PC Residency 1 Talk FINAL

info@obxlabs.net

[pause]

0:00:11 Jason Lewis: So Postcommodity is an interdisciplinary arts collective comprised of Raven Chacon, at the end there, Cristóbal Martínez, in the middle there, and Kade Twist. Their art functions as a shared Indigenous lens and voice to engage the assaultive manifestations of the global market and its supporting institutions, public perceptions, beliefs, and individual actions that comprise the ever-expanding, multi-national, multi-racial and multi-ethnic colonizing force that is defining the 21st century through ever increasing velocities and complex forms of violence. Postcommodity works to forge new metaphors capable of rationalizing our shared experiences within this increasingly challenging, contemporary environment; promote a constructive discourse that challenges the social, political and economic processes that are destabilizing communities and geographies; and connect Indigenous narratives of cultural self-determination with the broader public sphere.

0:01:05 JL: Postcommodity's most recent project is Repellent Fence, which they'll be talking about tonight, I'm sure. They're in residency here with us, from last night until next Wednesday, working with the Indigenous Futures Research Cluster on a new virtual reality work commissioned by imagineNATIVE Film + Media Festival for presentation in 2017. We're super excited to have them here. We've been talking off and on for years about trying to figure out a way to work together, and it's amazing that we actually finally made it happen. We're looking forward to what you guys have to say. Thanks.

[applause]

0:01:45 Cristobal Martinez: Thank you, Jason. Thank you, Skawennati. Thank you both for having us here. It's really exciting to be here. You wanna introduce yourself and...

0:02:00 Kade Twist: Yeah, we'll introduce ourselves, and then we'll provide an overview of our art practice, why we do what we do. We'll go through just a few works, and then we'll spend most of the time talking about the Repellent Fence Project, and have hopefully, plenty of time to answer some questions and have a little discussion at the end. So please keep us on task.

[laughter]

0:02:27 KT: I'm Kade Twist. I'm Cherokee. My family's from Oklahoma. I was raised in Bakersfield, California. I currently live in Santa Fe. I'm a multidisciplinary artist and for a living, I'm a public affairs professional. I do public policy work as a consultant, primarily in the areas of community development, healthcare, and technology.

0:02:54 CM: My name's Cristóbal Martínez. I'm Mestizo Chicano from northern New Mexico. I recently just finished my PhD in Rhetoric and Linguistics, and my academic work, it's theorizing media within the context of Indigenous sovereignty. So I wrote a dissertation called "Indigenous Techno-sovereignty," thinking about the ways that Indigenous peoples operationalize their

sovereignty via practices and performances of media.

0:03:41 Raven Chacon: My name's Raven Chacon. I'm from the Navajo Nation, out of Arizona and New Mexico. I'm currently based in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Most of my work is in sound and composing music for other musicians, chamber musicians or improvisers. And I also build my own electric instruments, and perform those all over the country and all over the world. I also have a background in television, and building kind of inventions for those kinda situations, and some background in video also. And the group started, Postcommodity started in 2007, 2006? I wasn't in the group back then. But Kade will tell us how the group came together, how he founded it, and why.

0:04:37 KT: We started out somewhere around 2006 with just the idea of bringing some good artists together that had different focuses with their art practice, to try to do some interdisciplinary work. It was started in Phoenix, Arizona, and there was Steven Yazzie, Nathan Young, and myself just right at the beginning. And the reason why we started working as a collective and why we wanted to work interdisciplinarily is, there's just not any money in this field, and it was very pragmatic. We could leverage our budgets, and we could create larger scale works than we could in our individual artist practices. And it's not just a matter of doing larger scale work, but doing work that is a little bit more rich, a little bit more complex, a little bit more nuanced, that represents a variety of perspectives. And to try to create something that's greater than the sum of the individual parts, I think that's what drove us.

0:05:48 KT: The Indian art world in the United States is always a tough thing to negotiate, and it just seemed that three people working together or four people working together could negotiate that territorial a little bit stronger than one individual. And I think as a result, we've developed a... Our practice is first and foremost, a learning community of artists. We really work on all of our projects, each phase of the project, from research and development to implementation all together, so it's not divided into individual skill sets. It's really creating an environment to where we can learn on a project-by-project basis, and it was something that has enabled us to create a really diverse body of work without having to be held hostage by gallery in the process. So really, really happy with the results.

0:06:54 CM: Yeah, I think one of the things that's really important about this idea of a learning community and sort of envisioning an artist collective as a learning community is that, that idea has provided us with a framework for mitigating power structures within the collective itself. 'Cause once you start... As we begin to mentor each other and teach each other skill sets and knowledge and share theories and philosophies, it starts to level the playing field. And so that... 'Cause there's like a lot of engineering in our work or there'll be music composition or there'll be diplomacy, public affairs, at different times in the art making process or within different context, those different types of skill sets take on various forms of power.

0:08:00 CM: But once we all have this playing field of knowledge, it helps us come into problem spaces and solve these problems in a way that allows us to more effectively, build our relationships together, grounded on things like 4 R's, where we really care about relationships, reciprocity, and responsibility, and... Now, I'm forgetting the fourth R.

[laughter]

0:08:44 CM: But there's... But you get the idea. The idea is respect. There it is. [laughter] And the most important one. But yeah, that also... It's not only about capacity in terms of skill or in terms of labor, but it's capacity to work together very respectfully and very... With a lot of care, with a lot of great care, which is really important for us.

0:09:26 KT: We're gonna run through a few pieces. The first one is maybe one of our most iconic pieces called "Do You Remember When?" This was created in 2009, it was commissioned by the Arizona State University Art Museum. And in the southwest, it's probably the most important contemporary art museum of the southwest, really wonderful place. They had a... There's a conference in town, the Greenbuild Conference. It's an environmental sustainability-type thing, and the museum responded to that with five concurrent exhibitions. And we were a part of that, and we were looking at the discourse of the curatorial frameworks and what the other artists were talking about and thinking about. And so, we developed this piece as a response to that, but also as a response to the land that the university is built upon. It's built upon the Hohokam land, so every time a building is constructed in Tempe, Arizona, where ASU is located, they're always digging up bones and things like that.

0:10:50 KT: But also, what we noted was, at that Greenbuild Conference, there was not a single Indigenous person on the agenda, and there was no subject matter about indigeneity or Indigenous worldviews or knowledge systems. And also, in the five concurrent exhibitions, there was no discussion of that. So we used this as opportunity to do an intervention. And what we wanted to do was cut a hole in the floor of the museum as part Institutional Critique, part intervention, but mainly to force a conversation to reconnect people to the knowledge systems of the land beneath their feet. And I think that's something that we achieved with that piece. There is a sound component, you'll see there's a microphone that is right above the dirt there, and underneath the dirt we buried a wireless speaker that had a song. It was a social dance song from the Pee-Posh people. The Pee-Posh people and the O'odham people, Akimel O'odham people are the descendants of the Hohokam people. And they're still there.

0:12:09 KT: Everybody thinks the Hohokam people suddenly disappeared somehow, but everybody's still there. And so, there's a song that was there that was traveling through that microphone back to this amp. We had a contact microphone or a piezo microphone that was embedded in that slab of concrete that we set on that pedestal, and that took the resonant frequencies of the piece, and that was brought into a delay. And we created a closed-circuit broadcast feedback system essentially in a room. It was traveling around amplifiers that were in the hangers, entirely analog type of system. And the goal was to look at this particular feedback system that we are all faced with when we think about sustainability issues, this notion of the same industry that is causing the scarcities is now trying to solve those scarcities through market-driven systems.

0:13:18 KT: So it's the same worldview, the same conceptual framework that is causing the problem that's answering the problem. And so, we wanted to disrupt that and allow people's voices and people's bodies, physical presence to disrupt that, so that collectively, people that would come in could disrupt that. So this was an ongoing live closed-circuit system. So people that are walking in the room, you could hear their footsteps, you could hear their conversations, you could hear them

clapping, laughing, talking, all those types of things. So we brought their voices, their presence, their accountability into that narrative.

0:14:00 CM: And just a quick note, this piece was reinstalled at the 18th Biennale of Sydney, where it was re-imagined and re-situated to dialogue with aboriginal peoples of Sydney.

[video playback]

0:14:28 RC: Yeah, this video shows the installation as it was in Sydney. And in the case in Sydney, there were no... The people who had been indigenous to Sydney were no longer there. We kept wanting to meet people from that tribe, which are the Gadigal people, but everybody was telling us they don't really exist anymore. There's no more speakers at least of Gadigal. So what we were finding out was there's many people who consider Sydney their home, being relocated there, being forced to go there for work or for school and to be in a church or they were kidnapped, any number of things. So this is a collaboration between a Bundjalung performer, who had an instrument, he called it something other than a Didgeridoo, but it was similar to that, and another gentleman... He was from somewhere in the northeast. I can't remember his tribe. But both of these musicians were doing hunting calls to each other for that soundtrack.

[pause]

0:15:41 RC: This is another piece that we did. This one was in 2010. We were asked by the Museum of Contemporary Native Arts to be involved in the celebration, which was the 400th year anniversary of the city of Santa Fe. And so, Santa Fe is very close to where I live and where I grew up. It's extremely close to where Cristóbal grew up in northern New Mexico, and it's the town where Kade lives now. And it's... I don't know how many of you have been to Santa Fe, but... That's a good amount considering.

[laughter]

0:16:26 RC: But somebody the other day said it's like, Indian Disneyland, so if that gives you any idea. Lucy Lippard was telling us... Yeah, we spent some time with her two months ago or something, a month ago. And what did she say? She said this, "They wanna get rid of the brown people, but they wanna put brown mud on the buildings." And these buildings, they're old buildings but they keep adding new and new mud to the exteriors of them to keep up the facade of it being some kind of pueblo or... That's how you get Santa Fe style.

0:17:04 CM: And it used to be a pueblo, but it's... That was Lucy's critique, is that the pueblo's been gentrified. And so, as part of the gentrification, come new city codes that all the buildings should be brown, then we kicked all the brown people out. So...

0:17:21 RC: And even the brick buildings are made in the 20s, they all have adobe look to them now. But that's the capital of our state, and it's also... I still consider it, it's the capital of the native people in the area. You have a mixture of all the pueblo tribes. Navajo people go through there. There was a market there for hundreds of years before the Spanish came, and they continued that on. They continued that city as being a market, and today, there's still that Santa Fe Indian market.

So the history of this town, this city has always been kind of a commercial place.

0:18:02 RC: So what we wanted to do was tell the story of this spot in Santa Fe, which is in the courtyard of the museum. And this piece is called "My Blood is in the Water." It tells time in three different ways. First, as a sundial. The second, that there's blood inside the deer which drips every 15 seconds onto an amplified drum, which you then hear all over the plaza. And then in the third way, it tells, with all of its materials, all the materials gathered from the area, the poles, the mule deer was shot by a friend of ours from Jemez Pueblo, which is about 20 miles away, and the drum is from Taos Pueblo style. And it tells the story from the top of the sculpture showing the sky and then the animal, the time when just animals were in that area. And inside of this animal, there's a blood that forms and drips down, that being the Indian people, the native people in the area, and that having a long lineage until it hits the head of the drum, and has this contact with the Spanish. That's very... That's thunder, and then mixes inside of that pool, all of that blood, and then dripping back off into the ground.

[pause]

[video playback]

0:19:45 CM: So part of this narrative is that, this area is a really complicated space. There was the Pueblo Revolt of 1680, where the Spanish colonizers were driven out by eight Northern Indian Pueblos, and it's one of the several successful campaigns by Native Americans to defend their homelands against the European invaders. There was, at one point, a reconquest by a conquistador named Don Diego de Vargas. And when he came back, he came back... Spaniards were moving Indigenous people a lot during Spanish colonization. So there's a lot of people in northern New Mexico who are of Mayan and Aztec heritage, Tlaxcala, Chichimeca, Yaqui. And so, there's a lot of mestizaje, a lot of mixing that is represented in the lineages of the people. So a lot of our work is really about memory and reawakening a place, a sense of public memory that has been sorta subjugated by the layers of colonial history.

0:21:32 CM: So that's something else that this timepiece does, when Raven talks about the blood hitting and the mixing happening because those colonial narratives are still very powerful in the city of Santa Fe. And so, this is how a piece likes this starts to speak in ways that decenters and adds complexity to the colonial narrative, which you may imagine that when Santa Fe celebrates a 400th year anniversary, that that's gonna be a colonial narrative because Santa Fe has been there for thousands of years. And so, that's some of the work that we do. We really... We try to... Like, we cut a hole in the floor to allow an Indigenous world to create portals by which indigenous worldviews can then come into spaces that have traditionally kept indigenous voices out of.

0:22:48 KT: And something about both of those pieces, and then the next one that we'll show, that's important in terms of our mission statement, of our practice, is moving beyond those binaries that dominates a lot of the Indian art world is, us versus them kind of binaries. It's really challenging to create a piece that celebrates the 400th anniversary of a town that signifies some trauma or devastation. And this was a... We really wanted to work with a piece that was inclusive of all the people that have inhabited this area. So that's why we chose that mule deer. It's a spiritual mediator of that land, and everybody who came from there and moved there and lived there before

refrigeration was really dependent upon hunting mule deer. That was a primary source of protein for that area. So it's something that included all peoples that eventually settled there. And we really wanted to make a point of that.

0:23:52 KT: And as a result of our generosity and the piece, the gentleman who shot the deer, his mother made a stew, a traditional Pueblo stew from the venison, and we served it to people who came to our art talk for that piece. So it's an afternoon, we've got to feed a crowd of about 150 people out of two big pots of stew that were giant. And they didn't realize that they were eating the animal they were observing, that there's a connection of that process, of time, of place, of spirit, of animal, and providing for people. So we were able to bring everyone into that kinda way of thinking.

0:24:46 CM: So something that's really important about our work, we're very... We're really fascinated by the velocity of contemporary network communications systems. We spend a lot of time thinking about global market systems, and issues of climate change, sustainability, and thinking a lot about how fast capitalism and the ways that it has... Thinking about the ways that fast capitalism has created disparities in the world and destabilized people, forcing mass migration, environmental devastation, resulting in policies around land use that affect the sustainability of previous local economies of scale that were the result of thousands of years of success. So that's just some more context to keep in mind as we're talking about this work. So here's a piece that we recently did last year at the Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art. This piece is called Pollination, and what Pollination is, is a... God, I don't know how many booths. Like maybe 10, 11 booths? It's about eight...

0:26:35 KT: There's eight booths.

0:26:37 RC: One of them's out of order.

0:26:39 CM: Yeah, an eighth booth peep show, and one of them's out of order. And so, what happens is when you enter into the gallery space, you come across this peep show, simulation of a peep show, and when you step inside a booth... You wanna say something?

0:27:02 RC: Well just real quick, hand sanitizers, paper towels.

0:27:04 CM: Oh, yeah, yeah, which is really important.

[laughter]

0:27:07 CM: Yeah, really important. And of course, Clorox in the corner. But we used a lot of mediums for this, including lots of different types of smells and scents. And so, when you go in there, it's fairly brutal, and when you get to the museum and you come to see this work, you're given a token. So the first peep is free, and then you have to pay for more after that.

0:27:41 KT: And one quick thing: It's modelled after an actual place in the south valley of Albuquerque, New Mexico. Down to the materials and everything...

0:27:48 RC: Measurements.

0:27:49 KT: Yeah.

0:27:50 CM: Yeah. It's a replica. And so, what happens, when you go inside a booth and you plop your coin into the arcade slot and the window opens, and what you see on the other side... Oh yeah, Kleenex. More Kleenex.

0:28:12 RC: Glory hole.

0:28:13 CM: Glory hole. Kleenex. What you see on the other side is not a nude female dancer, but you see this idyllic, lush, beautiful garden. And what this garden is, it's also a butterfly pavilion. So when this opens, you'll see this and you see butterflies flying around. And what this is communicating is that nature, as a surrogate for the coveted female flesh. So we're playing off of these allegories in the Western canon of art, where the female body is often situated as an allegory for nature. And what we're talking about here is we're talking about how we're moving into a time of fetishizing the natural environment as we see it wasting away before our eyes. And so, we kinda envision this apocalyptic future where it could be possible that one of these days, we will have damaged the planet so badly, we've caused so much irreparable damage, that the only way that we can appreciate nature, we could appreciate something beautiful or idyllic or pastoral, as often presented to us by the Western Judeo-scientific worldview, is to go to a place like a peep show where you have to pay to enjoy that or to gain some sense of pleasure.

0:30:04 CM: We also use this as a metaphor to talk about the ways by which fast capitalism and market systems have feminized labor in places like maquiladoras, which are close to where we live down at the border, where those are mostly women who are working in those environments, the sweatshop labor, which ties to tens of thousands of women that go missing annually, or that are raped, and are murdered in the desert. So we're talking about... Usually, in our work, we have multiple narratives associated with capitalism that are going on. In this case, we're bridging the relationship between labor and environmental degradation.

[pause]

0:31:04 RC: And this is a piece we'll spend most of the evening talking about. This is where it all started. These are scare eye balloons, they're ineffective bird repellent products. You can hang 'em in your garden, you can hang 'em in a tree, to scare away birds, and in about 20 minutes, birds all return and shit all over 'em and...

[laughter]

0:31:35 RC: But that's all the colors that they make. You can get them on eBay, or not eBay...

0:31:39 KT: Amazon.

0:31:39 RC: Amazon.

0:31:40 CM: Home Depot.

0:31:41 RC: They're real cheap, $7.41. But there's something really interesting about this that caught our eye. The colors that are used by this particular balloon are Indigenous medicine colors. The only color for many of us, the only color is it seems like blue. And then we look at the iconography, this predatory eye or this open eye as it's known by people of this hemisphere, it's an indigenous iconography on this consumer product using indigenous medicine colors. And it's a really heavily-loaded semiotic vessel that we felt like we had to use. And living in Arizona and New Mexico, we're really living in an environment of intense racism towards people who are from this hemisphere and other... Over the last 10 years, have been demonized as Mexican people, or Salvadorian people, or Guatemalans, or what-have-you.

0:32:58 RC: They're all indigenous people, but the thing is the way the border discourse works is they're dehumanized as members of a national sovereign. There's never any sense of who they are, where they came from attached to their stories. Because their stories actually are never included or never heard. So we thought of this idea of placing these in the landscape in that contested space, that borderlands area. And I think that's how that idea started. Let's make big ones, like if a 10-inch diameter balloon could scare away a bird, maybe a 10-foot diameter balloon could scare away Western civilization, and it doesn't work, it didn't work.

[laughter]

0:33:50 CM: Yeah. And it doesn't work because it was designed with embedded obsolescence, and that's part of the critique. The critique is that we sorta get like a double bottomline benefit to this. So, as we... As consumers consume products that are designed to fail, we also get the added benefit of filling our landfill or filling our lands with landfill. So we knew it wasn't gonna work, and of course that's the great humour and beauty about this piece.

0:34:34 RC: Yeah, it is designed to fail. There's only so much helium you can put in one of these. And this one was the first staging of that, of a Repellent Eye. And we flew this one over the headquarters of Sheriff Joe Arpaio, who's the kinda Billy Badass cop down there who's trying to arrest everybody for being brown. So this was flown...

0:35:01 KT: Right above his jail.

0:35:02 RC: Right over his jail in downtown Phoenix. We made another one which we flew at the Close Encounters exhibition in 2011 in Winnipeg. And this one was less about warding off Western civilization. This one was put up in the Manitoba Hydro headquarters or office building, more to serve as a reminder, I suppose, of everybody's obligation to watch over our natural resources, being that Manitoba has the most water, the problems with the most water or the area with the most water in North America.

0:35:42 CM: So from there, as we were doing these... These are kinda like studies. The idea that

we have this semiotic vehicle and putting it out within various contexts, various geo-political contexts, social context, cultural context. It sort of takes on these new and interesting meanings, and so, that's what we did. We flew these in different places, and did some brainstorming and did some thinking a little bit about what it meant and what it did in the public. And through that process, we realized that one of the most effective uses of this ineffectual bird repellent product would be down at the US-Mexico border, where we installed our piece called "Repellent Fence / Valla Repelente," which is situated right near the cities of Douglas and Agua Prieta in Arizona and Sonora. And this place is just west of the Arizona, New Mexico state line, so just to give you a sense of where it's located. And so, the piece is... Okay. In this image here, what you're seeing is the yellow line is the actual US-Mexico border, and then the red line was one of our site locations, which we eventually ended up installing the piece at. And you'll see that that is just east of Douglas, Agua Prieta; Douglas being on the top, and Agua Prieta being down at the bottom there.

0:37:49 CM: And this is a really... An aerial shot to give you a sense of what it is, but we flew 26 tethered scare eye balloons, floating approximately 80 feet above the desert landscapes, stretching for two miles, intersecting the US-Mexico border with one mile in Mexico and one mile in the United Estates. And so, what this is, is this is both a land art piece, but it's also a social engagement piece as well that took about eight years of intense bi-national dialogues and diplomacy in order to create the kind of bi-national cooperation to secure the land use permissions, to create a corridor of safety and to re-awaken a memory of a time before the iron fence. And so, the result was the community, both... One, the community definition of the meaning of the work, and then the community installation of the project itself.

0:39:18 KT: In this landscape, you see we added the blue. But in this landscape, using that iconography, it's a way to demonstrate the interconnectedness of our hemisphere, across boundaries, across borders, across geo-politics, across cultural chauvinisms; and remind people of the people who are crossing back and forth across this border, who have been doing so for thousands of years, and this is nothing new. So it's just to reawaken the public's imagination and memory about that fact, and to acknowledge the indigeneity of not just the immigrants, but also the people who are living in these two cities. These two cities are very brown cities. Spanish people aren't really brown. You get brown from having Indigenous blood pumping through your heart. So that was a lot of what the discourse was about, and the organizing and discussions that were taking place at our community meetings. We're just remembering who we were, and not being ashamed of who we were and who we are, and thinking about a more desirable future for the borderlands and...

0:40:33 CM: Yeah. Go ahead, go ahead.

0:40:34 KT: So we did a lot of outreach to communities from the border, across the border. We wanted to do this originally on the Tohono O'odham reservation, because that's a reservation that's literally divided in half by the border. But yeah, this extends all the way beyond that scale and that. But what we found when we started meeting with O'odham people on both sides of the border is there was a lot of cultural chauvinism from the US side aimed at their brothers and sisters on the Mexican side. The two tribes had no relationship. So...

0:41:16 CM: One tribe, two factions of the same tribe...

0:41:19 KT: Yeah. No relationship.

0:41:21 CM: Desocialized from one another.

0:41:22 KT: So it didn't make any sense. So we learned about Douglas and Agua Prieta after years of working along here, and found that this is a community that sees itself as one city. They call themselves one community. They have dialogues. They have memorandum of understanding, that is a legal framework for promoting cooperation and collaboration around social policy objectives. So there was this thing, this tangible connectedness that we could position the work within. And this work grew out of the spirit of that MOU between the cities of Douglas and Agua Prieta. It was what we had been looking for for eight years, essentially, as we found at least two communities. We wanted to find it from our own biases, our own notions of, "This has to be an O'odham project," or something like that, but that couldn't have been further from the truth. It's so much bigger than one tribe. And I think that's one of the biggest outcomes for me personally, is this isn't a one-tribe issue, these are hundreds of tribes. Hundreds of tribes, and these are... It's not just Indian people. It's non-Indian people as well. We're all in the borderlands together, we're all in this hemisphere together.

0:42:50 CM: So the way we situated this, we had a theory that the more that people understood this process as Indigenous re-imagined ceremony, the deeper the social engagement, and the more powerful the ability of people to innovate within the context of a transborder system across boundary lines. And so, that was sort of a theory that we came to the project with, and that was something that we positively witnessed and experienced through this piece.

0:43:32 CM: So we started in the westernmost part of the Arizona, Sonora border, and moved eastward, and not really finding the right place. We had to find like a Goldilocks zone, where this is the right place, where this sort of thing could be possible, and almost when we were... We never really ran out of hope. We always sort of believed that it was possible, even though we were being told so many things, but when we did get to Douglas and Agua Prieta, we spent time with the Mexican consulate, we spent time with the mayors there. And those were people who just didn't look at us like we were crazy, and then we began to realize "Whoa, maybe this is the place for us." So what's really beautiful about that is the sort of public affairs and sort of rhetorical approach that we took in putting this piece together was, we came to the city of Douglas, Agua Prieta with resources, with expertise and with an idea, and we essentially asked the cities how we could best leverage this idea in a way that would promote a more desirable future for the borderlands, and to have sort of a future imagining around that.

0:45:09 CM: And so, what the people shared with us is that it was their desire, where that they saw that our work, after questioning us in wanting to install another fence in a place where there already was a fence, after we explained our rationale for doing that, they helped us to understand that really what this project was about, was about suturing two communities back together again.

0:45:38 CM: One of the things that comes out of this is, yeah, just to give you an example... Here's an example of some of our partners. The US Border Patrol and Customs Protection.

0:45:53 RC: Wait.

0:45:54 CM: Yeah. We worked with them.

0:45:55 RC: We haven't been calling them our partners, the Border Patrol...

[laughter]

0:46:01 CM: Let me rephrase that. Here are the borderland stakeholders with whom we had to work with.

0:46:07 RC: Yeah.

[laughter]

0:46:09 CM: So we worked with the Border Patrol, we worked with cartels, we worked with minutemen, we worked with city administrations.

0:46:21 RC: Well, we didn't work with any of them. We...

[laughter]

0:46:25 RC: We got the unspoken permission from drug cartels to just stay out of their way, and they won't kill us.

[laughter]

0:46:35 RC: And the minutemen, as we're saying earlier, as we moved, we started west and moved east. We did get to a place where it was just that minutemen Tea Party presence, and we were still gonna do it. We're gonna have a guerrilla action and put this up, and they'd probably all get shot down, but that was gonna be the piece, to really have an intervention in that place, and it just... As we're saying, we kept going east, we found a community that wanted to help us put this up. We had a meeting with a lot of people from the city, the mayors and artist. And their first question was, "How long can this be up for?" And we said, "Well, helium's very expensive. It's only gonna be up for four days." And they said, "Why can't it be up longer?"

0:47:18 RC: So that was the sign that this was the place to do it. And so, that's what brought us to this place, and that was... Since it was a city, then we didn't have to work with Border Patrol. It was city jurisdiction. The Border Patrol was aware and in fact, we used... We were able to exploit the Border Patrol in that we used them as security, for if somebody, dehydrated out there, one of our audience, they could come and rescue him. And the minutemen were out of the story. They came and protested, but there's just like two of them.

[laughter]

0:47:54 RC: They put it up on their blog, which looks like it was made in 1995 or something.

[laughter]

0:48:02 CM: Well, we did find ourselves in meetings with these folks and having to have dialogues with them, and having to think strategically with them, and across these stakeholders, and to do it in a way that was going to promote the best chances of success at accomplishing the piece. So it kinda depends on how you look at it, and it also depends on what sort of stance you take, and what sort of stance you have to take. But one of the things that happens as result of this, in order to generate this kind of an installation within this really contested space, is people start to learn how to leverage, for example, the federal agencies that have failed to listen to them. They start to learn how to leverage those federal agencies in order to get things done bi-directionally across the border. So for example, the city of Douglas, Agua Prieta cooperatively learned how to leverage their national federal agencies in order to cross a HAZMAT, which is this helium, to move it from Douglas to Agua Prieta through a port of entry where HAZMAT is not typically moved. So, it's those kinds of outcomes that are the result of relationships that had emerged through this process of working together to install this project.

0:50:01 KT: Do you know, one thing, there are a few important pieces to the piece. One, first and foremost, is acknowledging what the social policy goals of those communities were, and being able to bring something to those communities that they could utilize as a metaphor for their intentions for cooperation and collaboration. And in reality, they came up with the metaphor of a suture, of a geo-political suture. We... That was never in our language, we never thought of that. They actually located the piece. We were trying to work with ranchers on this beautiful unspoiled land. And it wasn't feasible. The cartels didn't want it there and the ranchers did, but we were putting their families in really great jeopardy, danger, death threats, kidnappings, things like that. Those things are realities there.

0:51:03 KT: All of these things, without acknowledging and recognizing those social policy goals and inviting community members and decision-makers, leaders to come in and to think about what the piece means to them, really have these visioning sessions, and then to have them physically locate it on the plot of land that they think where it can work, and then the communities on both sides working to make it happen, and then people... There's zero degrees of separation between governments and cartel and citizen in this region. So we didn't really have to work at communicating with the cartels because everyone around us was communicating on our behalf. We get the sign off on that. It gets placed in an area where people are afraid to travel normally. Normally, that side of town where this piece was located is a "No-go zone." It's a place where you just don't travel to, especially at night or early in the morning. And when we were installing the piece, for instance, we would run across the coyotes with the immigrants trying to cross. We were in what you might call a tight spot on numerous occasions, to where if we didn't have the cartel having our backs, we probably would have walked away from there. So it was this thing.

0:52:26 KT: You find a place, you find what those social goals are, you facilitate a process to where those goals could be realized in a metaphor and as visual art, and that community took it and ran with it. It became their piece. It really was. There was public programming on both sides of the border. There was a bi-national art walk that was organized. There was feasts and dances, deer dances that were held for this event. The mayor from Agua Prieta was grandstanding about this

because the whole time we were working there on this piece, just like what Cristóbal was saying, they were leveraging this piece. They were using it as leverage to build relationships the entire time, it never stopped. Whether it was getting the HAZMAT, or whether it was getting a relationship with Border Patrol, or getting a relationship with the cartels. They never stopped.

0:53:30 RC: Yeah, it was... And so for those four days, there were fiestas and other things that happened. Some of it, we organized, but they wouldn't stop. They had some tequila I never had before, and...

[laughter]

0:53:47 RC: But all of those problems that came up, they solved with us or for us. And so, that's why it happened in this community. And during the four days, we barely saw the Border Patrol and we didn't see... On the Mexico side, a lot of people were afraid to go to that side before and they... By the third day, a lot of people from the US side were on that side experiencing the installation. And on the last day, in the evening or in the afternoon, we started taking them down, and that whole four days was just kind of inverted. You would have people on the US side walking through the desert and getting poked with thorns, walking that first mile that you can imagine anybody who crosses the border has to walk, and they got to experience that firsthand, walking through the desert to see our piece. But on that last day, we started taking them down and it got dark on us, and we started seeing spotlights on us and helicopters and trucks, and that portal started closing, and reality was coming back to what it had been before.

0:55:02 CM: So one of the things that's left behind, it's 10 years of work to achieve four days of re-imagined ceremony, it begins to articulate the scale of work that we have as humans, in terms of international relationships and borders and policy and especially Indigenous peoples, we really have our work cut out for us in a lot of ways. We're pretty aware of that, but it's... Even though it's four days, sometimes you have people say, "Well God, you went through all that work just for four days," and it's like, "Well no, the land art piece is one part of it, but the other part is the social practice. The idea that although the balloons have come down, the relationships remain. And now there's new literacies for working bi-nationally that are in place." So since that time, we've been receiving letters from both Douglas and Agua Prieta, they've been sharing fliers with us because they've been having more bi-national celebrations. Like this year's Dia de los Muertos ceremonies and celebrations became a bi-national event, which is typically had been more focused in Agua Prieta. So yeah, there's... I think this is a good example of how works of art can have influence over public policy frameworks, and over the ways by which... It shows how art can empower processes that support narratives of self-determination. So...

0:57:07 RC: And one powerful thing I think that we realized, probably three-quarters of the way through it, installing the piece, is that we didn't have one contract. There wasn't a contract with the city, with Border Patrol, with either city, Agua Prieta or Douglas, the cultural minister or anything. Not one contract, it's all word-of-mouth, all a handshake, all personal agreements, commitments. So it was an old school, oral tradition project that way. And it's something that we're really proud of, that in the 21st century, you can still work bi-nationally with people, that community self-determination can trump the intentions of national sovereigns if people exercise their self-determination. And we were able to do that merely with our words and actions.

0:58:06 CM: And with, yeah, with those dozens of oral agreements which were multilingual, by the way, despite it being a multilingual project, a trans-border project, dozens of very complex agreements, we had a 100% success rate, where not one single verbal agreement failed. And that says something about the power of those four R's that I mentioned at the very beginning of the talk. And one last thing is that... And we talked a little bit about sort of reawakening public memory. Kade and I spent our time in Mexico installing balloons, and so the way that this happened was that people on both sides of the border, we started closest to the borderline and balloons started going up starting from closest to the border moving outward, and one of the things that we experienced was the unbelievable... These situations where people would gather around a balloon and work together to solve the problem of getting the balloon into the air, and as that was happening, lots of stories, lots of Indigenous stories, lots of myths, lots of new... Lots of myth-making, lots of theory-making.

0:59:38 CM: And the Mestizo people were starting to remember who they were, and beginning to articulate their identities with a great, great sense of pride. And that's probably something that hasn't happened in a really long time within the context of that border fence.

1:00:04 RC: That's it. Thank you.

1:00:04 CM: Thank you.

[applause]

1:00:23 JL: Thank you, that was excellent. And now, we wanna open up, to throw open the questions in the audience. Please fire away.

[pause]

1:00:37 Speaker 5: Really?

1:00:38 JL: Don't be shy. Yes?

1:00:41 S5: Have you had any upcoming work?

1:00:46 RC: Yeah.

[laughter]

1:00:48 RC: We're here working on a virtual reality piece, so that is one piece where we have immersive installation environment, that I'll be exhibiting at the Center for Contemporary Arts in Santa Fe in April...

1:01:11 KT: We have other pieces. We were down working on the border so much that we started making some other work. So we made one piece in which we required a steady cam and drove along the US-Mexico Border, alongside of it, taking video of it as we drove along, of the fence and

the different shapes of the fence, as they're much like that one that you see projected. And then they turn to X's, and then they turn to crosses. So it's an immersive space for... You have this kind of zoetrope thing spinning around you at the border fence, with a very aggressive soundtrack.

1:01:51 KT: And it's edited to the sound, to the music composition. And yeah, we're gonna be doing a multichannel sound piece that we're gonna go into production on in the late spring, and a multichannel video piece that will be going into production in late spring as well, working with the same communities, and organizing an exhibition to show the documentation of the Repellent Fence and those three works that dialogue with the Repellent Fence.

1:02:28 CM: We also have some major exhibition opportunities coming up too, and we're starting to... We're just coming off the new year, off the break, but we've got our work cut out for us. One of those exhibitions is with the Getty Museum, and we'll be contributing to that exhibition with some of the material that Kade's talking about, some of the new works that are gonna... That are follow-up works tied to Repellent Fence, working with citizens in Mexico and the United States in this region.

1:03:05 RC: That's part of the maiden LA series, that is part of the... That the Getty organized. I don't know if you remember the Pacific Standard Time exhibitions over a couple years ago. They're gonna start on a whole new wave of exhibitions, and this is one of them. They'll travel internationally.

1:03:25 CM: We're also gonna go to Mexico this summer and we have a month-long residency coming up, so we're really excited.

1:03:34 RC: Mexico City.

1:03:34 CM: Mexico City, yeah. We're really excited. We've always pushed... Wanted to do as much work as possible in Latin America and really, really spend time in our hemisphere, and celebrate our hemisphere, and bring complexity and awareness about our hemisphere... Whoa...

[laughter]

[background conversation]

1:04:12 Speaker 6: Thank you very much for your talk, it's been really interesting and beautiful, all three of your works. And I'm thinking about the ceremonial aspect of all three pieces, also this last piece, [1:04:26] ____ and our new [1:04:28] ____ in the courts and politics of borderlines. I'm also interested in the medicine colors, and if you could talk a little bit about the medicine colors as inspiration to the ceremony, and then the combination piece. And also, its production as well, how were [1:04:48] ____.

1:04:52 KT: Well, I think every... It's one of those things like you can't... Talking about medicine colors, you're talking about... You're stepping on the toes of a lot of tribes, 'cause they mean different things to different tribes. But you're dealing with power, a sense of power, identity, place,

cycle. But I'm sure you could talk to every Indian in this room and they could... They would add something nuanced or something more interesting than what I just said, that's for sure.

1:05:30 CM: But in terms of our work, what we're trying to demonstrate is a broad proliferation of these colors. Even though they mean different things to different tribes, they're fairly consistent amongst all the tribes, demonstrating a real long view history of trade and commerce, and immigration, migration and movement.

1:05:54 RC: And you can't talk about the colors without talking about the four directions, and you know what those four directions mean, and things like that. It's a long thing.

1:06:05 KT: But another part of our work, a big part of our work and a lot of our installations is the temporality of it. So this piece, the fence and the clock, My Blood is in the Water, they both last for four days, and then they're taken down. And so, the materials have limitations to them, that they can only be up for that long. But for us, it's... That's a time when you have this durational time to sit with the piece, or that you know that the piece will exist and then it's done, and there's no trace of it afterwards.

1:06:40 RC: And if you think about what ceremony is, it is durational. Its emphasis is on some type of transformative experience of the participants and the witnesses, about accountability. But there's something about ceremony too, it's a world of symbolic representation, symbolic performance, where you become the metaphor, you embody it. Those types of things. So it's a way of bringing non-Indigenous people into that space, into that way of thinking, and sharing that accountability with them. Because we get so much brought to us, good, bad and indifferent. It's a way to reciprocate a little bit. But there's also something about... We work a lot in installation environments, and there's something about the nature of an installation environment just in and of itself; where you're going into a room, you're transforming that room, that space into something entirely different. You're transforming it into metaphor, into narrative, into a physical space that contain metaphor and narrative.

1:08:09 RC: So that in and of itself has this thing that I think speaks to Indian people, I think there's a lotta... You'll see a lotta Indian artists that are getting in the installation environments and working with new media and things like that because of that. It's a very familiar space, once you get your feet wet, it's very familiar.

1:08:34 Speaker 7: Yeah, you were talking about transformative... Thank you for the show first. Yeah, so you're talking about transformative experiences and installations in like the one that we've just seen, Repellent Eyes. And you said that you're working right now with virtual reality, so I would like to know a little bit more like why did you choose this specific medium, to create another kind, because I guess that's what you want to reach, and as a kind of transformative experience? I develop for [1:09:06] ____ for two years now and it's a lot of time behind a computer, so it's not like a lot of myth creation and myth-making with people around and community.

1:09:19 CM: Yeah. I would try to extend what you're saying and complicate what you're saying. So I share a similar background as you. I have my... A big part of my academic background is in

computer science, and physical computing and designing experiential media systems. And so, I spend a lotta time behind a computer, doing those types of things and with a soldering iron and... But the issue for us is that these pieces that we shared with you tonight have a more analog-type of approach, in terms of the technologies that are used. But we do have works of art that are extremely heavy in terms of computation, where we're modelling simulations and processing big data, and using movement and analyzing movement, or doing... Writing feature extraction algorithms. When you take those types of things that are, yeah, about sitting behind a computer for many hours, for us, we situate those or we ground those in Indigenous knowledge systems. And so for us, part of sitting behind a computer is preparing, preparing for installation, or preparing for re-imagined ceremony, or preparing the re-imagined ceremony.

1:11:06 CM: So they're all tools. There isn't anything intrinsic about sitting behind a computer that makes it any less appropriate to the work we're trying to do than, for example, blowing up a balloon in a desert. And so, we're looking at virtual reality right now. As I said earlier, we're very interested in the power of high-speed communication systems and that includes all pervasive and emergent media. And so, we'll use any media to communicate any idea. And so, we oftentimes look at... If we have an idea, we look, then we try to understand, "Well, what is the best media for the job?" So for us, it's all just tools.

1:11:58 RC: And you could add your hacking bit too.

1:12:01 CM: Yeah. We're hackers. We hack. Those balloons, for example, it's a hack job, right? It's hacking a consumer product. And it's repositioning, and re-imagining that consumer product in a way to where it becomes even more complicated than it was originally ever intended or imagined by its originators or original creators. So we took it, we appropriated it, and we reimagined it, and recreated it, and repositioned it. So that's a lot of what hackers are about, and what they do. And they'll do that with code, or you can do it with physical objects. You can do it with language. Language is the most contested things we have as humans, and we're always hacking words. We're always contesting the meaning of words. We're always contesting discourses. So yeah. So virtual reality right now was a challenge that was brought to our attention by Jason and Skawennati, and it presented an opportunity for us to learn because we've never done anything virtual reality before. And we thought it would be a wonderful opportunity for us to learn something new. So here we are.

1:13:28 S7: I'm sure you have a 360 panoramic of this piece here, that we can... And because it just... It was done after four days, so that would be nice to have like a view in audiovisual radio or something else.

1:13:41 CM: Yeah, yeah. Well one thing is that because we designed these experiential media systems, it's really about being in a place and really acknowledging the place that you're at. And that's the hardest thing about sharing a work like this with you all, is that there's nothing we can do. This is the piece now in its form. But when we were there, people were, and we were very emotional, and crying, and laughing, and telling stories and jokes. And it was incredibly powerful and incredibly beautiful. And I'm not even sure virtual reality's gonna work out.

[laughter]

1:14:32 RC: Maybe in different ways.

1:14:34 CM: Different ways.

1:14:36 Speaker 8: Speaking of place, would you be interested in bringing the Repellent Fence to Canada and the United States? I was fascinated with the Mohawk Reserve, but it's both in the United States and...

1:14:55 RC: Did you see the movie Frozen River?

1:14:57 S8: No, I didn't.

1:14:58 RC: Yeah, it's an amazing movie. No, I think that this piece is in the can and it's a one-time experience. So just the cost, and logistics is enormous. Lucy Lippard, she calls land artists, fundraisers.

[laughter]

1:15:19 RC: And it was eight years of fundraising really to pull it off. But I wish we... I wish it was something that was easier to manage, and I wish that helium... It's a very extremely limited natural resource. And the price of helium has grown exponentially since we've started this. To buy one tank of helium is right now, market rate, $285.

1:15:50 KT: US dollars?

1:15:51 RC: US dollars.

[laughter]

1:15:53 RC: And that's not if you're just buying one tank, that's if you're buying 110 of them. So to come up with 50 grand to do it would be tough, that's just for the helium. Yeah.

1:16:09 CM: But this is a globalizing phenomena. So we hope that we all see ourselves in this. Although it was situated in a certain geography, in a certain context, there's something important about you asking the question. And what I hope that you can take away is that this... Even though it doesn't come to the US and Canada, it's with the US and Canada in mind as well. And it's with Kashmir in mind. Or Palestinian-Israeli border in mind. Mass migration out of Syria. Mass migration out of Latin America into the US and Canada, with all of these things in mind. Migration from Europe to the western hemisphere. So we hope that people will see themselves in it, even though it isn't feasible for us to be moving it around.

1:17:30 S8: That's a great answer.

1:17:31 JL: Way in the back, there was...

1:17:33 Speaker 9: Now, when you were explicating about Pollination, you used the term "Judeo-Christian scientific," and I wondered if that's a kinda technical term for you or...

1:17:45 CM: Yeah.

1:17:46 S9: Because it seems together opposites, and so on.

1:17:48 CM: That term comes from Vine Deloria Jr, the late... It doesn't? He uses it in a...

1:17:57 RC: It's a Judeo-Christian Western scientific worldview...

1:18:00 CM: It doesn't come from him but he uses it.

1:18:03 RC: Yeah. It comes from his girlfriend.

1:18:05 CM: Oh, really?

[laughter]

1:18:11 CM: It is a technical term. We use it.

[laughter]

1:18:16 KT: He got the credit.

1:18:18 CM: Nice.

[laughter]

1:18:23 CM: We... It does come up in our discourse from time to time, yes. It's not a term we coined and obviously Vine Deloria Jr., maybe he coined it, but I'm learning something new tonight.

[laughter]

1:18:41 JL: So first off, do you know her name?

1:18:43 RC: I'm blanking. She's a mentor of mine, too. She was the Director of Indian Studies at University of Oklahoma, Clara Sue Kidwell. She is a Choctaw lady and Anishinaabe, and a hell of an intellectual. And she would start every lecture with, "Just a quick fact to a... Just cutting worldviews." And she had... Judeo-Christian western scientific worldview was one of them.

1:19:18 CM: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

1:19:19 RC: But she'd start every lecture that way.

1:19:24 Speaker 10: I was just wondering about this piece. When you were talking about it, you positioned it as a land art piece and you talked a lot about having sort of a consumer object, but then you just reproduced an object that also is going to be destined to a landfill, and to use that. You talked about the price of helium, that helium is a finite natural resource that's not renewable. So I'm just wondering if you can speak of your choices of materials.

1:19:55 CM: Yeah and we also call it Repellent Fence, just to add to your litany.

[chuckle]

1:20:03 RC: But they won't end up in landfills.

1:20:06 S1: I mean...

[laughter]

1:20:07 CM: But yeah... Yeah, so...

1:20:11 S1: They're made of plastic.

1:20:11 CM: Yeah. They're made of PVC.

1:20:15 KT: PVC, even worse.

1:20:15 CM: They're non-biodegradable.

[laughter]

1:20:17 CM: They're non-biodegradable. This could probably be one of the most unsustainable works of art in the history of art.

1:20:26 KT: Made in China.

1:20:27 CM: Made in China.

1:20:28 KT: So you think of the carbon footprint of the pieces, enormous.

1:20:34 CM: Yeah. So Repellent Fence is not an answer. It's a mediator for this multimodal conversation to happen at the border. So its job is to generate a lot of noise and a lot of confusion as a way to encourage respectful public dialogue across difference. And so, we, as part of the critique and as part of catalyzing that kind of movement, we fully work within the realities that we live. And so, if you're gonna have a metaphor for fast capitalism, it makes a lotta sense to use the medium of fast capitalism.

1:21:31 S1: And I'm not sure if that's coherent with... Just like in researching your work on your

website and hearing tonight, speaking from your value perspective, that's the one thing. The choice of material for me is not so coherent because I'm not sure it's so true that you need to use the language of capitalism to speak against it because you're only just...

1:22:00 CM: But we're not speaking against capitalism. What we're doing is we're creating a metaphor. We're positioning a metaphor by which people can dialogue about capitalism.

1:22:12 KT: Go ahead, sorry.

1:22:14 CM: So yeah, every group has a value system where every person comes to a problem with assumptions or with values, but outside of our own values, outside of our own assumptions. Our job in this case is to position a metaphor with all of the complexity, with all the coincidences. On the one hand, "Well, what is it? Is it a surveilling eye? Is it repelling immigrants? Is it repelling the fence? Is it repelling the minutemen? Is it repelling the Border Patrol? Is it repelling Mexicans? Is it repelling Americans? Is it a surveilling eye-turned-upon-itself, or is it a top secret government project, a new border technology? Is it... What is it? Or how can something be made in China be an Indigenous spiritual mediator?" So we're creating all of the complexity that we live with in the borderlands, devoid of any kind of didactic assumption or trying to communicate a value that we might have in some sort of didactic way. That's what we're trying to avoid.

1:23:40 KT: And you raised the dilemma that we're very aware of, and that we tried to utilized to help facilitate dialogue, that it's very purposeful. It's not coincidental. There's nothing coincidental about the piece. So coherency and legibility and those things are important, and we strive for that, but there are things about dilemmas that are irresolvable. And within that irresolvable space of dilemmas, there's also humour and irony, and...

1:24:18 CM: And absurdity.

1:24:19 KT: And absurdity. And those are things that we also have to utilize too. Those are important tools of the shed. We are Indian people, and at the... What is fundamental to all of our work is a pretty good sense of humour, we'd like to think.

[laughter]

1:24:40 Speaker 11: Really funny. Thanks for bringing your...

1:24:44 JL: Last question.

1:24:44 S1: I think it's very powerful.

1:24:48 Speaker 12: Could you come on up here, so we can all hear you? Well, me anyway. I can't hear you.

1:24:52 S1: What?

1:24:53 S1: Come on up.

[laughter]

1:24:55 S1: 'Cause I shout over here. And I really enjoyed it. And the way you guys did it, I think putting it there on the land because cops on our borders and the governments that are over there, I think, to me anyways, it speaks to me being an Indigenous person here in Canada. That's why I love the art. We can't... If we don't want capitalism to be... It's not about what the material is used because we're all... As people, as individuals, we're all part of it... Because it's the way it is. Electricity.

1:25:34 CM: Yes. Mm-hmm, you bet.

1:25:39 S1: Where I'm from, in Northern Quebec, where we, as people, the Cree people, [1:25:47] ____ people, our river was diverted to make electricity so the south can live like a world power. And I think that's what... And as Indigenous people, we subsidize that type of living. However, I really love the work because it's out on the land, and it speaks to me that we cannot everything have perfect...

1:26:22 CM: Thank you. Thank you so much.

1:26:24 RC: Thank you, yeah.

1:26:24 CM: Thank you for your comment. Thank you.

[applause]

1:26:36 JL: Okay. It's 8:30. These guys have been standing for an hour-and-a-half.

[laughter]

1:26:40 JL: So I think it's time for us to close it down. Thank you very much on their behalf and our behalf for coming out and hearing what they have to say. We seem to really appreciate it. This is our first big public event for Initiative for Indigenous Futures. And so we're happy to see that people are interested. So won't you join us now? Join me now in giving thanks once again to Postcommodity.

[applause]

1:27:16 KT: Thank you all very much for your time.

[background conversation]