



Un/spoken understandings: building sovereign intimacies through relation

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Co-Curated by Mariana Muñoz Gomez and Marie-Anne Redhead

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Screening will be viewable on VUCAVU



Sky Hopinka, *Anti-Objects, or Space Without Path or Boundary*, 2017, video still. Courtesy Video Data Bank.

Marie-Anne, our friendship has flowed easily since we met last year in university. We've shared conversations about our personal lives and relationships, as well as our shared interests in diaspora, Indigeneity, language, land, place, and displacement. It seems fitting to reflect on how we've grown as creative collaborators within the context of *Sovereign Intimacies*, since curators Jennifer Smith and Nasrin Himada focus on relation as a main theme. In *Un/spoken*, relation carries on as well in the works by Sébastien Aubin, Marissa Sean Cruz, Léuli Eshr ghi, Sky Hopinka, Francisco Huichaqueo, and Karin Lee.

Thinking through the works we've chosen, I remembered Jen and Nasrin mentioned some texts that were on their minds as they curated *Sovereign Intimacies*, one of which was *As We Have Always Done* by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson. Throughout her book, Simpson draws on personal experiences to teach the reader about constellated networks of relation and about various forms and articulations theory can take. These experiences often include an affective response as a

guiding force to questioning oppressive systems and structures. The films and video works in *Un/spoken* embrace affect and show us how theories of relation are inseparable from practice.

In *Anti-Objects, or Space Without Path or Boundary*, Sky Hopinka explores place, history, and relationship by wandering through language, architectural sites, and land. An audio recording between Henry Zenk and Wilson Bobb, one of the last speakers of Chinuk Wawa at the time, plays throughout the film. Their conversations are relaxed and become a space of reciprocal intimacy and learning. In *Anti-Objects*, language and material localities work to illustrate a quote from architect Kengo Kuma: "The individual is not an autonomous, solitary object but a thing of uncertain extent, with ambiguous boundaries. So too is matter, which loses much of its allure the moment it is reduced to an object [...] Both subject and matter resist their reduction into objects. Everything is interconnected and intertwined."¹ The film *Anti-Objects* references Kuma's book of the same name and asserts language, land, and culture as living, active, and intertwined.

Text from Kuma's *Anti-Object* appears a few times in Hopinka's film, once as: "We will be connected to the environment called wilderness only if we are allowed to wander."² In their video *filIPINES*, Marissa Sean Cruz creates a digital diasporic environment through which to wander. Cruz processes their "relationship to [their] father as an immigrant Filipino, transgenerational trauma and the Canadian landscape."³ In *filIPINES*, she names a tension arising out of trauma and survival in her family history, now entwined with living on stolen lands in so-called Canada. I'm reminded of Simpson reflecting on text by Mishuana Goeman, writing that Goeman "challenges us to construct deeper understandings of ourselves by examining our own relationships to place and to each other outside of the spatial constructs of settler colonialism."⁴ In the process of creating this non-place, Cruz does not seek to make a home; rather they question their relationship to survival, migration, and land.

Francisco Huichaqueo also considers colonial constructs in *ILWEN - La tierra tiene olor a padre (The earth smells of father)*. Affect as that which "is found in those intensities that pass body to body"⁵ leads his investigations into relation both impacted by and thriving outside of colonial structures. Huichaqueo's *ILWEN* is a story about love and loss, traced through patrilineal lines, language, and acts of working with the land. The land is a participant in building sovereign intimacies as it becomes a place of "self-affirmation of Mapu Che (people of the earth) roots and beliefs."⁶

Mariana, I learn more through my discussions with you than I do by sitting in class at the university. We first spoke to each other in a classroom but university classrooms can't possibly contain the amount of brilliance, love, support, solidarity and friendship that can grow inside them. I am grateful that we met there and that we've continued to have these dialogues over coffee, over dinner, in our homes, walking around the city, and here.

¹ Kengo Kuma, *Anti-Object: The Dissolution and Disintegration of Architecture*, qtd. Sky Hopinka, "Anti-Objects, or Space Without Path or Boundary," accessed October 26, 2020, <http://www.skyhopinka.com/antiobjects-or-space-without-path-or-boundary>.

² Ibid.

³ Marissa Sean Cruz, "filIPINES - a preview," Vimeo, accessed October 26, 2020, <https://vimeo.com/376012460>.

⁴ Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 196.

⁵ Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, "An Inventory of Shimmers," in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Gregg and Seigworth (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 1.

⁶ Francisco Huichaqueo, "ILWEN - La tierra tiene olor a padre (The earth smells of father)," V Tape, accessed October 26, 2020, <https://www.vtape.org/video?vi=7961>.

You and I have tried together to examine the forces, trajectories and movements that have led to our being guests here on Treaty 1 land. This is a task that must take into account our respective relationships to Empire. As Jodi Byrd writes in *Transit of Empire*:

“I want [...] to understand that the historical processes that have created our contemporary moment have affected everyone at various points along their transits with and against empire. If colonialism has forced the native to “cathect the space of the Other on his home ground” as Spivak tells us, then imperialism has forced settlers and arrivants to cathect the space of the native as their home.”⁷

As much as we can and should focus on the differences between your experiences and mine, we can also discuss the ways that they are infinitely similar—and that work is so important as well. We both look to language as a locus for imagining our way out of the dislocations of the contemporary moment.

Karin Lee provides a unique opportunity to imagine a shared language that isn't English in her short film *Small Pleasures*. Three women (First Nations, Chinese and European) speak Chinook (Chinook Wawa or Chinook Jargon), a language of the same family that Hopinka explores and revives in his work, to discuss their perspectives on feminist resistance in the 19th century. The dialogue is interesting in that it focuses on a struggle the three women share, though they each experience it differently.

All of the Indigenous artists in our program use creative praxis to perform what Jarrett Martineau calls “creative negation” or “affirmative refusal”⁸ to having their relationships to their lands, communities, practices and languages circumscribed by their subjection to Empire/settler colonialism. The modes of Indigeneity represented here instead embody what Gerald Vizenor calls *Native transmotion*, which holds Native stories of survivance: “Those creases [of transmotion and Native sovereignty] [...], are apprehended in the complementarities of stories, associations, intimacies, and reincarnations that resist absence and possession.”⁹ Léuli Eshraghi and Sébastien Aubin's works demonstrate this as they both overlay the (re)animation of material culture with sound. In *TAFA (((O))) ATA*, Eshraghi's animation of S moan barkcloths (siapo viliata) is accompanied by a poem on “the colonial ruptures between cyclical and linear temporality.”¹⁰ Similarly, in *HIDE*, Aubin animates hand-scraped caribou hide through a dance performance, but this performance is accompanied by a piano composition that evokes the winter sky instead of a speaking voice.

Eshraghi's and Aubin's works reflect those methods of relation, spoken and unspoken, that we see in the rest of these films and videos. These works also prompt us to consider how we relate to each other and remind us that in our distinct life experiences, there is value both in the understandings left unsaid and in the conversations we have with each other.

Mariana Muñoz Gomez and Marie-Anne Redhead

⁷ Jodi A. Byrd, *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 39.

⁸ Jarrett Martineau, *Creative Combat: Indigenous Art, Resurgence, and Decolonization*, Doctor of Philosophy dissertation (Victoria: University of Victoria, 2015), iii.

⁹ Byrd, 16.

¹⁰ Léuli Eshraghi, “TAFA (((O))) ATA (2020),” Léuli Eshraghi, accessed October 26, 2020, <http://leulieshraghi.art>.

Curator biographies

Mariana Muñoz Gomez is an emerging artist, writer, and curator. She is a settler of colour based on Treaty 1 territory in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Her work is concerned with language, representation, diaspora, displacement and identity within post- and settler colonial contexts. She is a coeditor of *Carnation Zine* and co-curator at *window winnipeg*. Mariana recently completed a Master of Arts in Cultural Studies: Curatorial Practices at the University of Winnipeg.

Marie-Anne Redhead is Ininiw and francophone, as well as an emerging curator, writer and member of Fox Lake Cree Nation. She is currently completing her Bachelor of Arts (Honours) degree at the University of Winnipeg with the intent to pursue an MA in the curatorial stream of the Cultural Studies program. Through her research and creative practice, she is interested in decolonial art forms, contemporary Indigenous art, futurisms, language, and relationship-based identities.

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