting to but...

Suzanne Kite:

That makes sense that it's a personal... That's too bad. I feel bad for him. Yeah, that's not, I'm sure he's sad.

Alex Firethunder:

And then of course, that person has a big ego.

Alex Firethunder:

Ego and grief, they don't mix well.

Suzanne Kite:

Well, I think we'll wrap it up here.

Alex Firethunder:

Okay.

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah.

## **8.2.9 Jhon Duane Goes in Center, Interview Transcript**

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

Called the creation story.

Suzanne Kite:

Right. I heard your Zoom.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

Oh, you did. Okay.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

So actually to have a contemporary exhibition about an ancient story is quite a millennial jump. But it has resonance because we as Lakhótas are evolving and moving. So the next generation interprets. Yeah. Just things are verbatim, but the concept is verbatim as far as the relationship to the moon and stars and sun, because that's the basis of our existence and social systems, because there's all this relational activity that we have. And that's the foundation... our governance is the relationship we're family, but really the first thing of creation was Ian. Myself, I've been able to make a connection to the creation story. I think what I'm going to tell you is very personal, but I think you will gain something from it. But I when came back to the military and I went on hanblecha but nothing happened.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

Everybody wants to get a vision, but then I just kind of let that ride. But I eventually, in later life, I had a dream. It was like, I usually read before I sleep and I'm just there reading and I fell asleep. All of sudden I woke up and this water was on my head. I felt that I had to wake up by this flood of water on me. But anyway, I woke up and, "Wow, that was wild." But in my dream I was... Hey, there's a student here we just kind of came through. This is-

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

So the second time we're on hanblecha maybe 20 years ago or something... Was Bill your grandpa or? Yeah. Okay. Well, he helped me with my hanblecha. But it was the third night, I went out the old time way for four days, no food and water, but the third night powerful things were happening. And I know the power of these Lakhóta songs, called the spirit calling song, I sang that one I seen in the horizon, the sun was stepped and if you ever seen a welder's torch, a bright light, but that was like a speck off in the horizon. All of a sudden it start coming and getting larger and it's floating over the landscape. Oh my God it's coming towards me. And I was on the edge of a big precipice of a cliff and anyway, it was just coming, and it came through the trees, and that light was coming through the trees, every one of those trees just lightening up blue. So it was coming up and I can see it coming up the side of the cliff. And about that time, the ground was shaking and there's heavy breathing and he was thundering, the ground was and anyway I just lost it and I fainted. But I woke up early and I mean, it must have been early in the morning, it's still dark out, the sun was coming up. Anyway. Okay.

Suzanne Kite:

That last part. So it's very sweet and very sad, but it talks about how that's the beloved family pet and as Bob.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

Yeah that was Bob's dog.

Suzanne Kite:

His demise is taking place. He's painting himself out, which makes sense as a painter.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

No, this is great news.

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah. It's very sweet.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

Yeah. So, in the light of that early morning, I looked on the altar and there was these symbols kind of etched into the dirt. So these are symbols that I probably I have to use in my lifetime. So now I have a little more truth about why native people did the things they did. Some of the symbols they used on their own personal items and bead work and all that. But there were four stones put on the altar. There were three white quartz ones, and the fourth one was this agate. And I didn't really know of this agate when I was a kid, but just never thought about it. But here the spirits brought one. Well that put me on a journey actually on to find out where it came from. What is it. But I started going to different rock collectors. And then I found out it's just agate. And then I eventually took a course at a geology course at the school of mines and found out that this agate, it came up of the uplift of the black hills, and it was embedded in limestone.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

So this agate is really one of the most rarest exists in the world because it's formed in water. So this thing had been compounded by seven different oceans and inside the limestone. So anyway, you can think of all the trace minerals seeping through limestone and into these cavities with silica and the pressure and heat. And these things actually they look amorphous. So you can imagine these were alive at one time. So it's just pulsing all these banded colours and it's a creature. So I was able to start connecting things together with this agate that came to me, and it kind of transformed my solo work. I've always liked the plains Indian silverware.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

In fact, there was nobody else really doing it in my day, the early '70s. When I did enter shows it was like some of the Lakhóta people, that's not Lakhóta but my research and historical photographs shown that we did similar work in 1850s, '60s, '70s, '80s. You look at all the old historical ledger drawings, you see these horses with silver headstones, that was a ferrous metal called German silver, an alloy of nickel silver and zinc. So it wasn't precious metal. But that's what the traders brought in. So I put presentations together about this evolution of German

silverware. But anyway, so I was always into doing metalwork and evolving it into jewelry. And I didn't like using turquoise because I didn't want to be deemed as a Navajo.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

So, this was a godsend to find out about this agate. So that's where I started incorporating into the principles of true Lakhóta art adornment. Think about it. We never hung paintings on their walls and did a lot of visual art. It was everything we wore we used, horses were painted. So I call my work the art of personal adornment, because it's the true sense of the nomadic people that they adorned everything. So that's where I come up with. So this agate has knowing its origins. People are still theorizing about its origins, but it's estimated to be about a half a billion years old. And its formation this agates. But being that it came up when the black hills were uplifting, there's a Lakhóta story called the Great Race. And when that race was going on early in the middle of this race track, this rocks were piling up, and that was really the geologic event of the uplift for the black hills, while this Great Race was going on.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

And the uplift is this, they call it the rock formation came up and it estimated to be about a mile under the earth when the uplift came up and broke apart in this limestone nodules, where were these agates. So after millions and millions of years, limestone was very soft and wore away. So there were these three dimensional agates in there that through other millions of years fractured by heat and cold, so that's what you find in the prairies today are these nuggets that have been moving for millions of years. So that's what I hunt for. And that's what I use in my jewelry because they're associated with water, I also make a connection to our creation story where the first thing in creation was water. When Ínyañ the first thing in creation was an amorphous being. And when he turned himself inside out, he created water and his blood became water and he became brittle. So that's why he became the first rock.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

And Ion did himself was the only being and he was very lonely, so this were the sun and moon and all those started being created. Personality started developing with all these terrestrial beings. So that's why we have a social system, our part of our governance comes from the first thing in creation was rock, who was lonely, had all these things around it. So, I equate even now these agates as because they were amorphous, they were formed in water, they become brittle. So they represent life, water. So to me, these are the face of Ion. I have no anybody else. I'm pretty much peerless to talk about this, because everybody wants to be a painter. Everybody wants to do it and myself it's like, "Wow. I guess the thing was Lakhóta jewelry. We would be using these things that connect us to place. And I think that's really powerful. And so you look at all this kind of art he did.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

He did landscape. So where he was in Vermilion, he did... So true to a Lakhóta heart is a sense of place. So I do know that our ceremonies are all geographic. So when we have a Sun Dance, it's

the Cottonwood tree in the middle, it's the choke cherries on the gates. It's the Sage, the Cedar, the buffalo skull for the altar, that's all geographic to this area. So, I know that gets exported to other areas and I was like, "How can there be a Sun Dance when our sun that we use and all these things is what we need for the ceremonies. So I question a lot of things like that, but not that I'm a purist. I just know that there's truth to what we do as Lakhóta people.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

So in a way, I think I discovered a truth, but I really want to people to find things that connect them to homeland. That's where identity is, is the land. So this was one of this is one of the things when you have something that really has a connection to its origin, to the black hills. Now, we can say and then talk about why we think the black hills are sacred. Right now, that's just a metaphor for people. "The black Hills are sacred." Duh, tell me about it. How? Where? Why? But it has to do with water because right now the black hills, some of their early maps that Amos Bad Heart Bull did and a pictograph history of the Oglála Lakhóta there's a map-

Suzanne Kite:

Oh, I have that.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

When you look at that map, to me the most outstanding feature on that map is the hydrology. All these little creeks coming out of the Eastern side of the black hills and they all emerge into the white river, the Cheyenne river, they all merge to the Missouri river. And then Missouri to the Mississippi. But this hydrates part of this prairie, so this hydrology is really important here. And all the underground water tables around here. So, this represents the life in itself, water. Because these were formed in water. I feel very fortunate that, I did earnestly pray for something that would help me in life. So it's just become part of my identity and I still go out to hunt agates. In fact I was just out yesterday. So I found this before, and then I found the source. So this is a celcidne. They're like, there's plates out there but... And it's blue.

Suzanne Kite:

Wow.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

So I found enough to do ensemble jewelry pieces now, because agates are just like one piece because they're so unique so I'm thinking of all these things I could do that are ensembles of jewelry. So if I take off the, I can shape it and polish it. And that's from our homeland. And there's so many other jaspers there are different colours out there. So it's a resource that comes from our homeland, we should be making those connections with it. So that's the way I see the use of rocks because it's something that really kind of goes to our creation story, our identity of place. I know you, I'm sure you're glad to be home. It's things like that, your identity is here.



Suzanne Kite:

Do you think that, because I think one of my questions in this project is, "What do rocks have to teach us? Or what did they have to say to us? Or why... I mean, you've kind of made an argument that Lakḥóta people should be making more things with stones as artists.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

Yeah. We use it in our ceremonies, especially the ceremony is a prerequisite to all the rest of the six other ceremonies we have, so that the stones are tunkashila, the grandfathers and they themselves, the ones we like to use are usually a basalt.

Suzanne Kite:

But they're not from around here. Are they?

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

They are.

Suzanne Kite:

Because some people go down to...

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

Oh yeah. I mean, that's an import. Our ancestors have been using a rock, we used to call them Butte rocks or whatever, but this was one of them, my epiphanies. I used to work on the tribal historic preservation office. As advisors took it upon ourselves to visit all the, we call them sacred sites. I don't like to use that word so much, but they're very special places of spiritual significance. They're apex of spiritual powers. And every one of them are igneous rock formation, which is volcanic. So Bear Butte, that's igneous out cropping and Matho Thipila is inside of a volcano and all these other ones. And even Eagle Nest Butte, there's rocks that are part of that formation. They're almost like a ceramic.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

Yeah, that's what our Lakḥóta ancestors used in our ceremony or our inipi. Because they get really red hot too. So we have them. So we have those rocks that we use and we heat them up red hot and we're recreating creation again. The inipi is a recreation of creation. We got the dome, we got the earth, so there's the four elements of air, water, fire, and matter. Those four things in creation. So we heat up the rocks, get them red hot, we give them steam, give them back their blood and they in turn give us the breath of life, which is steam. And that's how he purified herself.

Suzanne Kite:

So, I think one thing that comes up in trying to find why rocks are sacred or some are more sacred than others, but this concept of transformation, where if it has the potential to transform. Because I think that's what... When I think about the way water or Cedar changes, when it hits, it's a potential to become smoke, some sort of potential-ness or transformation.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

It has an essence into it. Lakhóta word is sicun, it's the spiritual essence and it can be transformed in that. So this is another thing I talked about, my friend and I was telling people about Bob is he danced. He came to me when we were friends. He'd never danced, but so I helped him put his regalia together. But what I know about dancing as a little boy, that was my most precious thing that I could ever think of owning was my outfit that my grandmother gave me. Because I recognize when I put my outfit on and I joined a bunch of other men, I was transformed into this person that nothing else mattered around me. And the drum and the song, the comradery and being, I just think that always happens every time you put your regalia on. You get transformed and you're uplifted, you got this sense of self and being, and then with all that, you're part of a collective, you're part of.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

So when you do that... And everyday life, we don't do that so much. Well we might smudge and kind of remind yourself that those kind of things our ancestors did, it was like the most powerful transformation story, I mean, experience I had was I have Apache friend. And anyway, his brother was the head of this, a singer, and all those mountain spirit dancers. He was the kind of the head of all that, but he invited my son, me and my grandson to be there. And so we went into this Tipi they have Tipis the Apaches do and they fed all the dancers in there. They're all joking around.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

Well, all young men. And there was a bunch of other men in there and they sang songs but they ate, people brought food for them. And then pretty soon all that was happening and just kind of getting quiet again. And then these men all had their helpers and they helped them put those Apache and they painted them with the symbols, and the last thing they put on those was big, the other big crowns. I got to see the transformation of these men into mountain spirits. And they sang and they're dancing here and then they all went counterclockwise and they went off backwards out of the Tipi, and then they danced out there again and they blessed everybody. That was out Alta. Everything does get transformed into another essence of spirit, I guess. So I've experienced things like that myself and then when I think about when I put my regalia on and dance it's just... Especially in today's environment, you don't get to do that. I mean, our ancestors did that in the ceremony and all that.

Suzanne Kite:

Art wise, you take these stones that are in the ground and then you transform them into?

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

So some of them I really challenged to set in the rough, which I like, because there's a million. And I like that because... So I've done that kind of. And then there's others I do, I'd cut them with a diamond saw and that's almost a spiritual experience because that thing's been landed for millions of years. You open it up and there's all this beautiful colour in a pattern maybe or something like that. Sometimes I got a sketchbook and I'll see these patterns and I'll just do a one dimensional drawing of the pattern and see. And that inspires me to do this abstract geometric designs I engrave on bracelets. So there's all these things that come from when I open up a rock. I'm probably a heretic to all these people who collect them because they just leave them in the way they are. There's such beauty inside them.

Suzanne Kite:

I mean, it think what makes me think of one thing that Bill's daughter Melita told me once, which we were talking about spirits stones and she was like the stone, "You spend your whole life looking for a specific stone," and then she was like, "That stone spends its whole life looking for you," except that stone is millions and millions of years old. And we are so small and young in comparison.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

Well we're related to it just from the fact of, it's kind of a stretch to most people's mind, but we're eternal spirits having a human experience, that's the way I see it. Yeah. We're part of the universe. We're energy. I don't if you been to ceremonies and see spirits coming a little lights and the energy. I mean, it's kind of an interesting way to talk about it but it's tangible. And we're part of that greater universe that just multi-verse in a sense. So all these things I see are so interconnected. But in heart we take materials and transform it into something inspirational, visual, spiritual, we're communicating with it, we're interrelating with it. So everything is in constant flux and there's a Lakhóta word for that, it's called skanskan. Everything is always moving. Yeah. So, what we have is tradition was new at one time. That's where people get stuck in tradition, because that was new at one time. Some guys say, ah, that's a new Sun Dance song, I don't know who should be singing. The heck.

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah. I mean think about the... I mean one stone that I don't actually, it's the people who make pipestone, who curve pipestone and thinking about white buffalo calf woman having... It was the first time. Didn't exist and then here she comes and brings these couple of stone technologies, the pipe and the inipi... So it's like, she delivered these stones to us.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

Interesting. I didn't ever quite think of that, but I made pipes that one for my own use and one for another friend's use. But I never commercialized it, but you're right. Just the technologies that we've mastered. So these things come to us from another place. And they inspire us because you

ever see these old portraits of these old time Indians and their pipes, I've got a great grandfather and he's sitting there, it's a beautiful pipe and just think of what he transformed or somebody did into that beautiful theme.

Suzanne Kite:

And then the pipe itself can then transform other things.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

Yeah. Exactly. So, everything is so interconnected that way.

Suzanne Kite:

I mean, that's kind of one of my questions. Because I mean, I remember that relates to this stuff, is there's so many obviously, there's so many symbols in here of non-humans. Everywhere you look there's an... It's just pure, almost... It kind of gets unavoidable. I don't think we could claim any of these stones including other being.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

Or parts of a being. That's what we were as indigenous people. We lived with his resources. We didn't... These sort of commodities they were actually spiritual. Even here in the, I always see the horses I always think of. Well, in our seven secret rites is making them a relative. It's why a lot of people argue today, *huŋká* is making a relative with somebody. But to me, it's like, it's such a broad topic of making a relative. So we've made relational connection to horses. They became a relative. We recognize them for their attributes. Some of them became good with children. Some of them were buffalo runners, some are... They all had they were people too so we call them Oyate.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

So we had a level of respect for all those kind of beings that we knew? So I always think of that. And then in a modern era, let's think about, we have to adapt new ways. This is what Sitting Bull and all these guys say, "Well, teach our children so we can live and exist as *Lakḥóta*." So we learn how to read and write. And from beyond that we are still learning to adapt to a higher level of coexisting with other humans. And right now most *Lakḥótas* don't know that we are already global citizens. We should drop the dependence with the federal government and be marketing our stuff and our products to the world. And having unique relationships, diplomatic relationships with other countries, instead of just the US. So, we figured out, if you're a real Dakota, you adhere to these ideas of *huŋká*, making things relative so that our people may live.

Suzanne Kite:

That reminds me of one thing that I think about with relationships to the non-human, that's like a *huŋká* is a ceremony but it's also a framework that can say, "This is how you do this is. And this

is how you make new relations in a good way." So then why can't we... So that's part of my research too, is that one of the big things putting pressure on us is technology and this computer technologies. And I think that one, I mean, one thing that I'm interested with this project is figuring out how we can take other ethical frameworks, like Hunka, like sweatlodge, like we already have the technologies to make new relationships with these new technologies.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

Yeah. Well, I think there's a principle involved in adapting. That's one of our strongest attributes as native people, is we've been adapting to any kind of things. So when it comes to climate change, we can't control that so where we were resilient. We have to be resilient, we have to be economical, and we had strict laws on how we hunted collectively so we are part of a collective that's really kind of interrelated in seeing the value of one another. And we had some pretty strict laws long time ago. If you went against the collective, as far as he's doing a collective buffalo hunt and all of a sudden you jump on, and it ruins it for everybody. And I always think the economy we had it was called an economy of reciprocity because we took care of each other. It was like the circle. It was always. It sounds idealistic, but it did. You think of the millennia that tens of thousands of years we've been living in this area we have survived through that interrelationship with each other, helping one another.

Suzanne Kite:

That's one thing that Clementine and I talked about a bunch of was, how, so you're going to make a new artwork. We're going to collect materials for an artwork or something you need, the first thing you do is this seemingly symbolic act of putting tobacco down. But it's not, I mean, it's not symbolic. That's the reciprocity. That's the first step of reciprocity.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

Yeah, it is. And that's what I do too. I take tobacco, make offerings, say a prayer, whenever I'm gathering and I see that kicked the back. We'll make offerings, say a prayer. Whenever I had a gathering, I see that as a really good example of the basket makers in Southern California. They were actually the ecologists. They never took more than they needed, but they're the ones that are understanding climate change right now, because what they use is getting scarce. But I'm just saying they never took any more than they needed because it was always going to be there. Things like that. It's kind of living not off nature, but living with nature, there's a difference. Yeah. I'm getting pulled in deeper. I was thinking about talking with you about what I've always felt. It's kind of hard to articulate a lot of these things with some of these other guys here. They want to talk about something else. Come on guys. Don Martin is one of these guys. I can't talk with him. He just wants to joke around because he doesn't know. Come on Dom.

Suzanne Kite:

So one serious question I have is, looking at these and I've been talking to people who write songs and people who write sacred songs and public songs, but one question I have for Lakhóta artists is, this question of when you make something new, where does it come from? I mean, of

course, yes, we can very simply say, "Oh, not from us. I'm just a vessel," sort of thing. But looking around here and looking at other artists it's difficult to articulate, but I think that's a really important, where does... I mean, in the West it is divine inspiration or something, but it's like, you can see there's non-humans involved. There's dreams involved.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

There's a continuity here that your seeing that's visual in a sense. But in all reality, these things are marking time and they'll disappear. So I know that. But I know, I myself when I create, I'll see something I made many years ago and I can't remember it. And I'll even look at it and then not even know it's mine and be inspired. But I said, "Don't you remember you made it. Oh, I did. Oh, my God." But so I do know that I've heard it about spiritual leaders. They always say, they're a hollow bone or a vessel that creator power comes through you. And I know that. I'm really happy when making things. Nothing else. It's like a zone and you don't care. I mean, I get it. I mean, I'm the most happy doing that. And sometimes I even dream about things that, in my dreams I'm looking at my engraving, my cutters, just moving through metal and I could just see things moving. That's me, everything is there.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

But it's kind of spiritual, it's hard to really explain it but I do know that I get really inspired sometimes. I like to do my best work in the early morning. There's all these little things that I noticed that make me happy. And I think we as beings, that's what we're born to be. Satisfied, happy. Because even little babies, they cry because they're hungry. I mean we're needy people.

Suzanne Kite:

We're needy people. Yes.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

Yeah. So we're constantly doing things like fulfill these little holes that we have in ourselves, but artists even more so are very temperamental. Although a lot of the guys I know.

Suzanne Kite:

You mean you can really... Of course, but even this one, like he's disappearing into a fractured.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

Yeah. He's got ancestral memories, sense of the buffalo, we are tied to a geographic place in the priory. The magpie that, pie represents the Great Race. It's just so many little icons that are... And we as native people, I see people driving around with feathers on their mirrors and that's the way we live.

Suzanne Kite:

It's interesting. I don't notice. I mean I've been spending a lot of time looking at the geometries and the old women's stuff and thinking of this type of stuff, and thinking about there's a really interesting woman, Sandy Redwing, who works on basically writing with these things. So making super intricate designs that she can read, or she teaches people how to read. So, here, I'm here and this is lightning. It means this and it connects to this. And, so I mean only a little bit do I see in his, but you use those symbols.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

I do. One of my favorite designs and how it came to me it was... You know that little pull off on top of Richard table, you see the Badlands underneath it. I always like to stop there and look around, I see the black hills. Every time it was just like, "Oh my God." So I get my sketchbook and I drew out the peaks and central to that was, they call it black hills. I mean, they call it Black Elk Peak. In Lakhóta we call it Hinhan Kaga but other Lakhótas call it something else. I know it as Black Elk Peak. So it's got this profile and the horizon, it's got a peak over here and a peak over there.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

So that landscape caused me to do a invert of it too, top and bottom. A mirror image and I filled it with some other designs and bending and all that. That's inspired by agates by the banding. And I see that same kind of banding in lot of parfleche drawings, all the painted high drawings that women did. They're all abstract geometric designs. So that's where I get my abstract is from designs in the agates or the landscape. So that's one of my favorite designs is just this profile of the black hills on the horizon and just inverting it and make it, filling it in. And I see other things like that, that are... Constantly. In the clouds. I see... Even as a kid, I looked at clouds and we've all had imaginations, but these things, once you start doing work like that, it's so evident that everything around you is inspiring.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

So, I think of my ancestors. They had no street lights, no signs on the roads, nothing, the prairie, the skies. And then there was no light pollution. So they connected to all these kinds of things and we're able to bring that into their existence, their culture, their spirituality, their designs. I see lightning in a lot of his work, I mean to me, wakhinyan, I have a kind of a special connection to them and even experiences bring out designs in me. I was up on bear view one time, I went up there one afternoon. Man these thunderstorms come fast. One time I was trying to, one was in Rapid City and I was following it all the way to Pine Ridge. I was driving like 70, 80 miles an hour. It was still in front of me. Those things travel about a 100 miles an hour. But I was there and all of a sudden a thunderstorm came and the sky got dark and I said oh, I better get down. So about that time, lightning, rain, wind, hail. All I could do is go down to drawing in these choke cherry bushes.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

But even now that experience, after everything kind of went away, that storm, I was sitting there thinking, wow, that was pretty awesome. But anyway, spiderwebs that were in the choke cherry trees were all lit up with water on them. The sun was behind. That was cool. So then that became, because one of the designs of the Double Face Woman you see it in the old time quillwork is like the design, it's like a square with four scalloped edges. So that became one of my designs that I use and then I engraved, all these little hailstones because hail as powerful as it was, couldn't break those spider webs. That's kind of interesting. It just pass through. So I did this medallion, it became one of my iconic symbols for earrings, as these round whole time, Lakhóta spider web design with hailstones on it. And then the fringes, I cut them up like lightning bolts.

Suzanne Kite:

That's the peak. You were at the peak.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

Yeah. So those are the things that inspire me is nature. I just try to, not that I'm trying too hard to be original. It's just that being consciousness of your environment. And I think it just came natural to our ancestors. And some of these parfleche designs, I could almost say that they're like maps because they feature so much of the geography planes. And then one of the most iconic symbols is medicine wheels, those quilt ones. I got a picture of my grandmother's brother who went to the wild west show, he's all dressed his regalia. And he had this Otter skin sash with mirror medicine wheels. And so those are prevalent back in the 1800s. But one time somebody asked me, "What does that mean?" I get asked that one time and I told the story. He said, well that's a pretty cool story, John.

Suzanne Kite:

If you don't say so yourself.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

But it's iconic because when you're standing out on the prairie, then we're giving the prairie the Lakhótas, Plains Indians. So you're actually at the apex of a 360 degree circle no matter where you're at. So, you know the sunrises there, the south, the wind comes that way. The sun and the wakiyans come from the west and up to the north is the buffalo and the snow. And the horizon's a circle. All the way around, you're standing right there at these four powers, so...

Suzanne Kite:

Logical.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

Logical.



Suzanne Kite:

Of course it would be.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

Yes. So that's an iconic symbol for the Lakhótas because we're prairie. So there's all these little things like that, that define us. I don't know if anybody's ever told that story but.

Suzanne Kite:

One of my favorite symbols right now is thinking about the twisting vortex, the Kapémni and I really like that one book on Lakhóta star knowledge, Goodman talking about the microcosms of like ceremony happening up here, ceremony happening down here. And thinking about the black hills as a gigantic base.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

Yeah. Well, that's the star you are in the changleska wakan constellation. Most people can't really see it, but then we'll think about our ancestors. Those things were so prevalent because of there's no light pollution and they were, so they could see those kind of things. They're much more different than all the other constellations that the rest of the world has conjured up. So we see ours. There's all these ones, the Zuzek, the snake, There's a story behind that one. What's the other one. Chachasha the one that comes up in the winter and that's when it's okay to go gather your tobacco. But when that sun comes, that changleska comes up in this time of the year, the sun actually moves through it. So it's like equating that to the Lakhótas did a great ceremony that's happening with her light.

Suzanne Kite:

The light of the pipe.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

Lighting of the pipe. So yeah, all those kinds of things. That they've struck a relationship with not only the land that we live on but also with the cosmos. And seeing the interrelationship.

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah, I think that the peak and the line up.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

Yeah and all that changleska is in reverse points to all these different. So this always confirmed with me about Plains Indians. We're spacial reasoners. We couldn't project ourselves. And that

map that Amos Bad Heart drew, I had another epiphany because I had a business in doing computer mapping, GIS.

Suzanne Kite:

I heard your presentation on it. Yeah.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

That one was like, what I seen in that book about the pictographic images that Bad Heart Bull in that map. And then seeing what James Harrington, the first indigenous astronaut took a picture of the black hills for us.

Suzanne Kite:

So nice.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

And they're at the same scale.

Suzanne Kite:

Wow. Wow. That reminds me of that part in the Black Elk Speaks where he flies from England to his mother's Tipi and he sees her, he sees from the sky perfectly from like, I don't know, wherever an airplane is, I don't know how many feet up.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

So this is what I'm saying, we're spacial reasoners. So what we know on earth, we can project ourselves to see because we know the whole expanse. We know where we're at, and we will know where we're going. That's a tremendous feature that we have that because we live in an area that we know everything. So we're never lost. We know the macro to the micro, because we see things on the ground. So that's called ground truthing in science. Because they have sensors in the sky that they read infrared and the biomass at different reflectance of wavelengths of light and all that. And then you go down and you measure it and it's the same thing there, but duh, it's already here, but no.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

So all that science stuff like that, I come to sort of like know that satellites have all these sensors, they could see just like eagles do. Eagles have remote sensing. They could see different light bands and dogs can hear different things that we can't hear. I'm just thinking it's so amazing, but that's what we're discovering. I think in technology that kind of enhances our own awareness of a place and how we can live in harmony again.

Suzanne Kite:

So what kind of technologies do you think that the next generation should take?

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

Okay. You got to have a vision and why you use it. Right now, it's manifested with the sense of power and wealth concentrating mouth. But when you use it for a collective good day, technology, no matter what it is, benefits the whole. I had experiences in that working with GIS up in Canada when these guys had to enter into the treaty process. They never had treaties in British Columbia. But I kind of fell into that opportunity of mapping for them and they came up with these maps that were just incredible because they weren't tied to the world coordinates system of latitude and longitude. They were tied to a reality heights of land and watersheds. And the boundaries in between that area was all piece mosaic together by knowledge of the micro, knowing the food sources, the medicinal plants, cultural resources, and all that mosaic together with different clans.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

So the Tiospayes here how we used to roam the land. We just didn't, did it as a collective. We did it in small family groups, just like we're following the buffalo. Buffalo did roam around and big herds, they went around in kind of family groups too. Because they didn't want to destroy their environment. They did it to live that way too. So that's the way we modeled our societies after, to live in harmony with the environment. So, all of these things have social implications. So when we look at even ourselves right now, we have to figure out a way to reinvigorate our social system like the Lakhótas do. We don't have that family structure anymore. There's a lot of single mothers and geez, what happened. Yeah. So, that's why we're kind of lost right now. We don't have that structure anymore. So anyway technology can help. Right now I'm doing some consulting work with GIS mapping, with helping to implement that with tribes for child protective services. Answering the greater question, where are your children? Especially the child welfare act is children's scattered all over.

Suzanne Kite:

I bet there's people working on my MMIW mapping. And I feel like that's probably happening too. Tracking the 18 missing girls.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

Those are all spatial questions that were where. So that's where the technology has been called the science of where. Using imagery to have updated maps, rivers change, all these things are. The world is always moving. Now they're using LiDAR. You can see things now they discovered all those monuments of the Aztec and all those people in Mexico because that LiDAR was able to see through vegetation. So technology with the right vision can really benefit us. But right now it's covered by resource exploitation.

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah. It's all going to get in more mined materials or gas

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

Yeah. I know the man that was instrumental in developing all that, Jack Dangermond, kind of became a friend of mine. Yeah. He's the one that owns ESRI. He's the Microsoft of GIS software. He's the one who helped me get my business started. So that's the work I did up in Canada. I tried to work in our own tribe but they'd rather...

Suzanne Kite:

I also only work in Canada. I moved to Montreal. I worked in Winnipeg and Quebec.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

No, I spent many years in British Columbia and Alberta.

Suzanne Kite:

Alberta. I love Alberta. I'm going to move to Vancouver actually.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

Cool. That's one of my most favorites.

Suzanne Kite:

Oh good. I've never been there so good to hear.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

Yeah. It is, go down to Stanley park and when I was younger, I used to run. I'd run from the hotel around Stanley park. Yeah. There's some cool Indian communities around there. Squamish. Their food's good,

Suzanne Kite:

Good salmon.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

Good salmon and halibut. Yeah. The Vancouver art museum. Yeah. All those places. Yeah. I know where all the good places to eat are. We did a lot of GIS work actually he helped the Squamish right there in north end, developing their maps for them. Their culture had them going

all the way up to Fraser valley, all the way up to Mount Garibaldi because that's where the salmon spawn. And they had all these culturally modified trees that they used to take bark off them and some of the old forest, they made the canoes out of those. So they had all these... That's all part of their land. So we mapped it out for them by their oral histories. So that's the kind of work I used to do. But I've always done artwork in the background and no matter what I did, I was like... So I never really just stuck to art. I just put everything-

Suzanne Kite:

But they're connected.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

Yeah, they're so interconnected. They really are, yeah. But I really am into maps because I know that we as spatial reasoners have created in our artwork that dimension of space and place. That's why I look at some of this art. And I really like, "What are we doing? Where are we going?"

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah. Well, I think I'll ask you one more question. Basically is there... I mean, you've answered this in 10 different ways already like, but is there anything else you want to share about stones or?

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

Yeah. Well of course we always known stones to be healers. We've heard stories that these spiritual leaders would have these helpers stones that came to them during a weepy ceremonies, whatever these stones have traveled. Come back with knowledge and I, myself, seeing those stones and ceremonies and realized that, one time I found a half one up on Red Shirt Table on the west side. And went across, so you could see Badlands below here, and the Black Hills. I was rock cutting and I seen one sticking out the ground. And when I was reaching down to it and it snapped like static. But anyway, I talk to it and anyway, I picked it up and it was half one. So they're not formed by rolling around in nature and they became round, they were actually formed round because there were rings inside of it and all that. So when I see these rocks and I have to find them every now and then, but I give them away to people.

Suzanne Kite:

So how do they form?

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

So I would know that it's just a phenomenon to me. Geologic phenomenon. Yeah. I don't know how they form.

Suzanne Kite:

If anyone would know it would be you.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

Yeah. So, anyway, that's just the way they were formed. And if you would know, you look out in space and you'll see the planets and they're formed in the vacuum of space so they. So that's another theory I have is because of the mass, everything draws together, becomes solid. Equal forces are holding in place. I do that because I do, and I do silver work. I make these silver balls, take like scraps of silver. You heat it up and it gets red hot and melts and all circle, and it forms a ball. You take the heat away and it's a silver ball. So I was thinking, "Wow, maybe that's-"

Suzanne Kite:

It's molten and then suddenly the heat gets taken away.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

You're heating it up and all of a sudden it just. Under the heat it dries together, and it's a red metal ball and you slowly take the flame away take these totally take the flame away. And so I have to show it to you sometimes if I could.

Suzanne Kite:

That's cool. So, I mean, you can imagine that's what the stones...

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

So that's how I make my little silver stars and I stamp them and use them on my silver work. So, those are thoughts that come to me while I'm working. I experiment and find things. So these stones, I figured they're formed in space, or somewhere in the forces of vacuum, you see.

Suzanne Kite:

Maybe in water.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

Yeah. Maybe in water or something. They're formed in there, right? So, I don't know. I can't explain, but I do know, but I when I worked at Sinte Gleska University, I taught there in Rosebud. And I got to go to the Jet Propulsion Lab in Pasadena.

Suzanne Kite:

Oh, cool.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

And this is when they built the first Mars Rover. So we got to see a live feed of them they're demonstrating. I don't think it was a real live feed, but they were telling us that, but it was the Rover. It went over to this hill and came down and in this field in front of it. And it kind of went blurry way beyond there, but it was this field of totally wrong rocks. It just sent chills through me. It's like, is no one else noticing us. Is this where all the medicine stones come from.

Suzanne Kite:

From Mars.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

Did they fight for space? Do they come here? I don't know, so I'm left with all these kinds of... I've been tweaked all kinds of ways with, I don't know. But I know they're very special, and I've heard of ways of how they used to keep. So I do have a, with my special stones, I keep them in the same way that all these medicines stones do. And I don't know what's going to happen, but I do... I'm not going to pray to them as gods. I know they have healing power because they were are part of creation. All this metamorphic, all of these kinds of things that were happening, traded rocks and this energy, matter water, all those things condensed into this thing has this powerful energy. It's like revere them very much. And most of other cultures, think rocks are inanimate, they don't have life. They don't move, but they are marking time. Yeah. So when I make things like this I tell people it was just living. It's marking time.

Suzanne Kite:

It's flowing, slowly.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

Flowing. Their silicon air looks like and it's translucent, you could see through it. Those are bandings each one of those bands are probably millions of years old. And it just blows your mind, but it's unique to this area, I mean that's. But, I met... I have some Japanese sculptor friends, they revere working with rocks. They discover. A lot of sculptors I know they see rocks and then they see it differently, they see something inside it. So they take away to bring out what's inside. So there's all kinds of perspectives on rocks, and the different kinds, metamorphic, igneous and sedimentary rocks, those are the three things the earth is made out of.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

So there's all of these events that happened, heat is one of them, two, power the sun. All of these kind of things. So I look at rock the way... When sculptors use it, I kind of realized that they made a connection with it somehow to have a relationship with it. Work with them, they work with it. You don't control it, it controls you. So there's power in those things. That's the way I see things about rocks. They're pretty important.

Suzanne Kite:

I agree.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

Yeah. I walk around Rapid City because I'm always looking at. I found an agate at the Hobby Lobby in the gravel there. There's people that walk around here with little spray cans, spraying the gravel, looking for agates. Urban rock hunters.

Suzanne Kite:

Urban rock.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

Because all this gravel comes from the Cheyenne River.

Suzanne Kite:

Oh wow.

Jhon Duane Goes In Center:

Yeah. I will look down more. Amazing. Well, thank you so much. I'm going to pause this here because I.

### **8.2.10 Mike Marshall, Interview Transcript**

Suzanne Kite:

Okay, we'll record. And let me get my questions out.

Mike Marshall:

Okay. Excuse me. I have a little hay fever.

Suzanne Kite:

Mowing all day.

Mike Marshall:

Yeah. I wish I was mowing all day. Okay.



Suzanne Kite:

Okay. Well, sorry I introduced myself very informally.

Mike Marshall:

No. I just thought you had to do a sound, whatever that thing is.

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah.

Mike Marshall:

Okay.

Suzanne Kite:

So then if you want to introduce yourself.

Mike Marshall:

Oh, yeah. Well, hey, Suzanne and-

Mike Marshall:

Natty, I'm sorry.

Mike Marshall:

My name is Mike Marshall. Obviously I live out here in the country, Rosebud reservation. I've been out here for close to some 32 years. Most of my kids have already moved on. I'm single now, but I still have my youngest son with me. And right now, I've got my grandson visiting up from Denver. Real nice.

Mike Marshall:

I've pretty much been interested in Lakǎóta culture. Actually it's all I read. I'm not really into fiction or... Well, I do read some news of course, but everything is about our past and my real area of interest is the early reservation period.

Mike Marshall:

You see a lot of interesting things happening with art and influences. I'll probably just say the Catholic church. A lot of influence there, and what's going on with the art. Currently I like

making the old tools from the days gone by, parfleche, which is mostly a woman's art. Wizipan. That's what we call it. Right?

Mike Marshall:

I do ledger art, which brings me a pretty good income. I'm also a silver smith. I occasionally teach that and boutique. Also I do a little painting. That's one of my paintings over there.

Suzanne Kite:

Oh, wow.

Mike Marshall:

I kept that from college, one of my first pieces.

Suzanne Kite:

That's really good.

Mike Marshall:

I get a little crazy and wild with that. And I do the same thing with my batik. Those are the only things that I really stray away from traditional. When it comes to batik, and bigger paintings.

Suzanne Kite:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Mike Marshall:

So yeah. That's all. My kids, my daughter, grandkids.

Suzanne Kite:

But there turtles.

Mike Marshall:

Yeah. My two daughters right there, they've gone and done good things. One's going to be a RN teacher, and the other one, she's a mortician. And that's her son in there I have with us. There's a few other things I do. I don't do as much, but on that table over there, I've got some atlats. I'm really interested in ancient hunting. Obviously we hunt?

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah. I can tell.

Mike Marshall:

So, I like to recreate the atlatls, the spear throwing devices if you weren't quite up on what that is. I make my own archery equipment. Those are some of my arrows. Let's see, what else am I missing here? I do some stone sculpture. That's my painting table over there. I had to move it out of the other room because it just got so busy in there. I'm not going to show you. It's really looking bad right now.

Mike Marshall:

But I do all my dirty work in there. I cut in sand bone, I work on metal knives, so it gets pretty dirty in there. But it's a good mess. I think that's about all I got going. Yeah.

Suzanne Kite:

So, most of my questions are about when you make things and your relationship, because I guess maybe we could start with your relationship with material. Because you know about hunting and you think about... Maybe it'd be nice to start with about the spirits growing. And what that is.

Mike Marshall:

Well, okay. Let me just go back to my introduction then. Prior to my bachelor's degree, I got it at Sinte, bachelor of fine arts. My emphasis was Lakhóta art. Before that I was 22 years with our tribes Game, Fish and Parks Department. So I was a ranger. I had access to a lot of animal parks. So, it really helped with my art. Okay?

Mike Marshall:

And then when I graduated in 99, I decided to move on and I went over to the museum in St. Francis. Which was really a nice boom. Because I got an introduction to the games. And it was really needed at the time. Nobody was doing anything with our traditional games. I'll show you something in a minute.

Mike Marshall:

So what I basically did is I looked at the originals and I recreated them all. And now I do regular, well, I haven't done any in a year, but I do programs. Either make and take or just programs to introduce the games and invite people to try them out.

Suzanne Kite:

I think I was there when Chanupa was making a mural. I think you were teaching games at Racing Magpie.

Mike Marshall:

Oh, okay.

Suzanne Kite:

It was like two years.

Mike Marshall:

More like three years I think. Yeah.

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah.

Mike Marshall:

I remember that. I don't remember you. I'm sorry.

Suzanne Kite:

I was being shy.

Mike Marshall:

Oh okay. And then they had later in the evening they did some music.

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah. That was probably me.

Mike Marshall:

Oh, okay. I watched it but, yeah.

Suzanne Kite:

A while ago. Yeah.

Mike Marshall:

Yeah. That was a while ago.

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah. So most of my research for my school has got to do with ethics. We make things as artists and sometimes, most of the world, they just make things and they don't care about if they're made in a good way or not. But the Lak'hóta way, if you're going to make a piece of art, the first step is this relationship with the thing you're killing. And then at the end you get a product, but the way you kill it is the first important step. Are you killing in a good way or bad way?

Mike Marshall:

Absolutely. I can't agree with that more. I think that's where a lot of Lak'hóta artists are missing the point. And that's why I think I try to stay within that all the time period, because I think that with my background, I'm able to do that, for one thing.

Mike Marshall:

And then what I see nowadays, I don't want to call it Pan Indian, but it kind of is. I mean, you can't even tell marks and designs anymore from tribe to tribe. So, whenever I do a ledger piece, especially I try to get the attire right. And what they're doing, I try to portray it correctly. And I have enough outdoors background, and really outdoors background fully with the bones and hides and all that, that I can do it accurately.

Suzanne Kite:

So when you go out to, let's say you want to make something with bone, you go out and hunt first?

Mike Marshall:

Or sometimes I go out and collect.

Suzanne Kite:

Collect. Oh, yeah.

Mike Marshall:

Which you can find out there's a dead deer down the road.

Suzanne Kite:

I know. I pass them every day.

Mike Marshall:

I know. And I'm like, "Huh." And, yeah. I could get the deer knuckles out of it. I can get the leg bones, you know? This isn't deer, but the last one I just sold was a deer leg. Okay. And it's gross.

Some people aren't into that, but this is how I make my art. So I start from ground zero. I even make my own glue out of hide scrapings and sinew and all that.

Mike Marshall:

I'd make my own paint out of natural stuff when it comes to making items like that. But nowadays, most of the stuff I'm doing, it's for a quick sale. So, I'm using acrylics modern paint, but if I'm asked to do something museum quality, I have my paints. I have my own glue mordant, and I've got a piece of elk hide. It's not very much, but we really missed out on collecting materials last year because of this whole COVID business.

Mike Marshall:

So, yeah. But stuff like this, you could see antler piles right over there?

Suzanne Kite:

Oh yeah.

Mike Marshall:

Those are my building blocks right there. So, I don't hang things on the wall per se. I'm not into that. So, first thing we're eating all the stuff we kill. I was just looking in there, I've got four bags of Turkey feathers that I have to deal with because they've got my freezer filled up right now.

Mike Marshall:

But I need those. I need those for my games. I need them to make my arrows, yeah. Like that, making my Turkey wing bone calls.

Suzanne Kite:

So, let's say when you're collecting or hunting or using materials, it's so interesting because when I talk to people, they're so in it, it's hard for them to see how Lakhóta it is, like the process by which they're doing things like, do you see that what you do is in the way in which you collect these things is a Lakhóta way?

Mike Marshall:

Oh, Nash, thank you.

Suzanne Kite:

Is that something that you can-

Mike Marshall:

Oh, did I?

Suzanne Kite:

Well, but I mean, it's clear to me obviously.

Mike Marshall:

Okay.

Suzanne Kite:

But do you feel like you're doing that different than let's say... Because there's a lot of white folks who make things that are nativy.

Mike Marshall:

Oh yeah.

Suzanne Kite:

But there's a difference when we're doing it ourselves. Do you see that in what you do?

Mike Marshall:

Oh, absolutely.

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah.

Mike Marshall:

Of course. No, definitely. And again, I think I'm a little better off than some of my fellow artists. I don't want to brag. I'm not saying my art is good, but I have the process.

Suzanne Kite:

Right.

Mike Marshall:

Again, and I think that's important. And I love that you brought that up. And I've tried to pass that on. I've had three mentees. I have one right now and I'm really pushing for her to learn about parfleche. Okay? And I think a lot of what you're seeing out there nowadays, it's junky parfleche.

Mike Marshall:

It's basically there, but... Okay. Let me back up on that. Back in the old days, there was men's art and there was a women's art. Okay? The men were realistic. The women were abstract. That's why you see designs, but it's not just designed. It's abstract meaning.

Mike Marshall:

So there's really a story going on with rawhide containers. Okay? And like a fine artist, it's not always recognizable, but she knew what it was. And I think that's just badass.

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah. We look at these designs a lot and I think one thing that strikes me is that the women would have a dream first or vision, and then translate that into the design. I know as working artists, we have to make a living, so we're always making stuff. But do you ever make things where you're like you have a dream or like-

Mike Marshall:

Oh my God, yeah. I mean, there's no practical purpose to this. But I was thinking about, not necessarily this one, but the ones before it, sometimes you just wake up and you think of things. Sometimes I wake up at three in the morning, I think of things. And it's always nice to have like a giant pad that you forget. You forget a lot of cool things here or you see something. Oh, well wait a minute. Not that one. Sometimes you have visions about things. I hate using that word. But here's a good example. I dreamt about that one. Now that's a batik.

Mike Marshall:

Which is in our art form, not even in the United States. Batik comes from Asia. Okay. But there's a few of us that took the class and I just love this because it's free and it matches my vision. And the colours I see. You know what I'm saying?

Mike Marshall:

Thanks man. But what I wanted to show you though. Needs my help. Okay, I can't find the one I'm trying to find or talk about, but I dreamt about this one. So basically these are like the universe. Can you see it?

Suzanne Kite:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Mike Marshall:



And this is a blood line. I don't know why, but I dreamt like, this is how our prayers go up. And these are the beans that take our prayers. So, I've got this positive and negative image of these horse beans, and they have horns.

Suzanne Kite:

I didn't know you could make a batik this detailed.

Mike Marshall:

Yeah. So you're asking that, and really, it's not so much that, that's so spectacular, but I see these colours. And it's all about the colours in my mind. That mix.

Suzanne Kite:

Batik can do that for you.

Mike Marshall:

Yeah. It can. And it's so free. I don't draw. I don't draw a batik. I just deal with hot wax right off the bat. That's my drawing. You know what batik is?

Suzanne Kite:

A little bit.

Mike Marshall:

It's basically a wax resist, meaning I'm going to start with a pan of melted wax. I've got a tool called a jaunting tool, and you dip it into the wax and it's got a spout. And basically you take it over to your canvas, and in mine is wall art, I don't do textiles. And you just start drawing with this hot wax. And it starts coming out. And you have to learn how to deal with the flow of the wax.

Mike Marshall:

So it's really a free thing. You know? And I don't know, it's like a stone too. Stone is the same way. It's just free. I'm sure that people when they do real serious stuff, but I don't do serious. I do it because I enjoy it.

Suzanne Kite:

I don't think I've seen your stone.

Mike Marshall:

It's been a while because it's hard to do. Unless you have a workspace. And I just can't afford to build the shop. I just deal with what I can do. And here's another one I really liked. Again, now this is my beginnings with batik. But again, it's all about prayers and all that kind of stuff. This is how I see it. Okay?

Suzanne Kite:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Mike Marshall:

But again, it's the colours for me. All right? And I think it's the same thing with the old timers too. Okay. Getting back to that thing about the women did their art, the men did their art, but they dealt with colouring in a non classical way. Okay. I'll just use a man as an example. He's obviously recording a historic event. Some personal deed or an event. Usually is a war event or a spiritual event.

Mike Marshall:

But anyway, when he's doing his art and you look at some of his older ledger art, okay, might not have a brown horse, it might be a green horse. And I just love that. And then even when they talk about black, it's not always black. You know, they use chokecherry as a pigment. I've got some in there that I used for paint. But it could be different variations of a tint of chokecherry. Not necessarily a bloodish red, or it might be a brown to a black.

Mike Marshall:

So, I like that. And the women kind of did the same thing. And their palette was really limited. They didn't mix it down. It just came straight as a primary. So the women had like a red, blue, sort of a yellow ochre and black. Which could be black to reddish.

Mike Marshall:

You know what, sometimes I go off track. So remind me.

Suzanne Kite:

No, this is all relevant.

Mike Marshall:

Okay.

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah. I'm just curious about, as an artist, your relationship with materials. So talking about those pigments that you make and the bone that you use and the stone, it's like you have to go out into the real world and do that. My question is what do those materials give to you? You could just use store-bought stuff, but what does it do for your art when you use the real thing?

Mike Marshall:

Well, I think that's what sets me apart and why people enjoy my page too, because I get out there and scrounge for the old stuff or the old technique. And you just don't see that a lot. Sorry. I think I'm on a little different level. I might be a little crude in what I do but, it's a whole different presentation. And I think people respect that. And definitely, I want to do that.

Mike Marshall:

I mean, this has been my life. So, it all ties together. My time with game and fish, my hunting, my study of Lakḥóta culture. Okay? It all comes together for me. And then I've been introduced to some materials along the way, stone, batik. And I've been able to incorporate that into my view of the culture.

Suzanne Kite:

So let's say you want to start a new work, is the start the dream maybe or an image that pops in your mind? Where does this begin.

Mike Marshall:

I haven't done anything really personal lately, so I haven't done any batiks in almost a year and a half. I've been dealing with survival right now, so I hate to say it, but a lot of my stuff is just cranked out right now. Again, I do the parfleche, but it's on a different level. It's something I could turn over quick. Okay?

Mike Marshall:

But I did do a nice piece and you can't share it yet, but this is a rawhide channupa case, but it hasn't been given yet, so I can't put it on Facebook. But this is what I'm doing now, and this is all kite by the way. Okay? I've showed the turtle. I did a rawhide turtle and I made him round. And then I've got a little pipe temper there out of buffalo bone.

Suzanne Kite:

Wow.

Mike Marshall:

But that wasn't so hard to do, and it's not as traditional as what... There's that little turtle. Rawhide. Okay. I'm doing stuff like this. And basically, I can recreate five or six of these in a

night. And you know what, I'm going to sell them for 50 bucks a piece. I'm going to be able to pay the bills. This has been my focus lately. And then I do these little boxes. Oh, come back. Sorry.

Mike Marshall:

I've been doing these little boxes. Okay? It's not really traditional, because I'm doing more of a realistic, modern thing. So it's not tradition. But again, working of that material and making a quick sale.

Mike Marshall:

But let me show you my ledger. You probably shouldn't. And you're welcome to use any of my images in there, if you want to poke around Facebook and use them. Here. I'll just let you guys scan through that. And you know what the whole thing about ledger ideas, right?

Suzanne Kite:

It'd be good to hear it from you.

Mike Marshall:

Okay. Well, mostly in the past, our history keepers were men. Okay. And they did that realistic style. You could look at it and you could tell what's going on. And women are doing this abstract thing. And you might get some of the designs, but you're not getting her story.

Mike Marshall:

Okay. Whatever she's doing. A bravery thing or whatever. Honoring thing. Which a lot of that was. But the men, you've got this ledger style or realistic style, and again, I'm dealing with the reservation era. So, most of those hides are gone, material that canvas is gone. So what they did is they went to the agencies, and they got discarded journals, ledgers, and those folks over there at the agency were making artists materials available.

Mike Marshall:

So, pen and ink, watercolours, which is what I use. Did I say pencils? And later on crayon. So, that's what these guys started to use to record everyday events. Okay? I'm going to show a ledger book. (silence)

Mike Marshall:

I actually got a ledger around somewhere, but I'm going to donate to the Racing Magpie.

Suzanne Kite:

Oh, that's nice of you.

Mike Marshall:

They had a fundraiser I think for a heating system or something. But I was so busy at the time. I couldn't give up a piece. I was too involved. Here's the ledger book I scored.

Suzanne Kite:

Wow.

Mike Marshall:

And you don't think about it. I never bought any old documents. And that's all I use. A lot of guys nowadays, I know a couple artists, they get a document and then they'll go to the print shop and they'll have it produced. That's okay. That's cool, but that's not what I'm after. It's got to be old paper. So this book is 1880s on up to 1930. I'm almost done with this book, but here's a nice page. You see how many I've cut out of here to make paintings from.

Mike Marshall:

Yeah. It's heavy.

Suzanne Kite:

Wow.

Mike Marshall:

But it's just so cool you know?

Mike Marshall:

Yeah.

Mike Marshall:

And that's a charm nowadays of ledger art. Is using this kind of material. This particular book is out of Hastings, Nebraska, when they were forming the town.

Mike Marshall:

So I've got like eight of these. Yeah. I traded a woman some paintings, and these came from her family. So she gave them up and got smart off me. And I got these great ledgers.

Mike Marshall:

And I've been saving that one. I had an old Atlas of Hastings too. And that was the last page left. It's all there. You can see all the townships. But I don't know what to do with that yet. But I'll think of something. And then again I took the subjects a step further, and I made my own ledger. So this is buffalo hide, it's commercial.

Mike Marshall:

And then I made this little magnetic lock, and a friend of mine, she bound this? I didn't do the book, but there's like 38 pages in here. And I made my own little ledger book.

Suzanne Kite:

Wow. Really nice.

Mike Marshall:

Again, I'm into to the game. So, I've got this woman right here, this young lady, and she's playing the game, which is a woman's game. So, stuff like that.

Suzanne Kite:

Green horse.

Mike Marshall:

Green horse.

Mike Marshall:

Okay? And I love that. I actually made this into a greeting card. Okay. That's my grandpa. Indian cowboy.

Suzanne Kite:

Poor guy.

Mike Marshall:

Omaha dancer. So again, I'm dealing with that time period. The Omaha dance wasn't ours.

Suzanne Kite:

Right.

Mike Marshall:

We didn't really have that, but it was introduced to us during that early reservation time. So, I got a few of those in here. There's another one. He's actually got a begging stick. Blue horse. Being free with the colours, but I've got quite a bit of control. Obviously I've got better art material to use.

Suzanne Kite:

Right.

Mike Marshall:

This is my ledger.

Suzanne Kite:

Cool. Tell me about this spirit.

Mike Marshall:

Oh, no. I think they gave it away. All I've got there in the corner, those are some of my game pieces by the way. But as long as these are game pieces, so I'll just use it to illustrate. Can you hand me one please?

Mike Marshall:

So two parts to an atlatl. You've got that as a thrower. Okay? And you've got your, I don't want to call it a spear, but maybe a long arrow. Okay. This isn't hollowed at the end, so this is not going to work. But it goes into the hollow, you know that little amber point right there? And it's going to have feathers like an arrow.

Mike Marshall:

Okay? So just imagine that's a stone point. This is a game. So that's a buffalo horn. Anyway, you're taken like that and there's your mammoth or mastodon or whatever. And you give it a little force with this and it sends this better than you could throw it.

Mike Marshall:

Okay.

Mike Marshall:

But this is homemade. I've got a piece of ash. My senior is coming a little later, so I need to repair it. But that's how natural material is. You've got to maintain it. Okay? I haven't maintained this, but this actually works great. And that's an antler point. And like I said, this would have been hollowed on the end. Okay? So that point to fit into there, and you can propel it.

Mike Marshall:

So it'll go accurately, maybe 50 yards. That's pretty good.

Mike Marshall:

You can hit a pipe plate size target.

Mike Marshall:

And since I have this in my hand, this is a woman's game. It's called Paslohanpi. So basically she would put her finger here, treat it like a shuttle. So it's a winter game. You need a nice smooth surface. So nowadays it's good when I do programs at schools because we have the gym floor.

Mike Marshall:

We get to really have a good time. And then, to keep it going straight, you just put a buffalo horn on the tip. So, any number of players, everybody has the same number of game pieces. Each slide is worth a point. And there's different ways you can play it. Think about Lakhóta games and a lot of things, nothing's set in stone. Okay?

Mike Marshall:

So we have to lay down the rules before we play. Say each round is worth a point. So whoever sends it the farthest or gets closest to a mark, would get that first point, up until 10 points or whatever.

Mike Marshall:

And a lot of games are like that.

Suzanne Kite:

Cool.

Mike Marshall:

So that's your thrower. And then on there I've got this counterweight, which actually gives a little more inertia instead of just a plain stick.

Mike Marshall:

You can't believe the force that this gives it. Okay. And then I made this one a little different, I actually took a piece of the antenna and made a separate hook. That one I inserted and it's got hide glue holding the den with the sinew. Okay?



Suzanne Kite:

So cool.

Mike Marshall:

And if you want, I could give you better pictures. One thing about my art on Facebook, I try to do the best pictures I can, because that's what's going to sell your stuff right off the bat. But, all I have is this. It works out pretty good.

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah.

Mike Marshall:

So those are added atlatls, ATL ATL. There's good examples of it that you could follow, like down to, I get fossil bed. That's the closest place down in the Panhandle, Nebraska. I think they've dug up some points and they found, mastodon bones and all that over there.

Suzanne Kite:

Wow.

Mike Marshall:

So, that's the best closest place. Maybe Mammoth site, but I've never been there. I don't know. I've never been there. I got interested in, that was actually my finals for art history. I did my program on the atlatl, looked like 10,000 years ago around here. When these words.

Suzanne Kite:

Okay. So, I'll just ask you a question, the interview questions. So you make all this stuff that's considered like older technologies, but one of the questions I'm interested in is what we want? What as artists we want of the next generation. What technologies we want them to take, because we've got the phones and computers and artificial intelligence. We have all those things, those are technologies but these are also very serious technologies as well.

Mike Marshall:

Well, it's our history and culture.

Suzanne Kite:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Mike Marshall:

Yeah.

Suzanne Kite:

What technologies do you want the next generations to-

Mike Marshall:

And I do those gates. Okay, I graduated in 99. I quit my job at fish and game, it was going nowhere. Nevermind. It's all law enforcement and it's a lot of BS. Okay?

Mike Marshall:

And it's not really satisfying with this art degree I just got. And actually it took me eight years to get a four year degree because I had to work and I was raising my kids around the ranch, you got a lot of hay fever too.

Mike Marshall:

Oh man, I feel you man. I got some claritin by the way.

Mike Marshall:

Oh, okay.

Mike Marshall:

Yeah. You don't want to take too much of that.

Mike Marshall:

Okay. Where was I at? Yeah, it just held me back and that's why it took me eight years to get a four-year degree. And I don't know if it really did anything for me because I already had it. I don't want to sound too big headed but it was there already. Okay? Maybe. Well, no way, I take it back. I learned stone sculpture there, I learned silver smithing, I learned batik. Okay. But the rest of the stuff I knew. Okay. I'm old. I'm an old spirit. Okay. So this stuff is with me. I'm trying to think here of what...

Mike Marshall:

Just go on.

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah. So you go to the schools, I know you do all these programs for the schools. And so what are the kids? I mean, they're learning games, but what are they really learning?

Mike Marshall:

Well, it's a piece of our history that's almost gone. Now what I was trying to lead into. I did my first games program that was in Sioux city, Iowa. It used to be the Lewis & Clark center, and now I believe they call it the Betty Strong center, right along the river there. I made them a set of games because we had actually, we did a school project when I was at the museum in St. Francis.

Mike Marshall:

I don't know how, but I became the manager or the director there. And I totally have no director skills whatsoever, but I had that interest in the history. Oh, I'm sorry. Is that too loud.

Mike Marshall:

Sounds like a turkey out there.

Suzanne Kite:

That is a turkey.

Mike Marshall:

Sorry about that.

Mike Marshall:

Okay. So one of the first things we did is, we looked at the original collection, which is an awesome, if you ever get a chance go there. In St. Francis.

Suzanne Kite:

St. Francis.

Mike Marshall:

Catholics have it but we won't go there. Okay. I friended a Jesuit, awesome guys, still alive, barely. And he was doing his dissertation on the original collection. And the drag about the crap, a collection is everything was on index cards. Nobody could access that material.

Mike Marshall:

And then through the years, I won't mention names. A lot of people have taken that material and mislabeled it. Give it the wrong meaning. Okay. One thing I'm thinking of right off the bat and

this led me to my games. Okay. I hope I'm not getting off the track. I'm leading up to what I'm doing and why I think it's important.

Mike Marshall:

At that time nobody was doing the games. I saw where one artist had recreated some pieces and they're fantastic, but they were a little on the more modern side, but that was the only example I've seen. Lucky me, I was working over there and they had this great collection. I mean, it's just good as The Smithsonian. Okay?

Mike Marshall:

And labeled a lot better I might say, even though there are mistakes there. That led me into the games. I'm fascinated with making these old things and I wanted to make those games. And one of the things that really sparked my interest was sliding the buffalo rib game.

Suzanne Kite:

Wow.

Mike Marshall:

I had no idea what that was.

Suzanne Kite:

I do not know what that is.

Mike Marshall:

I've heard of the snow snake. We've printed this. Right? But that could be any number of different games of the Iroquois. We don't call it the snow snake we call it sliding the buffalo rib game. And it's a totally different game. Now the two little ones there are actually ones I made for a daughter. Okay.

Mike Marshall:

So I have this guy, this is a guy's game. But my daughter was holding these two little miniatures. She even made them.

Suzanne Kite:

Oh, adorable.

Mike Marshall:

Yeah. So again, I'm using my turkey feathers.

Mike Marshall:

Okay. That's real buffalo rib. I try to make them accurately. And then when I was looking at the collection and we were describing the game pieces, so we could digitize those old index cards, get them up to speed. We really looked at the piece. I think my natural research background was a lot of help in recognizing that, the sticks were made out of willow.

Mike Marshall:

Funny thing about looking at pieces like that, and you get the description of, this is how you play it. This is played by young men. When you get to look at the piece, you really get a feel about what was going on. Okay. Let's just say this piece. Okay. Well, the wood and the feathers, a lot of them were turkey feathers and the wood was willow. Well, where do you see that? You see it long the water's edge. And this is a winner's game.

Mike Marshall:

Well, two and two, the material was right there. Okay? I mean, just little things like that. To me it's monumental because it really puts things together about that part of history, our history for me. And it's a good material.

Mike Marshall:

When you camp for a long period of time, where there's water, obviously you need it. There's firewood there. And there's this great willow, which is a very flexible, nice wood and works great for these games. Okay. Oh, wow. And then turkeys, roost along the waterways.

Suzanne Kite:

So it's located.

Mike Marshall:

Things are there and you're able to make this stuff because you don't carry this throughout the year. Why would you do that? When you got to go head on down to our north platform roads, but to go on buffalo. You're not going to carry this stuff around. There's no sense. So it got discarded.

Suzanne Kite:

That's interesting.

Mike Marshall:

Oh, and then I was talking about mislabeling material. It's a game. It's a toy, more so a toy than a game. I hate when I do that. I got to come up with a better system. So in the museum has an example of mislabeling. They were calling this, Lakǰóta compass. How in the heck they came up with that? But it's a rolling gate. Willow, Willow, light wood there's no way. Sinew across, again, no way. A Tuft of buffalo hair, super light. This thing is like holding a feather. But when you roll it on the ground with the wind to your back, it takes off.

Mike Marshall:

So the boys and girls would line up and they would go chasing after this thing. Whoever caught it, and I'll tell you one time my boy and I went to a program in the Black Hills. I don't know if they have this camp or not anymore, but the area was maintained so there was no nothing to stop this.

Mike Marshall:

And there was a good win. And one of the kids started it and then when you say, go, so whoever gets it starts the game again. Well, it ended up going, oh my God it went like 300 yards, and the wind is just not like this, the wind is like this, and then it goes like that. It always made me think of that movie with the dinosaurs and those little creatures are already getting chased by the T-Rex. And then they all change at the same time.

Mike Marshall:

That's how those kids look when they were chasing after this Jurassic park that's what it was. It always reminds me and then I tell that story. We were really lucky that time to see how that thing worked. But again, when you go back to those notes and we got to get real intimate with this, we actually looked at the original notes of the priests who collected all the original collection items, rather than just go off some crazy idea that that's a compass, and we made those corrections to that site. And then all of a sudden we were armed with all this information. And I got into this. I was like, I'm making all this stuff. I am making all this stuff.

Suzanne Kite:

Wow.

Mike Marshall:

And I got it. Oh, that's a different thing. These are all at the museum over there. There's my drawing or my painting their, the woman's deer tail game, pin in cup. And the reason it's a woman's game that piece right there, and this is correct again, to that time period. Reservation era, there's trade copper. And you could see them using it for stuff like this for earrings, for bracelets, I don't know how they got it, but it came in that wire form.

Mike Marshall:

So here they used it for the pin, for the deer knuckle cups. Of course, that's not what we used in the old days. It would have been Eagle bones sliver. But, this is what they started using afterwards. And then they were starting to make the loops. We have five knuckles, five loops, the coded style, other tribes might be different but when you see this, you know it's ours.

Mike Marshall:

And then we have these extra scoring holes, which I think was totally cool. And then this here knuckles is, here's the hooves of the deer. These knuckles here they're two of them, right? There is the leg bone. And then you've got this bone right here. And there's little pointy, they almost look like teeth that go inside the hoofs. There's this bone. I wish he would have told more about it, but the old timers told him that they called this the bug. Right now the cicadas are out, ever hear... Heck of a noise.

Mike Marshall:

So the story that connected with this game and with this bone is that's the cicada bug. The little spinoff from that is when you hear the cicadas, they must've been on a different timeframe for I don't know how they got to this conclusion. When they made a big noise like that, there was going to be some buffalo. I mean, isn't that a cool story?

Suzanne Kite:

Maybe the buffalo were moving them around this-

Mike Marshall:

Yeah. I'm not sure of the connection, but it's a great story. Where have you heard that story? And I'm like, wow, that's so awesome. You know? So that's the bug out of that bone right here in the deer.

Mike Marshall:

That's okay. But toy Teepee, I'm actually working on it I got a piece of hide of there. So I'm going to make another toy TeePee. Little girls play set. There's a doll. Mine aren't like the ones you see nowadays, these are some pretty good ones and little tiny beads, but this is a style they were making then.

Suzanne Kite:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Mike Marshall:

Okay. Snow sledge out of buffalo ribs. Here's my collection. I think I entered that in a red cloud. Very cool game right there. Unkcela Pte.

Suzanne Kite:

How is that game?

Mike Marshall:

Huh?

Suzanne Kite:

How does that game look?

Mike Marshall:

Unkcela, right? Cactus.

Suzanne Kite:

Oh, it's cactus.

Mike Marshall:

The cactus man game.

Mike Marshall:

So this is a little guy's game. There's his little arrows and they're no bigger than that long. There's a little toy bowl. Is only that big. And there's your one, your cactus one. And that's just no prickly pear. So the boys would get that and stick it in the one, and then wave it. And then boys with their little toy arrows would try to shoot this, and he's waving it, making it hard.

Mike Marshall:

This obviously isn't a game. I take for a demonstration, but I've made it for museums. Okay?

Suzanne Kite:

You got a dangerous game.

Mike Marshall:

Yeah. No. It's a tough boy game.

Suzanne Kite:

It makes them good. Probably make some real good shots eventually.



Mike Marshall:

Be careful of that.

Suzanne Kite:

No?

Mike Marshall:

Forgive me for saying this. My wife would say, "Oh, they did that to make them better hunters."  
No, they did it because they wanted to play.

Suzanne Kite:

True.

Mike Marshall:

And the reason I say that, this makes us human. Okay. None of this sports yet. Okay? No serious.  
When people say stuff like that, that makes us romanticize. No, we had games just like anybody  
else.

Suzanne Kite:

It's true. All of the game work reminds me how much fun it probably was to be a kid.

Mike Marshall:

Yeah. And socializing with people. Right?

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah.

Mike Marshall:

We have games. We do things just like anybody else.

Suzanne Kite:

A lot of games.

Mike Marshall:

Oh, let me finish it because it's cool. You got to know this one. Okay. So, say somebody hits that. Okay? Well, you've pierced the buffalo heart and the magic goes down into the wand bearer. It turns him into the cactus man. So part two to the game is you better start running your ass off because he's going to whack you with that wand.

Mike Marshall:

So, on that level, they were tough. You see what I'm getting at? And there's some mother games like that. I mean, where you physically harmed each other. But again, it's a game and you can't get mad. And it's the rules. Remember I was telling you how you got to lay down your rules before you play. Because they're not set rules, and you don't want to get somebody mad.

Mike Marshall:

So if you lose, you lost. There's no getting mad. Okay? Well, you're mad because you lost. And one thing about Lakḥóta games too, there's something at stake. You're going to lose something or you're going to win something. Okay?

Mike Marshall:

It might be spinning tops. Okay, wait a minute. Remember the little-

Suzanne Kite:

Oh, there he is.

Mike Marshall:

... play pieces. There's my guy. My young man. Your man's got to put his glasses on. There we go. Spinning tops. Caṅkawacipina. Right? Caṅ, what is Caṅ? It's wood.

Suzanne Kite:

Wood.

Mike Marshall:

Wacipi. You know that one.

Suzanne Kite:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Mike Marshall:

To dance. Instead of saying powwow, we say, so this is the dancing wood. There's so many ways to play this. Obviously it's a winter game. It's a boys game. You need a good surface. So frozen lake, hard-packed snow, even they had a song they would sing when they would tap snow with their feet. Okay. Again, another cool little thing.

Mike Marshall:

I'll just tell you about one game. Fighting buffalo. So real important to be able to recognize your top. You can hardly see it there, but it's painted on top black, on this one I've got a yellow band, and a yellow band and a black bat design, on this one, I've actually got the pigment.

Mike Marshall:

So once you get it spinning, you know that top. Now these go with the tops. These are the top whips, and I forgot the word right now. Okay. I'm not fluent. Anyway, what's important about the whip is it'll keep your top going.

Suzanne Kite:

Oh, you hit it and it keeps going.

Mike Marshall:

You hit it and keep it going. I'll show you the game here in a minute. And it also helps to get it started. Now, my one son he's in the army right now. He could get the top going by doing that, but he was an athlete his whole life. So he has that athletic ability, but most of us aren't like that. So, we have to wrap the string around the top and we have to give it a whip, and it starts spinning. And then we keep it going. And we give it direction.

Mike Marshall:

So this particular game, you got to circle the boys with their tops. Each boy has one pop and they get them going, and then you're going to start whipping it to the center and they're going to start taking out other tops. The buffalo. Okay? So the last buffalo standing, wins all the tops.

Suzanne Kite:

High stakes.

Mike Marshall:

And there's something to lose. Something of value. It takes you time to make that. See how the games go?

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah.

Mike Marshall:

So, part of it is, yeah, really cool, presenting the game, excuse me. I'm getting dry. Sharing those games and keeping them alive. And then another part of it is we actually make them. Okay? So I'm teaching other adults as well, how to recreate those old pieces.

Suzanne Kite:

Okay. I have one last question for the interview stuff. Just to go back to the art for a second.

Mike Marshall:

Hang on. I need to drink too.

Suzanne Kite:

Oh, yeah. We all need to take a refill.

Mike Marshall:

You guys need some water?

Mike Marshall:

Okay. There you go.

Suzanne Kite:

Thank you.

Mike Marshall:

Sure.

Suzanne Kite:

So, I think my last question is the interview stuff is, really hard question for an artist, but what do you think to you, what's the most important artwork that you've made to you? Super hard question I know. No? Super easy?

Mike Marshall:

No, it's not a hard question. And again, I think it gets back to when I think of other artists and the thing they do and they do it over and over and over again. And, no, I haven't made my best art

yet because I don't make the same thing over and over. And I don't get upset when people are copying my art. And artists do this all the time. You see it all the time. There's this plagiarism thing going on with art.

Mike Marshall:

Unless they just outright copy that. Yeah. I might get upset. But maybe they liked my colours. Maybe they like how I handle the shading, you know? And I can tell. There's a guy out of... Well, I won't get into it. But I could see what he was doing. And I'm like, you know what guy, that's getting a little too much... So, I unfriended him.

Mike Marshall:

I don't mind it. And actually I let people copy my stuff when I teach. So I'll teach ledger, I'll teach the games. The parfleche especially, I let people outright copy my designs, but you know what? I'm constantly coming up with designs. So here's a good example. And actually, I'm really proud of this. Again, my bone work. Okay? And this. And feel free to look through my page.

Suzanne Kite:

A turtle?

Mike Marshall:

It's a turtle, but it's a soft sheller. Again, remember I was telling you that you've got to keep people on their toes and let people know you're creative and you come up with something different. So this is an elk antler, that the coronet comes off and you put your good salt in there and there's a salt spoon at... I think I use buffalo horn on that one.

Suzanne Kite:

Wow.

Mike Marshall:

This is for my mentee. So she's Sasili Rose. She's in Rapid. Here's my spoon. And I made it look like a turtle. You see that?

Mike Marshall:

Oh, that's a different one. I thought I had a picture. The lid comes off. But I made that out of antler.

Mike Marshall:

Nobody's done this. Okay. So, to me, when it comes to art, you got to keep thinking of something new. Okay? because it's going to lead you... Oh, there it is. It is open.

Suzanne Kite:

Oh, wow.

Mike Marshall:

That was a ton of work man.

Mike Marshall:

This is antler. I carved it out. Yeah. So I don't have a new wow thing. Okay? My newest thing is going to be my next best thing.

Mike Marshall:

I'm not stuck with that.

Mike Marshall:

Okay? I guess of all the things, maybe my batik, I really like and think it's-

Suzanne Kite:

Pretty meaningful.

Mike Marshall:

Yeah. Thank you.

Suzanne Kite:

That's because it's your vision.

Mike Marshall:

But then see, I keep changing it up. But again, this is that whole thing we're talking about. How do you come to your art and you dream it. Yeah. Well this is definitely dreamt stuff right here. The other stuff is just being innovative and creative with material. Okay? So, but to this, it's a little different. Some of these aren't so great.

Suzanne Kite:

That one's crazy.

Mike Marshall:

That's a wolf. I went to a friend of mine. I gave this to my sister, and this was just a lesson I was doing for my students. Let's make a batik in half an hour. So, no flirting around. Let's get with it. That was done in less than an hour.

Mike Marshall:

So, that's what I was trying to teach.

Suzanne Kite:

What are the lines?

Mike Marshall:

Huh?

Suzanne Kite:

What are the-

Mike Marshall:

Again, they're spirits. So they have... and they're doing some weird stuff. But every time you see just a white here, that's the wax. And again, hey, come here. Say, hi. This is my grandson.

Suzanne Kite:

Hi.

Mike Marshall:

He's with me for a while.

Suzanne Kite:

Hi.

Suzanne Kite:

I'm Suzanne.

Mike Marshall:

Were you looking for a snack or something.

Mike Marshall:

Okay, go ahead. There's some tea.

Mike Marshall:

This is where I put down the line of hot wax first. So, the dye isn't going to penetrate that wax.

Suzanne Kite:

Oh, right.

Mike Marshall:

Okay? So, that's why it looks like that. But then I like these things. I'm going to give them more movement than just the movement. So, I continue that line and this is Joe.

Mike Marshall:

Yeah. And I never finished it. I ended up disliking it. Yeah. It's just sitting in there. It was a good idea. This is the one who makes all the tears. So, I wanted to show tears coming off the tree there, but I couldn't get it right. So, oops. I lost her. So I quit working on it.

Suzanne Kite:

It happens with artwork.

Mike Marshall:

Yeah. You know, sometimes it happens. I was actually doing this. This was my girlfriend. (silence) Come on, where are you? Oh, here's a nice piece. They had the, I forgot what the exhibit was called. Oh, the Horse Nation Exhibit.

Suzanne Kite:

Oh yeah.

Mike Marshall:

It's been all over, right?

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah.

Mike Marshall:



This was my piece.

Suzanne Kite:

Oh, okay.

Mike Marshall:

Well, it didn't continue with the show because somebody bought this.

Mike Marshall:

Yeah. It was a nice big piece too.

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah, I love the blend. That's definitely... That's so cool.

Mike Marshall:

Does it not just make you think of spirituality?

Suzanne Kite:

That's very cool. Yeah.

Mike Marshall:

That's what batik does for me. So, I don't know if it's necessarily my best, but you know what? It's a heck of a good portrayal of what I'm thinking.

### **8.2.11 Peter Morin, Interview Transcript**

In conversation with the author, May 24, 2021

Suzanne Kite:

Okay. All right. I'll set myself on. So I'm recording. Wopila for being here. I thank you so much for agreeing to be interviewed. These are really open-ended questions and it's just we don't have to stick to them. I think the first interview I did, we only really talked about one question for a whole hour, and then the next one we went through everyone methodically, but it's really not. They're just guideposts.

Suzanne Kite:

The questions kind of go, I'll read them all to you first, so you can get a grasp. So the first question is, what makes us indigenous when we are far from home? How do we define our relationships to land when we're removed from them? If you could gift a listening device to your descendants, your intellectual, artistic, or physical descendant, what would it listen to?

Suzanne Kite:

What technologies do we want our next generations to receive from us? What materials should these technologies be made out of? How do you collect materials in a good way? Why do indigenous people concern themselves in stones? What was the first indigenous material or stone you came to know? What can materials or stones teach us as indigenous people?

Suzanne Kite:

What kind of information concerning stones or materials is most important at this time? When we make something new, how do we begin in a good way? When we present something new for the first time, how do we present it in a good way? Should this artwork that ends up being made be seen by the general public?

Suzanne Kite:

Those are the vague overarching quandaries, and welcome respond to those, or kind of this basic route one, which is, what makes us indigenous when we're far from home.

Peter Morin:

Some incredible questions. I spent a lot of time being far from home, actually up until this point it's like I really think about territory like, what does that actually mean when there's so many people who have never lived on their traditional territories, never having a chance to even set foot there?

Peter Morin:

What does that actually even mean to step foot, place your foot down on this ground that you have been told is yours? Sometimes it reminds me of a Confucius story, which I don't know the details anymore. I used to know a lot more of this kind of stuff, but the actual references and things like that.

Peter Morin:

Anyway, the man is returning home to his home territory and he finds a guide. And then the guide that takes him around the town, and this is where your ancestors are buried and he's crying. This is where your grandpa was born and he's crying. This is the center of the village where all

of your family is celebrated. This man is crying, crying. And then at the end of the day, the guide says, "Actually, I was just joking. You're not from here."

Peter Morin:

It's a really big thing actually. It feels like violence and it feels like shame. And then afterwards the tour guide actually does take him to his home village, but it goes through this kind of strange provocation maybe, what actually is territory, what actually is identity?

Peter Morin:

Because it can be this in a particular moment in the particular environment you're in. How much of that is you and how much of that other stuff is the actual territory or land that you're from?

Peter Morin:

I think a lot about having, when I was younger too, it's like I'm middle age now. So younger is like '20s, right? I'm 43 now, turning 44. They always used to say the answers, like we're like early activists and trying to figure out what decolonizing is before it all gets stolen by the academics.

Peter Morin:

I remember how angry we all were when academics would show up in the community, put away one or two chairs at the community event and then go to their homes afterwards while we were all just cleaning, cleaning, cleaning. Decolonization for me at one point was just like cleaning up. That's what it meant.

Peter Morin:

Anyway, the people would say, "The answers are in your blood. The ancestral memories are in your bloods." We get a sense of that more now because the science has told us epigenetic memories are transferred there.

Peter Morin:

But at the same time, our family has familial Alzheimer's, how any Western culture tells us that Alzheimer's is like a slow brain death. I think this is me trying to answer the question a little bit. How do I look at my mother's experience of her experience of Alzheimer's, my uncles, my grandmother, my great aunties, my great uncles, including my great-grandmother?

Peter Morin:

How do I look at their experiences and still see a possibility that they're still Tahltan, even though they're experiencing the slow brain transformation? Do you know what I mean?

Peter Morin:

Then it also comes down to that sentence again, which I really like, and the sentence comes from working with this younger artist named Laura Greer, who is Dene. I keep thinking about this too, because I've lived away from home, there's lots of times where I've just been alone, in terms of not being with Dene people or Tahltan people.

Peter Morin:

And then you got to become an expert, and because you want to be a good person and you want to respect, and of course I want to do all those things. You become an expert, expert in the cultures of the territories that you're on, which is even then pushing yourself further away from where you were.

Peter Morin:

For me, part of the sentence Laura, and I were able to actually talk about Dene things in urban and non Dene territories, and the sentence is, your ancestors have never not imagined you. I just thought that comes from my conversation with her. That's part of it, like I think that imagination of ancestors makes you, continues to pull like it's like a silver thread or a spiderweb that goes through your body, keeps you connected to the spiderweb.

Peter Morin:

I think that the experience of loneliness also, it wasn't until I heard Auntie Louise Profet-LeBlanc, who lived in Ottawa. She's from the North where I'm from. She's the one who said, I felt lonely most of my career. So it's kind of a little bit like loneliness is also part of this, how do you know who you are?

Peter Morin:

The privilege of loneliness maybe, plus until I get my own Alzheimer's I got to remember on behalf of my moms. So I'm going to keep remembering her, remembering her work, remembering her offerings. And then also keeps me as a de dene taskini Tahltan nation. Next question-

Suzanne Kite:

Well, let me pull that one up for one second. Do you think your artwork helps? I mean, I'm assuming I know your artwork does help you do this, but I think that's what is interesting about your work, it maintains Tahltanness very clearly. It doesn't veer into indigeneity or something. It stays very clear, protocol-wise.

Suzanne Kite:

That's really what I want to talk to you about because you maintain Tahltan protocol in your artwork consistently, and which is, I don't think very many artists feel comfortable doing because they feel like art and life are separate or this post-modernist thing. I'd love to hear, maybe did you decide at some point that this isn't life and art?

Peter Morin:

I think I guess there's two things there. When I was doing my research, my master's research a hundred thousand years ago, the thing that I was attempting to understand was, what I perceived as a psychological blockage, which was keeping me from speaking Tahltan language in an urban environment.

Peter Morin:

One of the things that happened as a result of that research was the idea and the practice that my work contributes to Tahltan Nation or history first, and then everything else second. Because I was trying to think about, and that result of that deep research and thinking and making was about expanding a sense of language speaking because Western culture always tells us, "You don't speak your language." And then you've got to go into the deep trauma pain place.

Peter Morin:

And so what I realized was in order to have a Tahltan, or a sense of language speaking, I needed to multiply that, so my body speaks Tahltan language fluently. My makings speaks Tahltan language fluently. My thinking speaks to Tahltan language. That was a way for me to not prioritize that blockage.

Peter Morin:

There was that. And then this moment then makes all these other things happen. In the late '90s there was this really terrible, I just find it terrible. Some people might find comfort in it, but I find it terrible, this idea that indigenous people walk in two worlds.

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah. That, I agree.

Peter Morin:

The good old days. I'm just like, "I don't walk in two worlds." I think Peter Morin's Museum also helps me to help to really find language to articulate that experience. Because I'm like, I have one body. It is a Tahltan body. Everywhere I walk is a Tahltan space. There's no two worlds here. It's so powerful.

Peter Morin:

It was such a powerfully racist thing to say we indigenous people walked in two worlds and we had to like... I did it too like, you go home and you got your res clothes and you've got your city clothes. Just a bunch of bullshit.

Peter Morin:

Anyways, so there's a few things there I also keep myself very closely to. I want my actions and behaviors and my making to not disrespect or embarrass my grandparents. So that keeps me.

Peter Morin:

I used to also talk with my mom all the time about what I was making just so that I could make sure I was for sure not embarrassing. And then I just also have had the privilege to have so many incredible elders and practitioners who shared knowledges with me and practices.

Peter Morin:

And so now I have these things, which are these allegiances and accountabilities. Northern people don't. Knowing people where I'm from don't use sweetgrass, and some of them still get offended if you burn a sweetgrass. But Shirley Bear taught me about sweetgrass and was one of the first people to show me how to smudge and I have accountability to her. So I keep that practice going.

Peter Morin:

Then that's the thing too, it's like knowledges transform themselves. I was telling somebody, or we were just talking with James Miller, he's a Kānaka Maoli architect, and he got this question about sacred knowledge from another Kanaka person in the audience, he was giving a presentation.

Peter Morin:

I said to him, "Well, sometimes you got to think about, how does knowledge actually become sacred? It's because it is shared." It's a shared knowledge and it has a benefit. You can see the thing that it does. That's why perhaps we should also add into the definition of sacred as protected. It's knowledge that we shouldn't be afraid of, but it is knowledge that we should absolutely respect. I'm not answering your question at all. I'm not.

Suzanne Kite:

No. This is all great. I mean, if you want to get more specific, I think sometimes I see your work and it's like the whole artwork is just protocol. I said you're just exercising your right to do even when the environment doesn't want protocol or maybe doesn't respect you from thinking about your work in UK, where I mean, the last thing they want is to do ethical protocol and you go.

Suzanne Kite:

It's like even from a compositional standpoint, or a structural [standpoint], when making artwork, sometimes it reads to me that you're saying like, "I will just do the protocol and then the art will exist." Is that how you think of it?

Peter Morin:

Well, sometimes I'm also like, as a performance artist, sometimes you're not actually there either. Sometimes I follow this, I do follow a structure, kind of like a ceremonial structure that I learned from Fred Roland, who I was training to be a Sweat Lodge Keeper with. I know my body needs that too. It has to have a beginning, a middle, and an end and a very clear end, and that the work is done.

Peter Morin:

And then I guess I like hearing your thoughts about the work.

Suzanne Kite:

I'm supposed to interview you.

Peter Morin:

Yeah. It's true. I don't necessarily get that many chances to talk about this part of it.

Suzanne Kite:

Well, I've been teaching your work and my sound art made in American, which I know, I realized that me and a couple other sound art folks just force everybody into the sound art category because we like. It's like everybody's a sound artist.

Suzanne Kite:

But even beyond this, we could schedule a different time to talk. I can tell you lots of things about how I'm interpreting your work.

Peter Morin:

Yeah, great. That's awesome. That's awesome.

Suzanne Kite:

It is super helpful to hear what other people think.

Peter Morin:

All that work, there's two things about that. We don't really talk about that much, but that London work, one of them was about Dylan Robinson. Dylan was living in London and getting kicked out, not kicked out, but he had to move several times.

Peter Morin:

Well, come on, you're an indigenous person from British Columbia. You didn't talk to the ancestors over there. You got to tell them you're going to be there for this period of time. And then you got to tell them and you do the thing that you need to do.

Peter Morin:

Dylan was so funny and he's so wonderful. He's like, "I just really don't want to talk to English ancestors." I totally get it. Totally get it. So I told him, I said, "Well, if I was there, I'd build the machines and build the machine to talk to the ancestors on your behalf."

Suzanne Kite:

That's a really good invention.

Peter Morin:

Then all of a sudden I was going to London. And so I didn't move too far away from this sort of singing performative moments, cultural graffiti, the performance of indigenous power within the cultural matrix that imagined indigenous people to be dead and still does.

Peter Morin:

I still wanted to be able to... We all talk about that territorial acknowledgement thing, especially at that time. Now it's like at every dam, it at everything now. I was like, "I want to actually do this. I want to actually territorially acknowledge English ancestors."

Peter Morin:

And so part of that putting myself in pain, because each one of those performative moments was pain full. Pain full, two words, pain full. At one point after I marked the Tower of London, which I should've known better, with my voice, my body, I got quite sick actually.

Peter Morin:

Anyway, I did it. I did it. Even the declaring the war on the British Monarchy, which is falling apart right now, just saying. Just saying. I taught bead intro to beadwork class as a part of this gig, this fellowship gig and I started with the territorial acknowledgement from my body to those ancestors. That was quite a hard moment.

Peter Morin:



Now, when I hear people give territorial acknowledgements, white people of indigenous territory, I think, "You're not suffering enough." I don't actually tell people a lot about that, but I guess maybe I should.

Suzanne Kite:

I think that it's a special kind of suffering. It's a specific sort of suffering. But the difference is sometimes when people are suffering on stage while I'm just like, "Don't put that on me." But when you're doing that there, you're not doing it to put it on anybody.

Peter Morin:

Exactly. Exactly. And then I was teaching beadwork as a community building revolutionary act, that was my workshop. And then telling folks like this moment is so unimagined by these territories because all indigenous people are supposed to be dead and here I am performing. This is actually a revolutionary act.

Peter Morin:

I also was like, "I don't want to embarrass my grandma and my grandpa. So this is how I want to be a good guest here." I had opened myself up quite a lot, then these dreams start to happen and all this kind of stuff, and the one dream I sink, I really literally sink into the... I'm walking along my route there along the Thames and was like I just sunk into it. It was just full of blood, just all this blood.

Peter Morin:

And then it's like the blood is pulling your legs as you're trying to move forward. And then I sank in, in, in, and then that's where I saw the bones of the giants. After that dream... I'm telling you all the secrets. That's my new methodology right now. It's just telling all the secrets.

Peter Morin:

Then after that dream, I started to imagine that there was a being, entity, ancestor in the Thames. Then I started to feel that, and then I came to this one because it's the city of plaques. So I came to this plaque and it was like, this is where pagan people used to come and put offerings to the goddess and the Thames. I'm like, "Okay." So there is an ancient being in there somewhere.

Peter Morin:

Then I started to think, well, it was coming on June 21st. Here I am the only Indian boy in London, England. Then I was like, "I want to go find some pagans." I almost went to their party, their celebration, or their ceremony or whatever. But my new friend there, he was like, he asked around, he found a person, that person talked to him, that person said to him, "Well, things could get a little wild. Your friend might feel uncomfortable."

Peter Morin:

I said, "Well, I've been to parties on the res. I get it." But then I thought, "Well, okay, it's going to be okay. I don't need to do this kind of thing." But somehow I ended up at Stonehenge. Pretty crazy. We went to Stonehenge on June 21st, stayed up all night, and I did the singing there. I did the cultural graffiti at Stonehenge.

Peter Morin:

The thing that I realized there was that the whole thing, it felt ancient. I could literally feel that people have been gathering in this way, in this location for thousands and thousands of years. It's the whole thing like, what do I know about Stonehenge? But the whole thing felt like it was designed for sound.

Peter Morin:

And then when you get into that inner ring, and then you realize that the Druids, there's not that many Druids. There's just like three there all like beating on their drums or whatever. But it just felt like it was built for sound and harmonic resonances. The sound was so deeply, incredibly full.

Peter Morin:

I sang into the stone. And then Dr. Emer O'Toole who brought me to Stonehenge also sang into the stone. We didn't plan this or whatever, but we both ended up singing love songs like she, Irish love song, Tahltan love song into the stones.

Suzanne Kite:

That is a really good example. We'll come back to this other question, listening device with Dylan, but I would love to hear about any other stones. I don't know anything about Tahltan relationships to rocks. Do you all talk to rocks?

Peter Morin:

I think it. I think lately I'm realizing that Tahltan's relationship to rocks is like gold, like the mining that has happened in our territory. It's like watching gold leave your territory. It's very strange, but when I was 16, I was in a Sweat Lodge for the first time. I always had a kind of affinity.

Peter Morin:

This is a similar story to many people. But there's something that is inside of those stones and that was the first time I heard someone ever refer to them as grandmas and grandpas. I think because I had that kind of linked ability to have that language, then it enabled me to open up a deeper space for what the stones do.

Peter Morin:

Then I remember his name was Phil L'Hirondelle, and he was talking about his grandkid, Phil. His grandkids can identify with it, this one is a grandma and this one is a grandpa. I just thought, "I'm 16 when I'm hearing. What a special ability?" Ever since then, I realized that they help you. They help you to remember, they help you to build.

Peter Morin:

I work a lot with stones. I always ask permission before I bring them into the work. If they say no, that's the thing. If they say no, then that's no problem. I'll explain the shit out of what I want to do. If they say no, "Okay, we'll put you back. No worries."

Peter Morin:

The Tahltan piece from when I was a kid, as well as two stories about lucky stones. My auntie told me a story. My Auntie Rosie told me a story about her mama. Her name was Eva, Eva Carlick. She was better than all the men, and it's a very Tahltan women centric women power story, is this perfect. Because absolutely she was... She said the line, but we all knew Tahltan women are powerhouses.

Peter Morin:

She said, "I could shoot better than the men, hunt better than the men." She had a stone, which helped her, a luck charm. And then she gave it to Auntie Rosie, and Auntie Rosie lost it, lost it. She said, "I still grieve the loss of that."

Peter Morin:

When I was a kid, I saw, after our grandma died, I saw that there were really incredible stones in her house. I thought, "These are the stones that Auntie Rosie is talking about." The kind of stones which are just a little bit too special. And then because the stones are alive, we all do work together, like these things. Let me turn this around.

Suzanne Kite:

It is an interesting stone.

Peter Morin:

It helps me to remember. It's got that iron oxide in it. Like that. When I was a kid, I am... Okay here. When I was a kid, I worked in a mining camp. Okay, wait, I don't want to look at this. There we go. Anyway, I don't recommend working in a mining camp if you're not in the mining camp kind of person.

Peter Morin:

We went on a boat trip up the river and there was a fish there salmon way after salmon spawning. I just always remember this thing like it was almost half dead. Parts of it were falling off of it and it was still swimming. It wasn't advancing and it was not about falling back. It was just at that one sweet spot in the river, and still with so much hard for such a little heart.

Peter Morin:

And then was there with a bunch of dude bro dicks. The guy, the white guy, he's like, "Oh, I know the spirit." He finds a stick or something and then just tries to harpoon or he throws it, I guess. I can't remember exactly.

Peter Morin:

But anyway, I'll always remember it like even inside of that pain and all of that heart moving that fish, the spear hits the water and that fish does this. I just thought, that's the most incredible thing ever.

Peter Morin:

And then found these stones. These stones help me to remember that, that moment of deep, deep heart that, that salmon had.

Suzanne Kite:

That's amazing. The salmon was like, "Not today."

Peter Morin:

Yeah, exactly. It was just like, "No, thank you, dude bro Dick, for serious."

Suzanne Kite:

"I'm going to become one with the water on my own, thanks."

Peter Morin:

It's amazing.

Suzanne Kite:

I have this question about what, I guess I told you then, but kind of this multi-part thing, what do we want those in the future, what kind of technologies do we want them to receive? To me, it's really connected to this material question of, and then what is it made out of? Because I think that's my issue with technology right now is it ignores the material.

Suzanne Kite:

But I would love to hear what your... Clearly when you say you're making, because when you think about what you want to leave the Tahltan art history, that's what you're doing. You're not making history, you're making future. You're saying you're curating exactly what you want in the future.

Peter Morin:

I want kids and younger folks to see the artistic innovation of Tahltan people. Right now everybody's got eyes from gold in mining and tax-free mining dollars. But the real resources are the damn art forms, which still exists and still are.

Peter Morin:

Those original makers didn't get it. Maybe didn't get a chance to really describe how they made the things and all of this. We know all the stories, White dudes don't care about the work of indigenous women, you know those things.

Peter Morin:

I think the technology that I want future ancestors to know is how innovative artists were and are. There's no limitation to what our artists actually did. It wasn't even like you think about those beaded Dr. Bags, for example. That's not a thin leather. You know what I mean? Somebody was just like, "I can do that."

Peter Morin:

Certain culture reads it as it's like material object production, but if we're centering and foregrounding innovation as a technology, then you can see that this thing becomes something completely different. It's an exercise of skill for sure. But it's also a practice of power, indigenous power.

Peter Morin:

I think that to me is really, a part of knowledge systems are really enmeshed within the object production, but the object itself is not separate from the knowledge. I learned this in the museum, and not because the museum taught me, but I was there with this kid.

Peter Morin:

I was working with a really awesome bad kid. We're talking about, and at the time I was still really trying to understand what Foucault was talking about in terms of agency and power and oppressiveness. That's what it'd be, oppressiveness of power.

Peter Morin:

And so I was explaining to this bad kid, 16 years old talking about Foucault in the museum and Western culture makes us, and that's the thing. That museum, it makes you look at things in a certain way. That's what a museum does.

Peter Morin:

It makes you look at the totem poles, and that is supposed to be the pinnacle of indigenous artistic practice. But if you make, and under there, this is kind of a moment there in that museum where, so the totem poles are in a larger more open space in the center of the room.

Peter Morin:

And then there's this weird vitrines, smoke glass vitrines, which are glass on both sides so it's like a hanging box. And then there's a pathway or a thoroughfare and then there are the regular museum vitrines, which are embedded in the wall.

Peter Morin:

I was standing there explaining power to this kid, what I was trying to understand as power. Little did I, I was so young back then. Anyway, you could see where I was standing, you could see the totem poles and you could see this teacup that's a grass woven teacup.

Peter Morin:

There was hundreds of years of distance between the two objects, but there was no diminishment of the power, the practice of indigenous knowledge with when it's embedded within the materiality. There was no difference.

Peter Morin:

It was just as powerful, just as potent, just as real. When you look at these plaque art slackers, it's a funny word, it says, indigenous people were starving because they did all the things that they did. And so they were making objects specifically for Western European consumption.

Peter Morin:

But the fallacy of that, or the racism of that is not paying attention to the skill sets. The power is still being articulated. It was such a new channel object. It never lost itself. It just took on the form of a teacup because it could.

Peter Morin:

My work lately has also been, I just wrote this weird essay called, There are no Metaphors. The thing was indigenous knowledge is so innovative and sophisticated that it actually can be adapted to fit into any of the kinds of spaces that Western culture makes available, but it doesn't work the other way. Western knowledge can not be adapted. It cannot fit into indigenous ways of being.

Peter Morin:

That's why there's no metaphors, because Western culture puts a metaphor on indigenous knowledge in order to try and sublimate it. That's not real. Sounds like I know what I'm talking about, but I really don't.

Suzanne Kite:

No, no. I love that idea. That's very true. That's very true. You just know. When we're not telling when these symbols come up, they're not symbols, they're reality. I mean, one of the things I do want to ask you is like with the offerings, we understand that it's not symbolic or a metaphor to put tobacco down.

Suzanne Kite:

I would love to hear what you think about that exchange, especially for material for making work. Maybe it starts... Scott blew my mind last week because he was like, "Maybe all work starts in a dream." I was like, "Oh my gosh, maybe that's where work starts." But then maybe the protocol, the protocol stuff happens at the first exchange where you first give hopefully more than you receive. I'd probably want to know how you think of that.

Peter Morin:

I'm always so grateful to folks like Shirley Bear, who taught me about these kinds of things and taught me, or Cheryl L'Hirondelle, this sacred power house contract when you put that tobacco on the grounds, and to not have actual fear about asking for things, making the commitment to say, "I am ready to do the work. I am ready to suffer as I need to, as you want me to. I'm putting this tobacco on the ground and this is my commitment to this."

Peter Morin:

I know that I've been more than privileged to work with students as well, so they help me to understand the sacred contract of tobacco, and this thing where I'm like in my one class we would make before everything went online, I'd teach them how to make tobacco ties as a decolonial gesture.

Peter Morin:

And then I ask them to make their own territorial acknowledgement to themselves and to the land and they don't tell anybody. Then as they're saying the words or thinking the words and feeling the words, then they put the tobacco down as their commitment.

Peter Morin:

I think there's all these... this is just me in this exact moment right now. There are so many of these opening up gestures. So the tobacco is opening up. The first part of the song on the drum,

you hear lots of folks do that, they make it into a rattle or something. It's the opening up. Okay, sorry.

Peter Morin:

It's hard to be open when you have trauma or spiritual pains. I also keep thinking about the, this is just right now as well just because we're at this moment, we've asked this question, the pieces about, how do you know when people back home are passed away? Even that's an opening, an acknowledgement of the opening up. It's an unseen technology maybe.

Peter Morin:

Sometimes work starts in the dreams for me. Sometimes it starts in something that I've been reading because I want to try and understand it. I got little nieces and nephews, they're not little anymore, but when we used to work with these kids all the time, like these kids in care, indigenous kids in care, and there's all these sort of messages that they all get about indigeneity.

Peter Morin:

The kids in care in particular like, so I wanted to tell them the truth. I wanted to talk to them with deep meaning about things like residential school. The only way for me to do that was to make the performances that I made because I'm not a book, we're not books. So I needed to create a thing so that I could transport myself and be there with those young kids because I needed to help the kids now.

Peter Morin:

I think that's partly why I've done all those sort of like... I'm sorry, this helped me. I was thinking about that, we always read about it, we always hear about it, the hair cutting, the kids stolen and taken to boarding school and residential school. And then, but what does it actually mean? You can't just cut your hair.

Peter Morin:

I tried to understand that and I created all of those performative gestures of haircutting because it's also not just one thing. Then I was able to tell the kids, "This is a part of that experience of pain that you have and you're carrying inside of you, and this might be one of the ways to heal that pain."

Suzanne Kite:

That's really interesting. It's well it's 11:00, whatever. We're on the hour now. But maybe the last question I want to ask you is like, we talked a lot about openings to things and how one begins and the many... But you mentioned something that's probably just as important and I often cite this when thinking about making new technology because I'm like, "Okay, where's the death cycle. Where's the death process?"



Suzanne Kite:

When you are finishing a protocol, or an artwork, or a song, or something, how do you end it in a good way that you know you've closed and transformed? Because I can see that like you don't leave a wide open wound to just walk around and absorb dirt for the rest of the day.

Peter Morin:

Exactly. When I'm working with Ayumi, we work together to make that kind of space for ancestors to be present. When I'm working with myself by myself and there's harm, that naming of harm or violence, I try to be very clear with if it's going to be heavy performance, because lately I just feel like I haven't really performed in a hundred years, but that's not true.

Peter Morin:

It feels like it, doesn't it? The last performance, Land Breathless, it was crazy to train for. Ayumi had these thoughts because we help each other all the time. So she's like, "Well, you're going to need to work on your lung capacity." That's why I trained. She said, "I'm doing this thing for this marathon. You should help me and that'll help you." So I trained for the marathon.

Peter Morin:

We performed together. And then I did this thing at National Gallery six months of cold water baths, like lots of like prep. That thing is part of the work. We did this, when I did the 12 making objects, which kind of always feels to me like when I became a real performance, not just a performance artist, not just a little performing maybe.

Peter Morin:

At open space, it is actually an open space, and this White guy in the community, they were working at the acupuncture school where my ex partner was going to school and she was trying to set up free clinics for elders. This White guy at her school said, "Well, they have to pay something. They have to be invested in." This is the words, "They have to be invested in. They're human. They have to pay something. They could come in, if they don't got money, they could come in, they could clean, they could sweep."

Peter Morin:

I was so mad about that. And so I did lots of the performances, it's three hours, six hours, whatever, one hour, or 20 minutes. But then there are six months of prep beforehand.

Peter Morin:

For that first performance where we honored the tears of the moms, and dads, and grandmas, and grandpas, and uncles, and aunties, I swept the shit out of that gallery by myself. No one was in

the room. I was using one of those, I'm not trying to be disrespectful here, but those little English brooms that are like this big or whatever.

Peter Morin:

What is that for? Anyway, it took me like, I don't even know, four hours to bend over backward, bending over so that my elders, our elders didn't have to clean so that they could get free treatments. Do you know what I mean? So that's part of it. There's a long part of long prep.

Peter Morin:

Then I am very, very clear about what I'm doing. And then if it's an intense performance, I want people to understand. Then I'll tell them, "You can participate this way. You can participate this way, and you can choose to not participate. You can tune off, you can leave the room, you can do whatever you need to do."

Peter Morin:

Then the performative action happens. And then at the close, I'll acknowledge, "This is closed now. We are done now. We have done this work now." I mean, also lately I've been, 20 years of making super intense performances is a lot. So I've been trying to think about intimacy and care and kindness. Ayumi, and I, a lot of our work now is focused on joy as more joy being more powerful than colonization is an unstoppable force.

Suzanne Kite:

I've learned a lot of joy lately from my work with an Afrofuturist, and I think the Afrofuturist, I think just Black folks in general have a better grip on how important joy is. I've learned a lot every time I work with her because I'm like, "But what about pain? I love to wallow in pain, languish." She's like, "How about a little bit of joy? How about we just do some joy today?" I'm like, "Okay."

Peter Morin:

Just a touch. Just a touch of joy.

Suzanne Kite:

Yeah. I will ask the last question for now, before I contact you again, we'll talk more.

Peter Morin:

Yeah, please. I'd love to. I really have been enjoying this time.

Suzanne Kite:

Either like a non-human you know now, or maybe the first non-human you came to know, I would love to... It doesn't have a stone, or river, fish, breed.

Peter Morin:

I'm trying to write this essay, I hate it. I hate it so much. I'm trying to write the labor into a series of three works, which are interconnected and trying to think through my own work as well just to add that into the mix of how people are thinking and feeling about my work, that methodology of telling secrets.

Peter Morin:

I want you all to remember because I am probably going to get Alzheimer's when I turn 60, which is not that long ago, not too far away, I should say. Anyway, so in the story, in the essay, I'm writing again, the river as a methodology for encountering the secrets or the understory of the performance right there and the interlinks and the place that I felt probably like the relationship with the non-human being that made me feel okay and alive.

Peter Morin:

There's a similar story that so many people wasn't safe when I was growing up, all those kinds of things. There's a place called Six Mile, which is six miles away from Telegraph. I have no idea what it was called in the language, and there's actually two Six Miles, Six Mile to Telegraph, and Six Mile away from Telegraph.

Peter Morin:

Then I find out there's actually a petroglyph marking there, because the Tlingit used to come to that particular beach to trade with us. Six Mile, and my memories of that place, this is the river that I keep writing, one of the rivers anyway. It's a sticking river. There's something about feeling safe, and feeling alive, and feeling Tahltan, and feeling like this is the place. Now I have to go write that damn essay. Let me stop talking.

Suzanne Kite:

I love that. That is the river I keep writing. That's great. Well, thank you so much. I'm so glad because first, I was like, "Lakhótas only." And then I was like, "No, that's silly." Performance artists are like we're so cool. I mean, think about all the cool things.

Peter Morin:

We are. Thank you for today. I'm here. I'd love to continue talking and can answer some of your other questions.

Suzanne Kite:

I think I would love to talk sound stuff with you, and methodology. Methodology is so interesting too.

Peter Morin:

Perfect. Perfect.

Suzanne Kite:

Thank you so much. You sent your address, you filled out the survey thing?

Peter Morin:

I filled out the survey thing for sure.

Suzanne Kite:

Great. Many thanks. I'll send you something.

Peter Morin:

Okay. I'll see you soon. We'll talk soon.

Suzanne Kite:

Bye.

Peter Morin:

Bye.

## 8.5 Glossary<sup>251</sup>

**Creator** is the term understood in Lakǎóta culture to refer to the concept of Wakǎháj Thánka, Great Spirit, or more accurately Great Mystery

**Give-aways** are Lakǎóta cultural practices of giving away possessions to honor people during major life events such as funerals, memorials, namings, and graduations

**Haŋblécha** is the Lakǎóta ceremony for crying for a vision, traditionally taking place on a hill for up to four days

**Hyperlocal** is a term relating to or focusing on matters concerning a small community or geographic area

**Huŋká** is the Lakǎóta ceremony for the making of relatives

**Inípi Ceremony** is the Lakǎóta purification ceremony also known as a sweat lodge

**Íŋyaŋ** is the Lakǎóta term for stone

**Lakǎóta/Lakǎóta** is an interchangeable spelling of the language or peoples, encompassing seven Lakǎóta bands (Oglála, Sičáŋgu, Itázipčo, Húnkpapha, Mnikǎhwožu, Sihásapa, Oóhenuŋpa)

**Lakǎotiyapi** is the Lakǎóta language

**Native American Church** is an intertribal church which involves a peyote ceremony with its own practices, protocols and music culture

**Očhéthi Šakówiŋ** is the Lakǎóta term for the seven council fires that make up the cultural and political groups of the Lakǎóta, Western and Eastern Dakota peoples

**Peyote ceremony** is the ceremony held during a Native American Church service

**Road Man** in the American Indian Church, a Road Man conducts the church service.

**Sičáŋgu** is the Lakǎóta word for the cultural group of Lakǎóta Sioux based on the Rosebud Indian Reservation in South Dakota

**Siouan** is a term for the Očhéthi Šakówiŋ, the Sioux peoples, or Sioux language group

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<sup>251</sup> Note on this glossary: Lakǎóta language does not have a unified dictionary or diacritic system, however, I have chosen to use the *New Lakota Dictionary* for consistency. Ullrich, Jan F., ed. *New Lakota Dictionary: Lakǎotiyapi-English/English-Lakǎotiyapi & Incorporating the Dakota Dialects of Yankton-Yanktonai & Santee-Sisseton*. Bloomington: Lakota Language Consortium, 2008.

**Spirit world** is an English term used by Lakǎóta people for the world where nonhuman and spirit beings live. My personal understanding of the spirit world informs this dissertation.

**Sun Dance** is the ceremony of renewal which takes place in the summer

**Tiǎšpaye** is the Lakǎóta term for family and extended family

**Tǎŋkǎšila** is the Lakǎóta term for grandfather or Creator

**Wakǎiŋyaŋ** is the Lakǎóta term for thunder or thunders.

**Watéča** is the Lakǎóta term for food to take home like from a feast

**Wičǎša-wakǎáj** is the Lakǎóta term for the holy man or head singer of a singing group

**Wičǎzani-wašté** is the Lakǎóta term for good health

**Wolakǎota** is the Lakǎóta term for peace or sacred ways

**Wówačǎŋtognake** is the Lakǎóta term generosity such as offering community members care

**Yuwípi Ceremony** is Lakǎóta healing ceremony