

I have said this twice before, but I will say it again:^[1] I am trying to figure out how to be in this world without wanting it, and perhaps this is what it is to be Indigenous. To be Indigenous is also to be hurt on the way out, if the 'way out' is crowded by the past's razor sharp edges.^[2] *The body remembers when the world broke open* is a provocation of mine to think the time-frame of colonial worldings through the language of haunting and speculation. Which is to say that we are not done mourning the "world-shattering"^[3] magnitude of settler invasion and its attendant crime scenes of all sorts, and that this kind of loss yields affects that reverberate into the near future by way of the body's "critical receptivity;" that is, the ease with which we can be undone and displaced by others.^[4] Avery Gordon is a sociologist of ghosts and she knows that this world is not the only one, and that there is a porous boundary between absence and presence that allows the past to both seek revenge and to live again in the present. She writes, "[H]aunting is one way in which abusive systems of power make themselves known and their impacts felt in everyday life, especially when they are supposedly over and done with."^[5] There is, then, a "laboured viscosity"^[6] to being in life, and it is sometimes called a sore or gallstones^[7] or an eye twitch.^[8] A body can only jar so many spirits and trauma before it glitches, leaks, and splits at the seams.

To split at the seams is to be strained by a deluge of affects, where "affect" describes psychic and physiological responses to moments of profound instability—when the *you* you have been struggles but ultimately fails to persist in the wake of something that moves you, for better or for worse. In my research on diabetes and reserve life, I identify genetic predispositions as poor affective returns, insofar as chronic illness is one way the body sublimates histories of biological warfare into ordinary life.^[9] On the other hand, like Tananan Athabascan theorist Dian Million, I also understand affect as the process by which the dead and the devoured seep into our bodies, proliferating Indigenous worlds peopled by spirits, good and bad.^[10] Affect always produces bouts with non-sovereignty, leaving us vulnerable to a host of social and political dramas that do world-threatening things out of sight. Memory is thus one domain where affect becomes a noticeable pressure point.

Tanya Lukin Linklater's *In Memoriam* (2012) is a video of a performance that offers up this kind of corporeal volatility, staging memory's wrath to the cacophonous tune of the Alutiiq language, sounds that Lukin Linklater might not actually know or know what to do with, sounds that both conjure and upset the traditional.^[11] It is my contention that *In Memoriam* fleshes out what Karyn Recollet, writing beautifully about Kwakwaka'wakw dancers, calls "choreographic fugitivity,"^[12] as Lukin Linklater's dancers gesture to a rift in the present toward a geography of the elsewhere.^[13] In particular, *In Memoriam* images what I want to call a choreography of the feral, as its wild movements give us dystopian glimpses into what it looks like when the body erupts, when it fails to patch up the ordinary's grater wounds and is left beside itself with grief. This is not a bad thing.

Lukin Linklater brings into focus a type of embodiment that is constitutive of Indigenous life in a nation like Canada, where our survival always hangs in the balance. By this I mean that even when we are seemingly still, we are nonetheless disjointed, shaky, and jumping out of our skin. This is what the late queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz called an "embodied cultural surplus," one that exposes what it takes

to be here in this body and in this world when the *here* is a prison house that threatens to make decolonial flourishing into a fairy-tale of sorts.^[14]

Said differently, *In Memoriam* plays up a form of corporeal excess that bubbles just below a collective “threshold of awareness”^[15] for those who most intimately bear the coloniality of the world. Lukin Linklater tells a story about how memory stalks the present, turning bodies into faulty containers for affect such that life becomes a catch-22 where ongoingness taxes.^[16] We might not get the big decolonial world we want, as it takes everything we have to adjust to the unruly vibrations of the past-present.



Tanya Lukin Linklater, *In Memoriam* (2012). HD video to blu-ray. Courtesy of the artist.

From the Latin, “in memoriam” translates as “to the memory (of),” and is used in English as a preposition to govern the relation between a noun—now lost—and an act or object of commemoration that renders the noun anew, spectrally. *In Memoriam*’s lost object is an Alutiiq-ness that could have been had the world not fallen apart, and the body is the medium through which it is invoked. I want, however, to risk also interpreting the dancers’ jolting lurches as responses to haunting, as if to be haunted is to be dealt blows to your body when it cannot contain the pesky drip-drop of social violence in the normal anymore. Haunting, Gordon teaches us, “alters the experience of being in time,” causing us to lose our bearings in the world.^[17] This is what haunts me: knowing that there was once a world we could have loved in without the spectre of premature death stopping us in our tracks.

But, *In Memoriam* does not take us to this utopian past-future, migrating instead across two seemingly unidentifiable geographies, dropping us in the thick of an otherworld in which external stimuli wreak havoc on those who assemble there. Lukin Linklater’s is art that transports an Alutiiq-ness to a tightly-framed elsewhere,^[18] mapping a small gap between a here and a there that is something of a death trap. This is the *mise-en-scène* of the otherworld: peopled by two dancers who might or might not be the same woman and who might or might not be from different space-times, *In Memoriam* fluctuates between a familiar earthly colour palette to a melancholic grey scale, taking us to what I have previously called “the astray.” For me, the astray is a makeshift geography where experimentation and haste are workable socialites, where dreamers and doomed lovers gather to take a shot at life lived decolonially, if only for a little while. The astray is the stuff of last-minute decision-making and wrong turns, accommodating moments of action that should not be

possible in the world, propping up an infrastructure for renegade life. In “On ‘Moving Too Fast,’ or Decolonial Speed,” I wrote: “He is a lapse in time whose expressivity is marked by the teleological pull of an otherwise.”^[19] I was writing about a man I had fallen in love with, and the tenuous affects that barely held an emergent world together in the face of capitalism’s governance of the intimate. The phrase “it feels as if we’ve known each for ages” thus points to the astray’s shoddy memory work, and the ways some forms of love operate as if outside worldly time itself. We sometimes live in something that feels like another dimension. The astray is therefore a shape-shifting mini world, and it clarifies for me how we shoulder sadness like ours and still get through the day.



Tanya Lukin Linklater, *In Memoriam* (2012). HD video to blu-ray. Courtesy of the artist.

But, perhaps the astray does not have an embargo on negative affect. As I now see it in Lukin Linklater’s video, the astray is another realm where haunting’s damages are rendered and calculated, or sometimes just borne witness to. Lukin Linklater’s is art like *do not let us die this way*, and the astray houses forms of being in the world that cannot easily be seen, especially by an academic culture obsessed with hypervisibility; that is, the voyeuristic drive to find a wound on the body.^[20] Instead, *In Memoriam* opens up the astray so as to entangle us in its episodes of heartbreak that do not always magnetize public curiosity, doing away with the “legal and public fantasy about what a traditional group should look and act like, how it should be composed.”^[21] Lukin Linklater slows down the present’s tempos: her dancer reaches towards the camera, perhaps to say without actually saying anything: “look, look at the wounds that remembering brands onto me.”

In an interview with Elizabeth Povinelli, Mohawk anthropologist Audra Simpson notes: “And throughout the Native world we see lives lived in a constant contortion, and it’s not a good yoga pose. It’s collectively experienced and carries a great cost.”^[22] *In Memoriam* represents life lived in a constant contortion as its dancers are wrenched into a feralness that the ordinary cannot govern, routing political blame to a state whose bloodlust tore generations apart. *In Memoriam*, then, evinces a feral aesthetic, filming Indigenous bodies as they absorb colonial trauma and respond without making recourse to the skin’s ability to deflate affect. Decolonization is something of a becoming-feral, as it rewilds Indigenous life and detaches our ideas of sovereignty from the settler state’s norms of belonging. Here, though, ferality also describes a monstrous subjectivity of sorts characterized by an enduring disassembled-ness—an

odd way of showing that shit has hit the fan, so to speak. This is ferality's grammar: twitch, jump, shake, convulse, scream, ache. It is as if the dancers have been possessed, taken captive by the ghosts of Indigenous worlds past, dancing at the edge of the world. To be possessed is necessarily to be dispossessed. *In Memoriam* is the start of life improvised in the aftermath of that kind of usurpation.

I have thus put *In Memoriam* into my feral archive because it is art that noisily calls out for a witness to life precariously slapped together. Importantly, *In Memoriam* does not have a goal; there is no paradise-like then and there within arm's reach, just a last-ditch effort to sift through outposts of a dystopian otherworld to show that we do not get to pretend that we are okay. Sometimes we have to fall apart.

In supposedly reconciliatory times like ours, Indigenous artists are burdened with answering the call to envision a good post-colonial future, but we are still hurting in the present and we are not finished trying to figure out how to activate collective survival. My point is that *In Memoriam* demands a new hermeneutics of the sometimes and the somewhere, a hermeneutic that wards off the ossifying grip of analytics that do not take the imaginative, the otherworldly, and the ghostly into account to social-scientifically sketch Indigenous suffering and resistance. This is how we demonstrate that the "present is not enough," to make recourse to the Muñozian axiom.^[23] We must search through other dimensions to prop up architectures in which we are not always already ontologically mixed with social violence.

[1] See Billy-Ray Belcourt, "GRIEF AFTER GRIEF AFTER GRIEF AFTER GRIEF," *nakinisowin* (blog), last modified July 11, 2016, <https://nakinisowin.wordpress.com/2016/07/11/grief-after-grief-after-grief-after-grief/>; and "The day of the TRC Final Report: On being in this world without wanting it," *rabble.ca*, last modified December 15, 2015, <http://rabble.ca/news/2015/12/day-trc-final-report-on-being-this-world-without-wanting-it>.

[2] "Hurt on the way out" is a line from Melissa Lozada-Oliva, "Tonsils," YouTube, Button Poetry, 3:15, October 3, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FTd3ZQNIJ68>.

[3] Jack Halberstam, "The Wild Beyond: With and for the Undercommons," *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2013), 11.

[4] See Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou, *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political* (Cambridge, polity, 2014), 14.

[5] Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2008), xvi.

[6] Kathleen Stewart, "Atmospheric attunements," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 29 (2011), 445.

[7] See Billy-Ray Belcourt, "Gallstones and the Colonial Politics of the Future," YouTube, 6:19, April 29, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ohSatwGtil>.

[8] See Erica Lee, "My ancestors survived colonization and all I got was this lousy eye twitch," *moontimewarrior.com* (blog), last modified August 20, 2016, <https://moontimewarrior.com/2016/08/20/my-ancestors-survived-colonization-and-all-i-got-was-this-lousy-eye-twitch/>.

[9] See Billy-Ray Belcourt, "Meditations on reserve life, biosociality, and the taste of non-sovereignty," *Settler Colonial Studies* (2017), doi: 10.1080/ss01473X.2017.1279830.

[10] Dian Million, "There is a River in Me: Theory from Life," in *Theorizing Native Studies*, ed. Audra Simpson and Andrea Smith (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 32.

[11] See a poem by the same name by Lukin Linklater: <http://www.drunkenboat.com/db15/tanya-lukin-linklater>.

[12] Karyn Recollet, "Gesturing Indigenous futurities through the remix," *Congress on Research in Dance* (2016), 92, doi: 10.1017/50149767715000492.

[13] This is of course a nod to Jarret Martineau and Eric Ritskes' key formulation: "an elsewhere in the here." See "Fugitive Indigeneity: Reclaiming the terrain of decolonial struggle through Indigenous art," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 3(1): i-xii.

[14] José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 161.

[15] Elizabeth Povinelli cited in Tyler Morgenstern, "'Little things pile up': Ordinary lessons," *DE/CALAGE: politics + ethics + art + technology* (blog), last modified May 18, 2014, <https://tdmorgenstern.wordpress.com/2014/05/18/little-things-pile-up-ordinary-lessons/>.

[16] This line of inquiry—that "ongoingness taxes"—derives from Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2011).

[17] Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, xvi.

[18] See http://www.kennedygallery.org/exhibitions/camera_frontera.

[19] Billy-Ray Belcourt, "On 'Moving Too Fast,' or Decolonial Speed," *nakinisowin* (blog), last modified August 20, 2015, <https://nakinisowin.wordpress.com/2015/08/20/on-moving-too-fast-or-decolonial-speed/>.

[20] On “hypervisibility,” see Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 16. By “hypervisibility,” I mean the forms of social violence that are easily calculable via the analytics we already have in the social sciences. It is easy to bandage a cut. What, however, of the wrongs that are temporally inconsistent, messy, and ambiguous? To be haunted is to experience distortions of reality.

[21] Audra Simpson, “Holding Up the World, Part IV: After a Screening of *When the Dogs Talked* at Columbia University,” *e-flux*, last modified September, 2014, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/holding-up-the-world-part-iv-after-a-screening-of-when-the-dogs-talked-at-columbia-university-audra-simpson-elizabeth-povinelli-and-liza-johnson-in-conversation/>.

[22] *Ibid.*

[23] Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 1.