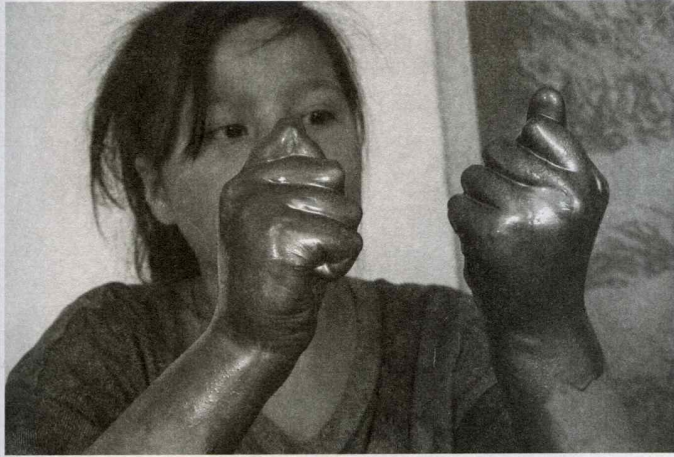


TANYA LUKIN LINKLATER & CANDICE HOPKINS



They fall the ground beneath you, 2018 (still). Video projection on plinth, site-specific performance, dimensions variable

CANDICE HOPKINS The lingering effects of colonialism and the embodied resistance against it are foundational to your practice. Where you're from and your family's history have certainly shaped your practice to date. Can you share more about your background?

TANYA LUKIN LINKLATER My ancestral village is the Native Village of Afognak in southwestern Alaska. In 1964 the village was destroyed by the Good Friday earthquake and tsunami. Our community was displaced, with some folks moving to other villages. A good portion of my family moved to the new village of Port Lions, which was built in response. I'm Alutiiq/Sugpiaq and a member of both tribes.

I've been thinking for a long time about my homelands. I'm an island person. There are also Alutiiq people who live on the mainland—the Alaska Peninsula and elsewhere. Our people are coastal, island people. We live in this liminal space, a shoreline, an archipelago in the Pacific Ocean. The atmosphere is constantly moving and bringing different weather formations to our island. That specific place continues to form Alutiiq ideas about who we are and how we are in relation to the world. That's an important place for me to begin. We've also endured imperialism and colonialisms. I say "colonialisms" because there are different registers and scales of colonialisms affecting Indigenous peoples and other folks.

CH That's right. A lot of times, colonialism is couched as settler colonialism, but there are extractive colonialisms, too. Before colonialism, there was imperialism, and where

we're from, there was Russian fur trading. There are many different layers to how colonialism operates and sometimes they operate all at once.

TLL Specific, violent histories on my island, the enslavement of our people by Gregorii Shelikhov and Alexander Baranov—we're still grieving these experiences that have had tremendous impact on us collectively. I consider how I ethically attend to difficult histories, speaking to them briefly at times.

Please introduce yourself, too. Your story is partly why I wanted to talk to you.

CH Even though we're from different places, we're both from the north. My family on my mom's side is originally from a small village in Alaska, called Klukwan, which is still quite a traditional Tlingit village. My great-great-grandmother was the first in our family to migrate inland, into the Yukon in Canada, and she was the one who carried songs, stories, ceremonies, knowledge. My grandma said she was always homesick. She would describe what that village was like. Migration is in some cases the result of forced displacement, but can also be a way to forge tighter connections to the events that were happening at the time. I think that part of the reason why she moved inland was to fortify trading relations between the Tagish, Tlingit, and Russians. Her story was part of a larger movement, which resulted in Tlingit people moving inland. Our customs supplanted many Tagish customs. Tagish people ended up taking on our clan systems, possibly not always willingly. My family was profoundly shaped by the Klondike Gold Rush, which happened in the late 1800s. I always think about that moment, when nearly 100,000 people came from outside in the span of a few years. What kind of social rupture was that? And what kind of opportunities were there?

Meeting you, Tanya, and your work, really got me thinking about embodied knowledge, the way in which not only family stories but oral tradition can become a pillar to work from. Your work is centered on acknowledging the truth of our histories. With that in mind, what are the possibilities to repair? Where is resistance? Is it in the body? Is it in what we do? Your process-oriented and collaborative practice is a model of how art can be a form of relation-building.

TLL Extractivist colonialism emptied out our lands through the museological process of accumulation and removal. Our communities have been working through processes of repatriation to return belongings and ancestral remains to our homelands, but this may not be possible in many situations because museums make the process overly difficult. If the museums are located outside of the United States they're not required to adhere to NAGPRA [Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act].

Alutiiq people participated in congressional hearings for the passage of NAGPRA. We have a complex relationship to anthropology and archaeology on our island, as evidenced partly in the organization of the Alutiiq Museum. Despite the process of severing communication between generations, emptying out the body through force, violence that silenced or made our practices immobile, embodied resistance did still take place.

CH There was this rupture that happened. It definitely happened in my family. Colonialism had a way of instituting a lot of shame around our traditional practices and our ways of healing. In this emptying out, there was the misconception that if all these things are taken and transformed into direct or indirect commodities as museum collections, that somehow our cultures will slowly disintegrate.

For me, much of the work that you've been doing about instituting other ways of engagement is a way to open up how we understand repatriation as an embodied action, as protocols of visiting with our ancestral belongings in museum collections. Repatriation can also be a way of reinvesting that knowledge within ourselves, within our bodies, and creating another kind of archive.

TLL We live with intergenerational grief as a result of ongoing colonialisms. That force in our lives has actually brought us to a place where many of our people—not only Alutiiq folks—but other Indigenous people across Alaska and Turtle Island are returning to our practices and our ways of being. These belongings were made by our ancestors, so encoded within them is information from our ancestors left to us. I'm one of many people (with Coral Chernoff, Hanna Sholl, and others) undertaking the work of visiting collections in order to gather information, decipher meaning and learn from our ancestors.

CH In your restorative work there's the ability to attend to the silences of history. For example, for *Untitled (for a rain gut parka made and worn near the Mackenzie Delta, Northwest Territories, collected by the Hudson's Bay Company in 1924)* (2019) you worked with the Manitoba Museum to access a rain gut parka. It was made obvious how often in those collections there's so much known about the collectors (who are often white men), but not the names of the people who made the item, who they made it for, what their names were. In those cases it's important to ask the question why. Even if something goes back to its community, it carries all of that history back with it, including the museological one.

TLL I've been working with these ideas for a long time. At quite a young age I read accounts from Alutiiq and

Yup'ik peoples about the way they activated particular belongings through orality, and that left a mark upon me. It showed me how to investigate the archive in order to find out more about who we are, to remember, to recall, to bring forward.

CH You've called it "affective knowledge," which I think is a really useful term.

TLL It's both embodied and affective. I call it a "felt structure,"¹ an invisible, ephemeral atmosphere that surrounds cultural belongings² and accompanied us in the old days within our ceremonial practices and in an everyday way. Felt structures can be generated through performance (in Iñupiaq, Yup'ik, or Alutiiq dance), in story, in the way we gather with one other. The context of a ritual isn't always necessary, it's about being in relation.

CH You're weaving many threads right now.

TLL At the Met in 2016, in my encounter with a St. Lawrence Island Yup'ik rain gut parka, it occurred to me that these objects are scores for performance that already exist. The way we read the score will be different based on our experience, knowledge, and thinking.

For "Soundings" [exhibition curated in 2020 by Hopkins and Dylan Robinson], we wanted to bring that parka to Kingston, Ontario, for the exhibition, but weren't able. Instead, I visited an Inuvialuit gut skin parka from Mackenzie Delta at the Manitoba Museum in Winnipeg. During my visit, I noticed how comfortable I was within the collection storage space and how disconcerting that sense of comfort was. I asked myself, what does it mean to visit? My answer centers on embodiment, being in relation, noticing, being present, listening, sensing. I considered where the parka lives now, the extended periods of time that ancestral or cultural belongings have spent in the storage cupboards, their loneliness. They're often housed geographically, so there's a potential for visiting with one another. Often the collection manager wants to show me other belongings.

CH Which you can't help but look at when you're there ...

TLL You can't help it. This visit put in motion or further extended my concern with collections. For the Triennial, we're installing *An amplification through many minds* (2019), a performance for camera in three parts, commissioned for the exhibition "Soft Power" at San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

In the work, I investigate Alutiiq belongings in the Alaska Commercial Collection at the Hearst Museum of

Anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley. This collection was accumulated over time through trade. I chose not to investigate what I've come to understand as sacred or ceremonial objects because there are specific protocols that should be in place when visiting with them.

CH Sometimes, people don't understand that these circulated only within groups of certain people. They weren't for visual consumption at all. One of the huge limitations of museums is the emphasis they place on visual culture. Our belongings are things with very specific social lives, uses, and protocols.

TLL There were specific societies and groups who had access to particular sacred belongings. I chose to interact with day-to-day objects, Alutiiq sewing bags.

When thinking about the rain gut parkas, they were built to the specifications of the body of an individual hunter. The same goes for kayaks. It's a beautiful garment usually affiliated with men's work. I was interested in investigating women's work, which is often less visible. In the old days, sewing was never complete. The constant action of repairing a garment was crucial for our survival. Rain gut parkas were sewn watertight but as they ripped they had to be repaired. The survival of the hunter was dependent on the skill set of the seamstress. The stitch.

CH If you flipped into icy water in your qayaq [kayak] you could die from hypothermia, right?

TLL Yes. I started to investigate these stitches, the cultural belongings' immobility and stacked-ness within these cupboards, and the space of the archive.

CH Like on steel shelves. These institutions feel very antiseptic, like an operating room.

TLL Yes, to a large extent. I had planned to shoot the dancers in relation to the Richmond Facility off-site collections storage, with sizeable square footage, good air ventilation, and floors suitable for the dancers. The Northern California wildfires in October 2019 caused rolling blackouts, and completely shut down the Hearst Museum. It meant that my shoot, intended for two days, was accelerated and condensed to four hours in the basement of Kroeber Hall. The performance for camera then comes to focus on my visits and oration of the belongings in the archive, open rehearsals taking place at SFMOMA, and a dancer's relationship to the cupboards where the Alutiiq sewing bags live in the basement of Kroeber Hall. I asked the curators, Eungie Joo and Jovanna Venegas, to be in that space also because their curatorial labor was significant in the making of the work.

CH Your research as a doctoral student at Queen's University includes what you call "short form." This idea seems to tether movement to the literary. Text scores are another form of writing that enable something to happen. What is the role and meaning of short form in your practice?

TLL I understand a singular cultural or ancestral belonging to be a short form. A felt structure, an organizing force that is unseen, exists within our social lives, and can be generated by, surround, or appear in relation to an ancient or contemporary short form. A singular dance, rehearsal, text, sculpture, or work for camera may be a short form pointing towards a larger set of forces.

CH It's a signal. Short form not only has a potential of unfolding something, it's citational.

TLL It's absolutely citational. In a book by Ann Fienup Riordan, James Barker, and Theresa John,³ a photograph of a Yu'pik Elder and a model universe suspended above a dance floor points towards particular moments in specific songs when the Elder will pull a string tethered to the model universe so that it dances with the people. This action is citational. The short form cites larger actions, not only about the time that we're in and what we see in front of us, but potential effects in the world and beyond, into the universe.

Often we don't know that activities we're participating in now are becoming history. The short form is the present moment unfolding and the long form is history. Minor daily actions (or short forms) accumulate towards something that I call insistence. This idea builds upon the work of Vine Deloria Jr. and many Indigenous thinkers who've proposed survivance and resurgence of our practices as a way to restore ourselves.

CH There's a romantic view of decolonial practices where we view the past as this place of balance, which we wish to be fully restored. But even in our own histories, particularly Tlingit history, there are dark chapters. For example, we took slaves. Our society was (and is) extremely hierarchical. But the way I understand insistence is exactly how you described it. It's the continued performance of this dance, or pulling this thread, as you say, to point to these more profound relations beyond ourselves, beyond our bodies. These dances and choreographies decenter the human. The insistence is all about drawing that line, whether it's through a repeated song or repeated performance. Through your open rehearsals and the recurring movements, you're building on embodied knowledge, which can extend beyond the body into objects of practice.

TLL Yes. Insistence has to do with persistence amidst the durations of colonialisms. We're choosing to return, to

restore, to recover, to repair but not the full pre-contact moment. We apply our ethics and principles in the current moment as a way to be generous to our ancestors, to be present, and to look towards a future becoming.

CH Exactly. It's interesting how that frames different ideas of the future. For many of us, futurity is what happens when you carry the things that are behind you forward. It's not tethered to the idea of technological advancement.

TLL No, not at all. But we did have phenomenal technologies.

CH Sewing is a technology.

300 TLL And so is the qayaq, built to the specifications of the body. Not mass produced, but built to the length of a specific person's arm, torso, and legs. We won't produce technologies at the scale that we did previously. What can we learn from them that can be applied to this moment?

CH I try to always learn from Indigenous economies and values, particularly since we live in an accelerated age. The belongings that you work with come from a very specific kind of temporality. What happens when you overlay our own accelerated culture within that?

You said once, citing Susan Leigh Foster, that choreography is the time-space of the body. Does it form other temporalities? I think there's great potential in that.

TLL She defines choreography as time, space, and the body. I'm compelled by your version. Indigenous practices point to the time-space of the body where time is understood generationally as a continuum that extends far back and far forward. I consider not only the bodies of dancers, but the bodies of cultural belongings, sculptures, and the body of a violin played by a composer (often Laura Ortman) with whom I'm working. Choreography as time, space, and the body makes the three discrete.

I consider everything in relation to the body, processed through our consciousness. Dancers have an astute capacity to know the world through the body. They ask questions and generate something that's then amplified in performance or otherwise. In my process for making a work, as a choreographer, I'm not focused on placing movement on the bodies of other folks. It's not solely about *my* body or experience, since we're generating movement and embodied knowledge collectively. I am proposing a set of ideas to place in relation to people, ancestral belongings, and sites. I am proposing something that I cannot know fully until it unfolds, yet could not happen without me. The title of this work, *An amplification through many minds*, speaks to my hope that Alutiiq folks can access it and carry into the future.

CH That's the insistence.

TLL For many minds. Many people then remember and recall these belongings, these short forms. In the time-space of the body, the dancers and I generate embodiment through conversation and continuous recall. This short form may bring forth a felt structure.

CH This idea of amplification is also the citational insistence, which not only enables an opening up of the time-space of the body, but mobilizes the time-space of whatever you might be in relation to. Even in some of your earlier installations, you brought in ancestral belongings that become citations. Your works highlight the important role of inheritance, what you can honor, carry forward, and amplify.

TLL Yes. What does it mean to inherit something? I don't have the answers.

- 1 Dian Million and Angayuq Oscar Kawagley's writings have helped inform the concept of felt structures.
- 2 Jordan Wilson discusses the history of the term "cultural belonging" in Musqueam communities in "sq̓q̓ip: gathered together." Master's thesis (University of British Columbia, 2015).
- 3 *Yup'it Yuraryarit: Yup'ik Ways of Dancing* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2010).