Kim TallBear
Future Imaginary Dialogues
(transcript)

Kim TallBear

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&

Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace

&

Concordia University Research Chair

in Computational Media and the Indigenous Future Imaginary

Concordia University

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[pause]

0:00:15 Speaker 1: Okay, so I'm just gonna jump into it. But first actually, can you just give us your name, and your position, where you're at now?

0:00:28 Kim TallBear: I'm Kim TallBear. And I am a Canada Research Chair of Indigenous Peoples, Technoscience and Environment, and an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Native Studies at the University of Alberta.

0:00:38 S1: Great. And how long have you been at Alberta?

0:00:40 KT: One year, yeah, 2015.

0:00:43 S1: Okay, and how has it been so far?

0:00:45 KT: I love it.

0:00:46 S1: Good.

0:00:47 KT: Yeah. It's taken me a long time to find a place that I wanna stay for a while, I think.

0:00:50 S1: And what is it about University Alberta, or Canada that makes you wanna stay?

0:00:56 KT: I grew up in South Dakota until I was 14, in Eastern South Dakota. So I grew up on the prairies. I was born in Pipestone. I went to high school in Minneapolis and St. Paul's. So I'm a prairie person. What I was saying to you yesterday, I need to be where there's a river cutting through the center. And I grew up in a small town, with the Big Sioux running through it, then the Mississippi. I've lived on the East Coast, the West Coast, I've lived in the South, I've lived overseas. I've spent a lot of time moving around the world, and taking advantage of a lot of opportunities, but I realized finally I was getting increasingly agitated the older I got, that I really need to be back on the prairie. I need to... And it's the skies. It's the flat land, and then the land is almost like a canvas for the skies. And I just breathe easier. And I also want there to be a large visible presence of indigenous people, and that's on the prairies for me. And I've lived a lot of places that you just don't see indigenous people with the same kind of presence as in places like South Dakota, or Minneapolis, or Edmonton, or Saskatoon. So it's really important to me, especially as I get older.

0:02:01 S1: Okay. And you'd mentioned in one of your talks that we were listening to about how you thought that sort of indigenous studies south of the boarder tend to be very preoccupied with kind of one or two subject areas, and wasn't necessarily as, I don't know, open or interested in the science and technology side of things as you would like, and that maybe this is a better place.

0:02:27 KT: I think so. In the United States, I would say in general, Native American and indigenous studies tends to be more dominated by people in the humanities, especially literature and history. And that's great, we need that stuff, but I didn't see... There's just not very much engagement with science and technology, there's a little bit more with environmental stuff. But when I came to Canada... And I've been working up here for about 20 years. Even before I was an academic, I was doing some environmental work up here. And it just seems to me there's more engagement with the land. And if you're engaged with the land and land-based issues, you're engaging with materiality,

you're going to have to engage with science and technology. You just have to. The other thing I think I've noticed, and somebody should study this, I feel like in the United States, a lot of people that are in indigenous studies are people who grew up more in diaspora, as opposed to inland-based indigenous communities. And I think that that's got something to do with their being drawn towards the humanities, they tend to get into issues of identity and culture. And I also study indigenous bio-scientists. And I was very surprised when I started hanging out with biological scientists, indigenous geneticists, the vast majority of them come from rural, tribal communities.

0:03:41 S1: Really?

0:03:41 KT: I was shocked. I think it's because they're raising animals, they're hunting, they're dealing with the land, they get interested in cellular level issues, so there's a big divide there. And in Canada, I don't see quite the same divide. So I don't know what that is yet, I've only been here, living here a year.

0:04:00 S1: Yeah, yeah. It would be interesting to check in five years from now, and so we'll see how it's maybe played out. So can you talk more about how you envision indigenous epistemologies, and their relationship to Western science, as alternatives or replacements for Western science, or complements?

0:04:19 KT: That's a big question. So I'm gonna start out by saying that I've actually come to think of indigenous knowledge, as any knowledge that helps us survive as Peoples. Peoples, capital P. And so that can be a combination of what we would call Western science... So it's why I'm interested in indigenous scientists, people who are doing Western science. I'm interested in aspects of "traditional knowledge." But I'm really not so interested in making the divides between those things anymore. I really like to think about indigenous people, whether we're in the academy, or whether we're out in communities as thinkers and as intellectuals. Everybody does theory, and so whatever methodologies, whatever tools or theoretical frameworks you wanna bring to a problem, I think that's great. And I think if we think about knowledge or theory methods as a toolkit, we grab the tool that's most useful to help us access and analyze a problem. And if we think about it, that way, we're not going to be staying within these boundaries of, "What's science? What's social science? What's the humanities?" And so an indigenous epistemology, again, would be anything that is somebody who's concerned with the survival of their people. As a people, what would they use to help ensure that?

0:05:32 S1: Right. Okay. Are you familiar with Margaret Kovach?

0:05:37 KT: No.

0:05:37 S1: So she wrote then Indigenous Methodologies. Is that the name?

0:05:42 KT: Oh, I've seen this book. I haven't...

0:05:43 S1: Yeah. So she was just here yesterday. And she was talking about indigenous research, indigenous methodologies, particularly as it pertains to the academy. And I think that was one of the points that she was trying to make, was that we don't have to see it as either, or, and also that indigenous research is a political project. Which is, it's about sort of addressing the needs of our communities.

0:06:09 KT: Well all research is a political project. The difference is we know it, and they think they're not.

0:06:13 S1: Right, yeah. So this is sort of related. You talk often about the integration of science into indigenous communities, in order to understand our own peoplehood and sovereignty. Can you talk more about that connection between science, indigenous science, Western science, science in general, that way of operating in the world; and how it plays into projects of sovereignty, or of defining and supporting ourselves as a people?

0:06:45 KT: Well scientific thinking and scientific projects have been part of the colonial projects since the beginning. And so we have been most often, as indigenous peoples, on the receiving end of the scientific gaze. We have been looked at as less agential, less civilized. As this sort of the raw materials for knowledge production of the colonial state. So engaging with science, at the very least, in a way that is politically resisting that is important. But in order to resist, you have to have a sense of what you're resisting. And so at a very baseline, we need people who are educated in science so we can resist colonial forms of science better. That's where I started out. When I was working for Department of Energy, for the US Environmental Protection Agency, and I was hanging out with a lot of scientists, I wasn't a scientist myself. I first began to notice the ways in which we could resist. But then as I got to know more scientists, and I met tribal environmental scientists, then I started to think about the ways in which we could use science to actually expand our self-determination, our self-governance.

0:07:47 KT: And so I really came to be a believer that we're a nation, both the US and Canada, which is governed by science. You need to be able to speak a scientific language, and I include the policy sciences and social sciences within that, in order to sit at a decision-making table. That's just the reality that we face in a colonial state. And so we're better able to advocate on behalf of our peoples, and our land bases, our cultures if we can sit at that table and speak in those languages. We cannot, I think, expand indigenous self-governance without engaging in science and technology, because that's what's being used to shape states, it's being used in extractive industries, it's being used to develop the state. If you look at President Obama's, both of his inaugural addresses I think in 2008 and in 2012, he talked about the role actually of biotechnology and genetics. This is central to national economic development platforms, and we need to be figuring out how that's going to be used in ways that are going to benefit us, and not just hurt us. And usually genetics has been used to hurt indigenous people, either inclusively or exclusively.

0:08:57 S1: Can you talk a little bit about that? That goes back to your early work on DNA, and things like that. It'll be good to have some kind of engagement with that. Though I know you've evolved in other directions at the moment.

0:09:10 KT: Yeah. Well if you look back into 19th and earlier centuries, and even the 20th century, it was indigenous land that was the raw materials for the development of the state. But in the late 20th and 21st century, you begin to see indigenous bodies being treated in very much the same way. And you see the same kinds of narratives structuring the kinds of property claims that scientists are making on indigenous bodies, in the same way that they've made property claims to land, minerals, and resources in the early 20th and 19th and earlier centuries. So we're still the raw materials for the production of the states. So they're looking to produce value out of our bodies, they're looking to produce value out of our lands and resources in order to build the states. And then indigenous

people get portrayed as less evolved, as incapable of ourselves producing value, when we're sitting over here thinking about I think being in more ethical, in intimate relation.

0:10:06 KT: And when you're in relation with your human and non-human relatives, and when you're in relation with what the white man calls the natural world, it's much less of a relationship of treating something else like this non-agential body of natural resources to be mined and exploited. You have to live in a... I hate to use these overly-used buzzwords, but you have to live with more reciprocity. There are a lot of indigenous scholars who talk about, and people in general, who talk about a spider's web as a good metaphor for relations. What happens on one part of the web is gonna affect what happens on the other part, right? And so we need... If you're thinking about living in a set of relations, a web set of relations, you've gotta be more careful about what you take, who you eat. [chuckle] Right? We all need to... We need to eat our relatives, in order to survive. But that's a really different kind of idea if you're talking about an indigenous notion of the world, than when you're talking about treating other bodies as less evolved, less agential. "I can go take what I want because they're lower in an evolutionary hierarchy."

0:11:14 S1: Well even using the term "relatives," right?

0:11:16 KT: Right. Right. Yeah, so I think these Western ideas about how humans relate to non-humans are much more hierarchical. And I'm not saying... We obviously kill and eat our relatives, but we think... Historically, indigenous people have had to think very carefully about how they do that, because we depend on them for our life. And we recognize that we're taking something, and there's an exchange going on there. I may have gotten a little off track from the original question. [chuckle]

0:11:40 S1: No, no. That's great. And it's really good because it actually feeds into the next question. Which is, you've spoken about the critical relationality between human kin, non-human kin, and contesting settler relations. How do you envision this as being applied to all kin, and breaking down the non-human, human binary?

0:12:03 KT: Can you repeat that?

0:12:04 S1: Yes.

[chuckle]

0:12:06 S1: So really the question is, to have you go a bit further in what you've been talking about over the last at least four or five years in what I've seen and read, about how do we get back to a situation where we are able to think of our non-human and non-biological kin, as kin? And why should we be trying to do that? And what are the consequences of living in a world where that's the case?

0:12:40 KT: Well I think we're really hamstrung actually, this world that we live in. And so you see these pockets of resistance or practice, like we were talking about the Shinto earlier. You're looking at communities of people, scholars, students, young people who are trying to learn those things again. We've been cut off, through the colonial project, from those relationships with our non-human relatives. You can't expect indigenous people to have knowledge about how to relate in that way, when they've been taken off the land, when you've had the land cut out from beneath your feet.

So it's not just our children that were stolen from our communities, our families we're disrupted in that way. But our non-human relatives were also... Those relations were severed as well. All of our kinship relations were severed, as settlers attempted to force us into these settler state institutions.

0:13:36 KT: So I think those are really great efforts to try to rebuild some of that knowledge. I don't think in terms of grand revolutions. We're boxed in by the settler state in a really rigid way. And I'm really interested in people who are looking for those little spaces where they can kind of put cracks in that edifice. I also really think that doing theoretical work is important. And I have to say, where I take the most theoretical direction from is not actually from academics, but when Idle No More started to do the work that they did. And now looking at Standing Rock and the resistance to the Dakota Access pipeline, I see those two communities of activists, largely indigenous, but also with non-indigenous participation, theorizing what living in a different kind of world looks like. So what was really interesting for me with Idle No More was when you have those women, and then other activists who teamed up with them, tying the welfare of all Canadians to the defense of indigenous treaty rights. Because if you defend indigenous treaty rights, if you defend indigenous land, you're going to defend non-human bodies that are necessary for all of us to live. You're defending the soil, the water, the sky, and I thought that was really, really important.

0:14:56 KT: And then there's a whole other bunch of rhetoric that happens in Canada too, which was kind of foreign to my American ears. This notion of governing in partnership. I realize in the west of Canada, that's a little bit more prominent I guess than it is in the east. But it's really interesting, that whole kind of kinship. Developing kinship relations even with settlers, that's a little discomforting to me, but we certainly do it in practice. Settler and indigenous people have been having sex and making babies for a long time. So why not think a little bit about what those kinds of kinship relations mean, in addition to that.

0:15:32 KT: I just wrote an article for Anthropology News in the US recently, where I was drawing on Rob Innes's work at the University of Saskatchewan actually, where I was thinking about moving into a space a little bit more where we're talking as indigenous peoples about governing and diplomacy through making kin. And we can make kin, again, not only through those biological ways, but we can also think about how we make kin with other kinds of communities. And I was thinking about the United States. So to think back to my own history, and so this is where I actually went back and reread the 1862, the Dakota War. That was the pivotal moment that changed the world for my people back in Minnesota, in 1862. So I was rereading those histories. And we have family oral histories, but there's also historians that have extensively treated that war, and the role of my ancestor, Little Crow, in that war.

0:16:31 KT: If you go back and look at the way that Little Crow and other Dakota leaders were thinking about treaty relations, after reading Rob Innes's book, and listening to people in Western Canada talk about governing in partnership, I started to see that perhaps Little Crow's expectations of kinship by settlers were not just naïve, that there had been kinship relations before the settler state came in with previous European or European Americans. So I'm right in the middle of rereading these histories, thinking about kinship as a framework, not only about indigenous sovereignty or indigenous self-determination in this 20th century way that we think about in the US. We talk about a government to government relationship, nation to nation relationships. That's very strategic, and there's a good deal of truth to those, to that framework, as understanding history. But I also think we should think more about how we're making kin, and that as another sort of diplomatic strategy. So that's kind of what I'm thinking right now.

0:17:34 S1: Skawennati has a great story, which... We're not live, so if she like, we can edit it out if we want to. So her mother's a Mohawk from [0:17:42] ____, and her father is an Italian immigrant. He came over when he was in his late teens. And so it's an interesting household. So people from this land, and then a family who came to this land, and it changed their lives, and they think it's amazing and everything. And so when she was younger, and she was talking about becoming more active in indigenous politics and things like that, at one point, her father said to her, "What do you wanna do? You wanna get rid of all of us?" And she is like, "No, Daddy, I just want us all to make babies together. That's how we're gonna come closer together."

0:18:20 S1: And so it's part of her work, and part of our thinking about this stuff is then thinking about in terms of the kin relations that do exist, they exist all over the place, between indigenous people and settlers. A lot of them are maybe toxic kin relationships, but there's a lot of them that are positive ones, and ones that work. And so it's interesting to think in terms of strengthening those kin relationships, as opposed to sort of seeing them as necessarily antithetical to each other.

0:18:49 KT: I'm starting to also think about how we do that though without resorting to this language of multiculturalism, that requires everybody to be absorbed into the settler state, with their values and ontology at the center of the world. And I'm really interested. I think most indigenous communities are not interested in that. We're interested in thriving indigenous societies, I think we're also interested in making kin, but we're tired of doing it on their terms. Their terms don't work. That's what I maybe talking about tomorrow. They're not environmentally sustainable the way that they've created this world, it's not emotionally sustainable, it's not economically sustainable. They're terrible, terrible relatives. The settler state has been a terrible set of relatives. They're oppressive, they're extractive, they take too much. [chuckle] So yeah, I do wanna think about making kin as a strategy, but also I really want us to center indigenous worldviews more, because I do think there are things our ancestors got really right. So yeah, that's with a caveat, I say that.

0:19:55 KT: And I was really thinking about this. We're going to Minneapolis for the American Anthropological Association this year, and I wrote a piece for Anthro News, saying, "When you come to Minneapolis, and you see the burning of sage, and you see an opening of a ceremony, and you hear the territorial acknowledgements, you're not just getting a little taste of a Dakota or Anishinabe culture." Those are the two peoples there, primarily. "But you should understand that there's a way in which they are sort of telling you, 'Look, this is our space.'" There's an attempt I think at kin making, and drawing people into a reciprocal relationship there. This summer, when you... Philando Castile. Was it Philando Castile? I think is his name, when he was killed. The African American man who was killed in Falcon Heights, a suburb of St. Paul, by that cop. And his partner got it all on video.

0:20:43 KT: This summer, and still into this fall, you've had these highly visible murders of African American men by police. I was writing about that, and how it's actually... It's really incredibly heartbreaking, as a Dakota person, to see the kind of police state that settlers have brought to our land, to our land. And you don't see any kind of discussion of that. So when all of the media around us, what you see is this kind of racial lens, which is true. There's a black-white racial lens, that binary is the central racial binary operative in the United States. But that binary is in part dependent on erasing indigenous people, it erases red. And so there used to be, in the early 20th century, it was red, white, and black. There's this racial triad, if you look at histories of race.

0:21:33 KT: It's largely now a black-white binary. And watching this, as a Dakota person, this happened on our land, and I imagine indigenous people all over the country feel this way. I can imagine the heartbreak of my ancestors, in terms of the kinds of really violent relations that were brought into the Americas by settlers. And I do not think... These are not things that make us feel very good, because they're happening in territories that are our historical lands. So that's what I wrote about. And so for me, I think it's important. And I'm not sure how to do this, 'cause I don't know that black people think of themselves as a people, in the way that you have indigenous peoples thinking of themselves as peoples. But we need to try to find languages to relate to each other in whatever sorts of making kin ways we can. I'm not interested in everybody trying to say they're indigenous, that's not what needs to happen; but rather, can we relate people to people in some way?

0:22:32 KT: So one of the important links that I made intellectually, was I noticed that it was... You had women at the center of Idle No More. I found out queer black women founded Black Lives Matter. There's something interesting going on with women here, and the ways in which they're organizing. And so I really... And then the sort of influence of queer communities as well. 'Cause they've had to make kin, because they've been ostracized from their birth families much of the time. Indigenous people are still good at making kin, so I think there are all these really complex networks that need to be nurtured and massaged. And that kinship framework for me is really, really generative right now in helping me think about how to do some of that work. So these are just questions I'm better... [0:23:17] ____ to me right now.

0:23:19 S1: It's exciting.

0:23:19 KT: It is exciting, yeah.

0:23:21 S1: So that's a good way to the next one, which is, do you envision feminist epistemologies as integral to indigenous futures? And why is feminism important in imagining an indigenous future? What does a feminist indigenous future look like, a queer future?

0:23:39 KT: Well my students and I talk about this a lot. Because I've got a Cree student who is really resistant to the word "feminism," as many indigenous women are. But she knows she acts like a feminist, and thinks like one, when she thinks about what that means. She's really interested in... We talk a lot about what feminism means among my students. And for me, I came to feminism through the side door, through feminist science studies. I didn't come through this typical academic genealogy of feminism, within the academy. A lot of my other indigenous scholar friends came to it through woman of color feminism, I did not. So for me, feminism was... I was looking at the way feminist critics, queer critics, crip theorists or disability study scholars, they were doing the same thing I was doing as an indigenous scholar, which was critiquing the objectification of our bodies and our communities by science. They had very similar critiques about those kinds of exploitative scientific practices.

0:24:32 KT: So when I come back then to indigenous feminism, that's what I'm bringing into it. How are feminists critiquing those kinds of hierarchies? They've done a great job of theorizing modes of resistance, I think, and so that's been really useful for me. But in terms of my Cree student, who's uncomfortable with the word, I said, "Well if what we're talking about are better relations, better obligations to one another, if we're talking about consent, if we're talking about

reciprocity, are there words in Cree, or is there a concept in Cree that you can begin to use? And maybe someday, if we figure though... We need to theorize in our indigenous languages, I think. I think that will really help us do some of this very complex intellectual work, where English is limiting us. And so maybe someday," I said to her, "I'll be a post-feminist with you, if I can find a better indigenous term to encompass what I think feminism does a pretty good job of."

0:25:22 KT: But it's got the baggage of white feminism, but we work through that. But right now, it's central, and it's key. And then also, queer theory is another... That's also been a really fruitful area for me, and I feel like I've learned so much from what queer theorists have done in terms of similar kinds of critiques. But queer for whom? What's queer in the West isn't queer in the cultures of our ancestors. So again, these are imperfect kinds of terms or concepts, but we are operating in English. We don't have a choice but to make use of the available tools and concepts in English. But at the same time, I encourage my students who speak their indigenous languages, to think about working as much conceptually in those languages as they can, and then it has to be translated back into English too. So it's very complicated.

0:26:11 S1: And do they take to that work? Are they enthusiastic about it?

0:26:14 KT: Yes, and they're really thinking about it. And quite often, they'll say, "Oh, but I need to go home and talk to my grandma or my uncle, because I don't know the language as well, and I'm not sure what this word means." And then they end up having these amazing conversations, where they're prompting their elders to sit down and think about, "What does that term mean?" And even if it's not exactly what it meant two generations ago, language is an alive thing. So if you're sitting there thinking about what a term means, and what it can encompass, and so language learning happens, knowledge transfer happens. And they learn that everybody does theory. And this is not just the domain of white guys with beards and tweed jackets.

0:26:52 S1: Right. Well hopefully we'll have time tomorrow to show you one of the VR productions we're working on with an Anishinabe artist, Scott Benesiinaabandan. And it's a project that's thinking, sort of imagining the world 150 years from now. And part of what he's trying to do is imagine the future of the Anishinabe language, so sorta how the language will evolve.

0:27:13 KT: That's interesting.

0:27:14 S1: Looking at how it's evolved since contact, and then thinking about what's gonna happen with it over the next 150 years, given some speculation about what might be happening around it.

0:27:24 KT: It's interesting to think about moving from a recovery mode, into a...

0:27:27 S1: A generative mode.

0:27:29 KT: Yeah. That's actually more inspiring to me, to think about language maintenance or revitalization. If we can get people from recovery, into generating new language. I imagine that would get young people really excited.

0:27:42 S1: I think so. And I think that's part of what we've done with the workshop, is it's not specific about language, but part of what we talk to them about is the idea that they're now the

makers of the next generation's traditions. So it's not just about recovering the old traditions, and learning them, and respecting them, and honouring them, but it's also about the fact that they are the culture now. And so part of their responsibility is not only to pass on those traditions, but they have to develop new traditions that respond to 21st century. In the case of Kahnawake, it's essentially an urban reserve that respond to the conditions they find themselves in. 'Cause those aren't the conditions that their ancestors found themselves in, and so it's about generating that culture, as well as honouring and passing on culture.

0:28:35 KT: I do think though even though we may have lost language, and things like that, or... I'm writing now about how the fact that we've lost knowledge of what we would now call sex or sexual practices, 'cause those things were so shamed out of our ancestors. But I do think we've retained fundamental ethical frameworks, that I think can serve as a ground from which we produce new practices. And I've talked to other colleagues as well, and we all feel like, "Yeah, there's something our families have retained about an orientation to the world, a fundamental way of being that's still there, despite the loss of surface-level practices." So I'm interested, and I was thinking about that as well.

0:29:16 S1: Okay, great. Actually, this is a probably good point. I want to ask you about the program, the one that you started in Texas. The one you referenced. What's it called?

0:29:26 KT: [0:29:26] ____.

0:29:27 Lindsey: It was in respect to the Reconciliation Conference.

0:29:31 S1: You talked to me about it then?

0:29:32 Lindsey: It was the Collaborative Science Program, that was working in community with indigenous peoples.

0:29:38 KT: Oh, the Summer Internship for Indigenous Peoples in Genomics?

0:29:40 Lindsey: Yes, yeah. Exactly.

0:29:42 S1: That's not it. That's not it. I'm interested in that, but no, I'm talking the... The thing that you've been doing for like five...

0:29:46 KT: The research-creation thing, the Confession show?

0:29:48 S1: Yes, the Confession show.

0:29:49 KT: I haven't been involved for five years, but it's been going on for...

0:29:52 S1: Oh, you haven't been?

0:29:53 KT: Just a year, I've just been doing it for a year.

0:29:55 S1: Okay. Can you talk about it from the year you've been involved in it?

0:29:58 KT: Yes. All right, so...

0:30:00 S1: So describe it, and what it's about.

[background conversation]

0:30:08 S1: What's it called? What's the full title?

0:30:10 KT: It's called Prairie Confessions.

0:30:11 S1: Prairie Confessions, okay.

0:30:12 KT: And it's a sexy storytelling show.

0:30:13 S1: Okay. So can you tell us about the Prairie Confessions project?

0:30:17 KT: Sure. I got this idea... And I'm under the mentoring of a group of three women in Austin, Texas, who started a show about five years ago, called Bedpost Confessions. And it's a sexy storytelling, it's sex-positive, there are audience confessions that the emcees read. And it's been a really incredibly healing space in a conservative place like Texas, for people to come and talk really openly about sex. And as the show runs, the gamut from body, to emotional, and healing. Sometimes they need trigger warnings, 'cause people will talk about healing from sexual assault. Well, we decided to do this in Edmonton as a 100% indigenous show last year, called Tipi Confessions. We did it at an indigenous masculinity symposium, and it was a total hit. Standing room only, people loved it. Within a month, a student at Carleton University decided to do a student Tipi Confessions. And then this year, we just did our first Prairie Confessions show, which is gonna be a three times a year show in Edmonton that we're taking out to the community. And Prairie Confessions is open to indigenous, and non-indigenous alike, and we just did that at one of the fringe theatres a couple weeks ago.

0:31:31 KT: And what I'm doing with that show though, is I'm also turning it into a research-creation laboratory. And so moving to Canada has helped give me that language, because this is new shared language. [0:31:42] ____ I'm doing it sort of art-driven, art-based research. At first, I thought it was gonna be a little side thing that I did, because I've long been interested in this kind of performance, but I'm figuring out a way to make it a laboratory space, or a field side space. So I've got a couple of incoming PhD students who are going to maybe do one or more chapters of their dissertation based on the show.

0:32:06 KT: So doing narrative analyses, performing themselves, helping script and produce the show. Thinking about what other kinds of community engagement can happen around the show. So we've got an indigenous erotica class being taught at University of Alberta, those students come in. Tracy Bear is one of my co-producers, she's the professor who teaches that class. Those students come in, and they bring in their artwork, they do these artspace journals. And so it's just incubating all these new sex-related, artistic and performance projects, so we'll see what happens with it, but it's... I just got a request to do a show in Saskatoon for a week, that's... I can't remember what the show's about, but people are really interested.

0:32:48 S1: Why? Why was it...

0:32:49 KT: Why are they interested?

0:32:50 S1: Why was it standing room only? Why do you think the...

0:32:53 KT: Well, the stories are really powerful and moving. And these are not professional performers often, these are people who are from the community. Spoken amateurs, spoken word people, or storytellers. I think the audience confessions are really important, so you can submit an anonymous confession onto a card, and then the emcees read it. And people, they start out not knowing how to write a sexual confession, but then we have sample confessions on the overhead, and then by the intermission, the confession bowls will start to fill up. And in the second half, people are laughing, they're cheering, they've lost their inhibition, and it's an incredibly transformative space. And I think it is the audience participation part. So yeah, you get just really... At the last Confession show, there were a couple of confessions about learning to love and lust again after rape. And it was, wow, that somebody feels that they can do that in that space. And it's a space where people are incredibly generous. And so really then you see that intimacy, and touch, and sex can be... It doesn't have to be like that, it can also be funny. So you get to really see the range of emotions that can be involved.

0:34:07 S1: Okay. Well we might have to get you to come out here, and do one out here.

0:34:09 KT: Oh, we're gonna do one at the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association meeting, in Vancouver.

0:34:13 S1: Oh the Vancouver one, right.

0:34:14 KT: We're gonna do it not at the meeting, but out in the community, as soon as I find out what their entertainment dates are. And that might be called Longhouse Confessions. [laughter]

0:34:22 S1: Okay, nice. Good.

0:34:22 KT: So we'll see.

[background conversation]

0:34:37 KT: Well, I rambled a little, so you have a lot to work with. [chuckle]

0:34:39 S1: Great. That's awesome. We like to have lots more stuff, more stuff than we need. So we talked a little bit about this in the car. You're developing this language around human, non-human kin, life, not-life. How do you see that intersecting with the new materialism, or object-oriented ontology from the philosophy side? These are things that when I first started encountering, particularly the object-oriented ontology stuff, a couple years ago, I was like, "You're just ripping off... "

0:35:18 KT: Exactly. [chuckle]

0:35:19 S1: We have people been talking about this forever.

0:35:21 KT: Zoe Todd has that great blog too, where she talked of... Have you seen her blog?

0:35:26 S1: I've seen her blog, but I'm not sure if I've seen...

0:35:28 KT: Yeah. Well she did her PhD at Aberdeen. And she talked about Bruno Latour coming in, and all these science studies people, and famous philosophers. And she said the same thing, "What are you talking about? Indigenous people already know their strength...

0:35:41 S1: Have to go find it. Yeah.

0:35:42 KT: But we use different language." They're not ripping us off, in the sense that they don't know. What they don't realize, that those ways of being in the world, of understanding that non-humans actually have life paths, and there's cultural transfer that happens, and that there's a whole lot about them we don't understand, and how they are in the world, and we're deeply entangled with them. I don't think Western thinkers often understand how much has been lost.

0:36:10 S1: Oh yeah.

0:36:11 KT: Yeah, and so when I began engaging with the new materialism stuff, that's the first thing I noticed. So any book or article that I read, I'll add my own index point, which is indigenous thought. And I think in Jane Bennett's book, which I can't remember the title now, I found 117 instances in which she could have referred to indigenous thought, and did not. And it's not a wilful omission, literally I just don't think they know that we're here. And so yeah, a lot of indigenous scholars are saying that. So for me, again, if I'm trying to operate in the academy, Western academic language is really useful for me; but when I engage with this stuff, my first response is, indigenous people need to be at the table, and we need to be leading the way and theorizing around this.

0:36:58 KT: And it's also that I'm really happy that we're at this moment in the academy, where people are realizing that they can't just simply continue to operate as if humans are at the pinnacle of everything. And so I appreciate the fact that non-indigenous people are struggling mightily to find a language that's helping them accord agency to non-humans now. Because they're mostly secular, they really struggle. And that whole secular spiritual thing as well, I'm looking to get away from in my work. But we don't have a problem as indigenous people with ascribing what you might call in English a life force to a non-human, or a soul. And we know that that's an inadequate term, we probably wouldn't talk about it in the language of our ancestors like that, but we just don't have a problem doing that. And you see them really contorting themselves intellectually, trying to find a secular language to do this sort of...

0:37:52 S1: To be able to handle that.

0:37:53 KT: This is why there's such impenetrable theoretical languages. But I appreciate how hard they're working to try to do that. It's not easy with the tools that they've left to themselves, to try to find ways of talking about this. Mel Chen's book, Animacies, is fantastic for trying to get at some of this in a way that's thinking about race, that I think mentions indigenous thought, is thinking about queer theory.

0:38:23 S1: Right, right. So you talked about this a little bit before, and you may not have much to add. But I think it's a really important point, pulled out as a separate point. Which is talking about

the need for deep engagement with the academy. So as indigenous people and as communities, that we can't ignore it. On the individual basis perhaps, but as communities who are trying to build our communities, and thrive in this space, in this territory. That the effect of the academy is profound, and we need to find ways to engage with it. Can you talk a little bit more about that, about why you see academics, indigenous academics as being an important part of this larger struggle to define ourselves, to take control of our own communities, and our own lives?

0:39:14 KT: Well I think we need indigenous people everywhere. I was a planner in a previous life, and I worked for tribes, federal agencies, national tribal organizations. And those are also important places to be. I just realized that I was gonna become an alcoholic, if I stayed with those institutions. I'm not a good bureaucrat. And lo and behold, I ended up being better as an academic. I never would have understood or thought that. And I work with indigenous scientists, I work with indigenous attorneys. I know a lot of people in Indian country, in the US especially, who work in all of these different areas, and they're... We need people everywhere.

0:39:53 KT: In terms of the academy, I guess I don't think it's a particularly special place, but it's one place in which we need people. And since a lot of scientific research and scientific knowledge production happens in the academy, we need to be there, and trying to influence that, so I more recently worked with research scientists. But I also in my previous work as a planner, worked with more applied scientists and engineers, so people who are out in industry working. And I think it's also important to have people there. I just went down the academic path, and that's my community now that I feel best able to intervene in, talk about decolonial science and technology. But there are people out there in industry as well, I think, trying to do that work. Or I hope so anyway.

0:40:35 S1: I think so, yes. I think so, more south of the border, from what I know. But another interesting border difference I feel is, part of the history up here, which it was that if you went to university, you got your native status taken away.

0:40:55 KT: Oh I didn't know that.

0:40:56 S1: Yes, yes.

0:40:58 KT: Oh wow.

0:41:00 S1: So one of the things that surprised me when I moved up here... So down there, there was a big push in almost all the communities I was familiar with, to get educated. To create doctors, and lawyers, and engineers, both for the work that needs to be done in the community, but to be effective in interfacing with these larger structures that were around us. I come over the border, and it's a very different feel. And it took me a while to really click in and understand the history enough, and hear it enough times to realize that part of it is that for the older generation, there's a very taught aversion to the idea of going and getting an academic degree. Because if they had done that, and they had relatives who did that, their Indian status was taken away. And so part of the reason why I wanted to come back to, is I actually think it's a particularly important thing to talk about, specifically the fact of the academy, as opposed to some of these other places within Canada. Because I do think that there is still work that needs to be done at the community level, in terms of making it okay, and making it a positive thing to go off to university, and get a degree.

0:42:18 KT: We still have resistance at home, to people saying, "We're gonna come back and act

white, or talk white." Where I think because the academy has its own culture, and in order to thrive here, you have to learn that language. I'm an advocate of being multilingual. I can talk like that, and then go home and talk another way. But you acclimatize to the culture here, and that does look white compared to the communities that we come from. So we have that as well. But there also was definitely an emphasis on doing applied degrees. Becoming a doctor, a lawyer, a teacher, those are the big ones, because those people will need it at home. The idea of doing a PhD often will get looked upon as maybe irrelevant, or... For me, I have a hard time telling how different that is from the broader American public who thinks that way.

0:43:05 S1: Yeah. [chuckle]

0:43:05 KT: So to what degree, for me, is that an American thing? Or is it... But I don't yet understand how this works in Canada. So that's really interesting to me, that little bit of different history up here.

0:43:16 S1: Yeah. So it has some profound effects actually. So again, you've touched on this in little bits... Or not little bits, but in bits before. So in regards to the work that you're doing around relationality and kinship and stuff like that, why do you think this work is so important in the face of the Anthropocene? Or what you wanna call the phase that we're moving into now, of increasing environmental duress and possible environmental catastrophe, at least in some ways. How do those things work together in your mind?

0:43:56 KT: I think we're going to need broader, more sustainable kin relations to get through what we're going to face. We live in a world that has encouraged us to live individually, to live in these small nuclear families, to live in these individual homes. I just don't see how that's gonna be a sustainable way of living in the coming century. People are going to need to be on the move, they're gonna need to relocate. I also think about the fact that as indigenous people, we've already been... We're already post-apocalyptic. For my people, we're post-apocalyptic 155 years. Really 1862 is it, when everything changed. Not that we as indigenous peoples are not going to face some of the extreme hardships that the broader society is going to face, we are, because we're living inside this society. But I do think... I think we will come to see that we have developed strategies, and that works for surviving in crisis. My mom always says to me, "There's nothing like a crisis to make natives get organized."

0:45:04 KT: Look at what's going on at Standing Rock, super organized. I'm really a fan of zombie movies. And when I watch The Walking Dead, I'm like, "That's how white people are gonna handle it. The people of color have been living in crisis for centuries. We're gonna have shit under control." So I think there will be opportunities for organizing, and bringing to the fore these kind of extended kinship and community ways of living. And so I'm focused on that: What have we learned in the apocalypse that we've already been living through now? And my people... For seven generations, my daughter, and my nieces, and nephews are the seventh generation after 1862, after 1862. And when you look back at what leaders, including Little Crow, were saying, wanting to survive seven generations out, we're at an interesting moment right now.

0:45:56 KT: So it's an interesting time for us to begin thinking then about the next seven generations. And he was making decisions at that moment, at that apocalyptic moment, about how just to survive. And so if you look back historically, there were decisions that were made by leaders that look incredibly compromised, but they were living in a world in which survival was really at

stake. And so I'm taking lessons from that history to think about how we operate now. And so I have a lot of non-indigenous colleagues, or friends, or relatives as well who are thinking about, "How do we begin to live in community, in different ways?" And the indigenous feminists I hang out with in Edmonton, are also talking about that. "What kinds of skills are we gonna need to survive?" And those aren't just land-based skills, those are important too, but there are also organizing skills. It's learning how to live together in these more diffuse networks. So I don't know if that's a real answer to your question. [chuckle]

0:46:53 S1: That's a great answer, yeah, that's a great answer. Michel, do you have anything you wanna throw in at this point?

0:47:02 Michel: I wonder if you would like to dig more into discussions about the future? It's come up in a lot of things, but...

0:47:10 S1: Yeah. So like I said, over there, the first time we talked on the phone, one of the things you said to me... 'Cause I was like, we wanna do this in the context of talking about the future. And you expressed a very... I don't wanna think it was a skepticism, but you sort of pushed back a little bit, in a sense that you were like, "Well I'm not sure if that's how I think about time." And so I'm wondering if you can talk a bit more about that.

0:47:37 KT: I don't think about time as going on a progressive path. And I wish I had had the math skills to study physics, I would have dug into this more, but I don't have those skills. I believe in an ever-changing present. And I'm gonna think out loud here. If I think about what I'm taking from the new materialisms, what I'm taking from thinking that ascribes vibrancy or agency to earth and to water, those energies and things are always there in different forms. And so I think about things moving around, or changing form, but I don't think about... I really resist this notion of linear time, because it's too deeply welded to the notion of progress, and I don't see any progress. That's not to say that I don't see change that is sometimes for the better, but I just see change. And so that helps me a lot to think of... But what that does as well, that point of view helps me to not dismiss the presence and validity of... It helps value non-humans more, I don't know how to say that. And it also helps value the agencies of persons that are no longer embodied, so you might call that spirits.

0:48:58 KT: So if I'm not thinking about linear progressive time, but I'm thinking about an ever-changing presence, I can value those shifting forms and energies more. And so, for me, when I talk about sitting at a conversational table, at a table where I'm in conversation with different thinkers, those might be actual other humans at the table, they might be texts, they might be the words of my ancestors as documented through oral and written history. To me, all of those thinkers and doers are at the table, and I'm in conversation with them. And me not thinking about linear progressive time helps me bring a broader array of voices into the room, into this sort of figurative room that I'm in, where I'm having these conversations, and where I'm learning. And I feel like what feminist method has done for me, is taught me that we're always co-producing knowledge, we're never just responsible for the words we're producing, for the knowledge we're producing, for the art that we're producing. We always do these things in community. It's just that some people don't explicitly acknowledge that.

0:49:54 KT: So I'll write more about this, I'll try to think through this in writing a little bit more about how resisting the notion of time, or future, or past is productive for me. 'Cause I think it is, and I just think I haven't put it into words yet.

0:50:08 S1: Okay. I would like to see that. I think it would be good for the project that we're doing, because we're also interested in... We've taken a particular approach towards thinking about time, and the future, and why that might be productive. But we're also very much interested in other ways of trying to get at the same things, that is not necessarily coming through this kind of linear temporality, but coming at it from different directions, or different languages.

0:50:35 KT: Right. Well I think technology also often gets wed to these concepts of the future. But technology exists across time and space. It's just, we think about high technology versus low tech, but technologies are tools. And they're not only material tools or digital tools, but they're conceptual tools. I think about theory as a form of technology, so it also helps me then... It's not that I... I love technology. It's not that I'm not thinking about that, but I'm thinking about the technologies my ancestors had that might not look the way that we envision future technology. And I think by focusing on... By wedding technology to the future and these notions of high tech, I think that might help us lose sight of the really profound dynamic things people in the "past" were doing.

0:51:21 S1: Right. That's why... Yeah. I wanna read more about that.

0:51:22 KT: And your time travel stuff is kind of getting into that a little bit, right?

0:51:26 S1: It's very much getting into that. And I can't wait for dinner, and for Skawennati and you to have a chance to talk to each other. Lindsey, anything that you would throw into the conversation?

0:51:37 Lindsey: No, I think you did a great job with it. It's fine.

0:51:39 S1: Okay. Trying to think... Now that I have you, I'm like, "Ha." One of the things, one of the moments in your talks that really struck me, and actually Skawennati and I were listening to this talk on the way... I gave a talk at Dartmouth about a month ago, Indigenous Archives in the Digital Age conference. And so we drove there, it's about a three-hour drive. We realized it's like the longest time we've had to just talk to each other, since we had kids.

0:52:17 KT: Yeah, nice. [chuckle]

0:52:20 S1: But part of it, we listened to you, because she wanted to know who was coming. And you were talking about that moment when you realized in talking to your elders, that what had been written down by the settlers, and... I'm not sure if it was missionaries in your area or not, certainly was up here, and down where I was. As the creator, it was actually something very different. And that moment of realizing how much the language, the settlers' language had malformed this concept, and the ramifications of that. I was wondering if you wanted to talk a bit more... You touched on language earlier, and you talked about encouraging your students to go back home and try to figure out the language for describing these sort of intellectual or academic concepts. And I'm just wondering if you can talk a little bit more about that. Because I think that's a really powerful methodology in a number of different ways.

0:53:23 KT: Yeah. I'm working on a book about the pipestone quarries in Minnesota, where we harvest pipestone for ceremonial pipes. And there were some pretty intense conversations happening there between quarriers and carvers, and then tribal people that are not in the quarries,

but that are away from the quarry. And people are really concerned about the commercialization, the selling of pipe and jewelry and artifacts, and pipes as arts. But the quarriers have to make a living, and the carvers have to make a living there. And them living there, helps protect that space. So there's these deep kind of contradictions in how we keep that space somewhat within our governance, and purview. But there are...

0:54:06 KT: Albert White Hat passed away, and I think he was from Rosebud. So he was Sicangu Lakota. But he was teaching at my tribal college, on my reservation, which is a Dakota reservation in the eastern part of the state. And he is in one of the films about pipestone, talking about... I can't remember. It's won a couple of awards, I can't remember which one it was. I'll have to go back and look at my film. It's a word that we use to mean creator, or great spirit quite often. And he translated it, and he said, basically it means relations. And there's also a word that means, that gets used as "sacred," translated as "sacred" into English. And that was a real aha moment for me, 'cause I had begun thinking about relations just through observing the way that people live and interact with stone. Some of the quarriers and carvers talk about the pipestone as a relative. And when I was watching Albert go back and forth between Dakota and English, and trying to do this translation, and he was really focusing on the concept of being in good relation, a light bulb went on for me.

0:55:11 KT: Because growing up, I had always heard about being in good relation, doing things in a good way. And it sounded vague, and I never really understood what it meant. But I'm beginning to understand what it means when I look at the very thoughtful and anguished way in which people at Pipestone are thinking about how to relate to that space, how to relate to that stone. And then to have Albert, who's an expert in the language, center in on the concept of relations. Not having grown up speaking the language, there's a lot I was hearing, but not really getting. And actually through anthropology, or through observing people at the quarries, I'm beginning to get it.

0:55:46 KT: So yeah, that was really profound for me. And then the Dakota language I have studied, when you go back to the... We use the Riggs dictionary. He was a missionary. And when you look at the translations of those dictionaries, you see very clearly the imposition of 19th century settler ideas into the way they're translating the language for their worldview, and that's what we're left with now. Which gets back to your earlier point about the fact that, we've got some baseline and some speakers, but there's a lot of language... I don't wanna use the word "revitalization," but language creation almost, that needs to be done according to... For us, a Dakota worldview, and not simply a 19th century settler civilizing project worldview.

0:56:30 S1: Right, right. Great. And then there was another moment...

[background conversation]

0:56:37 S1: Great, thank you. This will be the last one, unless you guys come up with something else. There's another moment, another reframing moment in my head, in listening to your work, and that's when you were... This is earlier work where you're still mainly talking about the Native American DNA work, and the research around that. And you have that tableau, where it's the National Geographic geneticist, Spencer Wells.

0:57:05 KT: Spencer Wells, yeah.

0:57:06 S1: Yeah. And he's talking to the aboriginal elder, and trying to convince the aboriginal

elder that there's almost a moral obligation on the part of the elder and his people to provide the data to Spencer Wells and his people, so that they can create a story. They can create a creation story in the way that the aboriginal elder and his people had a creation story. And I realized when you were talking about that, that there's certain ways I was holding our creation stories kind of in a metaphorical box, and happily in a metaphorical box. And then there's this scientific story which was tracing the movements of people, and things like that. And I was fine holding both of these things together, but there's something really profound that he talks about there, that you would then go on to talk about, the elder talks about. Which is about... It's not... It's actually...

0:58:05 S1: His story isn't even addressing that story, because his story isn't about that migration and movement. His story is about the place, and the place where his people define themselves. And so it's actually completely... Not completely different, it's a very different way of thinking of a creation story than the Western way. Which I think in my mind, I was like, "I can hold these two things in my head at the same time, and I can operate in both ways." But I think it's the first time for me, where I really was like, "Okay, actually these are like apples and laptop screens, in some ways. The story that they're trying to tell, and why they're telling it." So I just wanted to share that with you, and see if you had any thoughts. Any further thoughts on that?

0:59:00 KT: It's interesting. I see some profound differences, but also some real similarities between say, an indigenous origin story, and a scientific origin story. The scientist thinks they're dealing largely with materiality though, and they're looking at the migration of markers around the world. Whereas the scientist, or the Western thinker would say that indigenous people are dealing with mythology or spirits, and they don't have material evidence for those things. There's a lot of narrative in it, there's a lot of origin stories that structure the very way in which scientists tell the story of their data. They come to the data, they come to the questions with an origin story. Which is a story of migration, it's a story of immigration. It's not a story of being constituted in place, it's a story that privileges the movement of human bodies, and does not... Even though they'll talk about environmental effects on genes, they're really privileging the agency of the human body, the agency of peoples.

0:59:58 KT: Whereas indigenous people, in the way that these stories get told, they're not privileging humans as above, they're looking at humans as constituted in relationship with other relations, with place, with particular landforms, or other non-human bodies. And so that to me is kind of a fundamental difference. That can't be understood by, "Here's mythology and creation," versus "Here's materiality." They're different narratives, both of them have different narratives, both of them are treating materiality, but they're treating materiality in a different way. I see a more co-constitutive synergistic treatment of materiality in the indigenous origin story. Or the scientific origin story, I see much less synergy, and I see a sort of focusing on the agency of the human, as I said. And that human nature divide is always there, even though they might give some credence to the interplay, in terms of environmental effects on genes.

1:00:53 KT: But I also think we have been hampered in our ability to tell these narratives in ways that... I think we've been affected by that spirit-material divide, in the way that we talk about them now, and I don't think that was probably always the case. 'Cause if we didn't have a spirit-material divide, if we didn't have a divide in which there's narrative and story, and then there's real history, I don't think our ancestors necessarily had that, right? And I think for a lot of indigenous peoples, there's a... At least I found this with interviewing indigenous scientists from many different tribes, there's a deep tolerance for ambiguity, for not knowing, for waiting until something is known, and

maybe it's not my right to know. Doesn't mean that the answer isn't out there, but I may not be the one that needs to know it. There's no tolerance for that in Western science.

1:01:41 KT: It's almost like an affront to their value in the world, if you tell them that they don't have the right to know something, or maybe they're not gonna be able to know because of this, that, and other ethical issue, or financial issues, or whatever. This deep need to know I think really limits them, being more expansive in their thinking about what counts as truth. So I may be getting away from the answer, but yeah, I don't think indigenous creation stories or origin stories are materially without truth. I don't think they're just mythology. Right?

1:02:13 S1: Right. Yes. Yeah.

1:02:16 KT: And I think we need to focus on our emergence as peoples in particular places, 'cause that's a lot of what's happening. I wouldn't be a Dakota person absent the space from which Dakota people come. Which leads us into all other kinds of questions about how far out into diaspora you can go, and remain Dakota. I'm not sure. It's not just about my body and me passing on a Dakota cultural practice or identity to my kids absent that place, you can only do that for so long. So I think we need place. But that's a whole other argument.

1:02:47 S1: I was just gonna say, that's another half hour.

1:02:49 KT: That's a whole other hour.

[laughter]

1:02:51 S1: That's over wine, and food. Okay. Thank you, Kim. That was really a pleasure.

1:02:56 KT: Thanks.

1:02:56 S1: And yeah, I can't wait to get it out there in the world.

1:03:00 KT: Yeah.

[pause]

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