

Tanya Lukin Linklater: *Neither Nor*

Essay by Ellyn Walker

Tanya Lukin Linklater makes art in many forms. The overarching thread of her writing, poetry, performance, photo, installation and video-based works is the investigation of relationality, including the possibilities and limitations that particular kinds of relationships entail. The interactions represented in the exhibition *Neither Nor* demonstrate unique points of contact through performative scenes of entanglement and repetition, which in turn compel viewers to make meaning from the obscure and poetic connections portrayed onscreen.

Two videos, *the the* (2014) and *Untitled* (2016), replicate scenes from historical and contemporary cinema chosen by Lukin Linklater. Without dialogue, the scenes re-presented are enacted by dancers Daina Ashbee, Ceinwen Gobert and Emily Law, and portray women onscreen amid contrasting locales—outdoors versus indoors. Both sites of colonization with distinct histories, together the land and the art gallery represent spaces of encounter that require acute cross-cultural negotiation.



Image: video still from *Untitled*, 2016

the the portrays various sequences of women among nature. The first part shows a woman on top of a boulder from an elevated vantage point. Pictured awkwardly moving around with bare arms and legs atop the rock's rough surface, the woman's uncomfortable movements evoke the difficulty of navigating relations, be they cinematic, performative, feminist, decolonial or otherwise—as is often conjured in Lukin Linklater's

work. Recreating iconic scenes from Robert Bresson's 1967 French film *Mouchette*, Andrei Tarkovsky's 1962 Soviet war drama *Ivan's Childhood* and François Truffaut's 1959 French New Wave drama *The 400 Blows*, *the the* reconstructs a visual record of childhood in film, highlighting works that feature tragic or unresolved circumstances. This attuned filmic gesture points toward the most recent state of emergency as declared in national news—the Attawapiskat suicide epidemic, one that is a long-term structural phenomenon, not a novel one, as is reported.

Though this connection to Attawapiskat is my own, it is not arbitrary, as Lukin Linklater has engaged considerably with the First Nation's Chief Teresa Spence in past works as a symbol of Indigenous feminism, resistance and solidarity. In thinking along these lines, what is the interconnection between land (such as portrayed in the video) and life (as is being taken in the Attawapiskat community)? How is the landscape, like the body, a site of trauma and colonization, while simultaneously being a site of continuance and resilience? These questions have a multitude of answers, and as viewers we are challenged to recognize the systemic intersectionality of colonial violence and oppression, and to imagine new ways of being in the world that work against its invisibility, normalization and endurance.

Having grown up in the Native Villages of Afognak and Port Lions in southern Alaska and now living in North Bay, Ontario, Lukin Linklater has lived in Canada since 2000 and, as such, brings forth a unique perspective to land and belonging that is as nuanced as it is relational—specific to both time and place. The video *Untitled* (2016) re-creates scenes of bodies in relation to one another, also excavated from films that feature dark childhood narratives. Specifically referencing Victor Erice’s 1973 Spanish drama *Spirit of the Beehive*, Hana Makhmalbaf’s 2007 Persian-Iranian film *Buddha Collapsed Out of Shame* and Samira Makhmalbaf’s 2000 Kurdish-Iranian film *Blackboards*, the work’s composite references gesture toward the importance of temporal interrelationships, such as between generations, cinematic movements or cultural ancestries. Through sequences of the women paired together through entanglement, slowly pulling each other through the empty (albeit culturally loaded) gallery space, Lukin Linklater and the dancers generate relational choreographies between words and actions that make visible the ways in which bodies, like cultural histories, connect, contract and at times sever.



Ellyn Walker, *Tanya Lukin Linklater: Neither Nor*, Modern Fuel, Kingston, Canada, 2016

For viewers who are unaware of the works' cinematic references, they are able to draw other connections from reading the exhibition statement, which describes Lukin Linklater's investigations of childhood through text and video as a response to the Taliban's attempted assassination of girls' education activist Malala Yousafzai in late 2012, in the region of Swat Valley, Pakistan. This example is not unlike colonial tactics



Image: video still from *Untitled*, 2016

used by the Canadian state to deter Indigenous activists (amongst others) from protecting their land in more local contexts, such as with the infamous standoff that took place near Oka, Quebec, during the 1990s, or more recently, at the barricades of various British Columbian and Alaskan pipeline sites.

Drawing distant yet correlated equivalencies, Lukin Linklater's works are put in conversation with both global and local questions of human rights, sovereignty and interrelationship. Together the works contain opaque cinematic references, which force their reading as interpretive poems rather than as straightforward texts. In doing so, Lukin Linklater's works offer us an occasion to think through how our proximities to others hold the potential to re-orient the kinds of relationships we want to have, and, accordingly, the kind of future in which these can be possible.

Tanya Lukin Linklater's performance collaborations, videos, photographs and installations have been exhibited nationally and internationally. She is compelled by the interstices of visual art and poetry, pedagogy (learning), Indigenous languages, portrayals of women and children in film, and the body. Her work has been exhibited and performed at EFA Project Space + Performa, NYC, Museum of Contemporary Art Santiago, Chile, SBC Gallery, Montreal, Western Front, Vancouver, Images Festival + Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art, Toronto, Remai Modern, Saskatoon, Art Gallery of Alberta, Edmonton, and elsewhere. Her poetry and essays have been published in C Magazine, BlackFlash Magazine, Yellow Medicine Review, Taos International Journal of Poetry and Art, Drunken Boat, Ice Floe, and in publications by Access Gallery, Western Front, and McLaren Art Centre. Tanya studied at University of Alberta (M.Ed.) and Stanford University (A.B. Honours) where she received the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship and the Louis Sudler Prize for Creative and Performing Arts. She is currently a graduate student in Cultural Studies at Queen's University. She was awarded the Chalmers Professional Development Grant in 2010 and the K.M. Hunter Artist Award in Literature in 2013. She originates from the Native Villages of Afognak and Port Lions in southern Alaska and is based in northern Ontario, Canada.

Ellyn Walker is a writer and curator based in Toronto on Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee and Wendat land. Her work is informed by critical art history, Indigenous-Settler studies and anti-racist methodologies, and focuses on the politics of cross-cultural work within representative and collaborative arts practices. Ellyn's writing has been published in such venues as the *Journal of Curatorial Studies*, *Prefix Photo*, *PUBLIC Journal*, *Fuse Magazine*, *BlackFlash*, and most recently in the *Inuit Art Quarterly*. She is currently a PhD candidate in the Cultural Studies program at Queen's University in Kingston where her research explores curating as a relational and decolonizing practice.