

SKY HOPINKA

Interviewed by Adam Khalil & Zack Khalil



Sky Hopinka, video still from *I Will Remember You As You Were, not as What You'll Become* (2016)

— Zack Khalil: Have you been traveling much recently?

— Sky Hopinka: Yeah last weekend I was in Norway for a few days, and then I headed here, to Utah.

— ZK: Are you working on a new project?

— SH: I have all the footage I shot at Standing Rock, but I haven't looked at any of it. I gathered a lot of sound and video when I wasn't paying attention to my camera running, so I'm looking for-

ward, but also sort of dreading diving into it all. I don't know. I like getting everything onto the timeline and just moving things around. As soon as a rough assemblage is done, I feel an immediate sense of relief, because then something is there, like a scaffold, or an outline.

— ZK: It seems like sounds and images sometimes have a direct relationship in your work, and sometimes a not so direct relationship. How does that play out in the production process? Are you paying more attention to one or the other when you're recording?

—SH: I try to shoot sync sound when I can, but with documentary it's always hard. I don't like to record onto the camera, so I always have a sound box with me. This is a way to separate the sound and the image. It's nice to have these two things that are happening at the same time, but are not tied to each other, even though they are. This allows me some freedom to add different sounds to the images, or if I really like a piece of sound, to find another image that could go along with it.

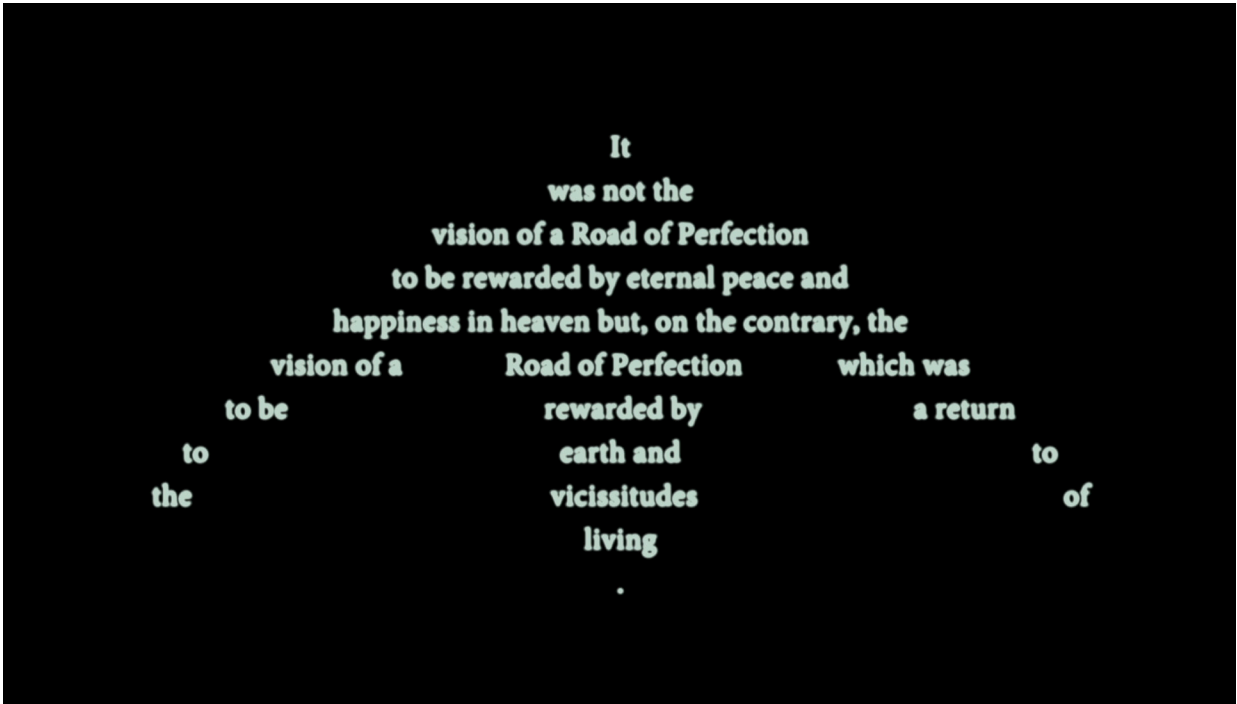
—Adam Khalil: A lot of your work is dense audio collage: people talking on screen, people talking when they're not on screen, subtitles of what people are saying, and other text. It's interesting to see all these different modes being enacted in terms of how you communicate and what you communicate to an audience through your films. I'm kind of curious how you get to those points. Do you see something that's in sync and think, this is too much, I should make this a weird diagonal edit instead?

—SH: Yeah, the driving force behind my short video *wawa* was thinking about these different layers of information and history and how they are collapsed into a language, into the act of speaking a language, especially as a second language learner. When I was learning Chinuk I would go through the filter of translating English in my head. My teacher told me you don't want that. You want to think in the language as soon as you can. What does that mean, to just get rid of your English brain and allow the small little baby brain that is Chinuk Wawa to grow into something that has its own agency in your mind? This is something that I've thought about since I began learning different indigenous languages — and also learning the histories of who my teachers are and who their teachers were, and

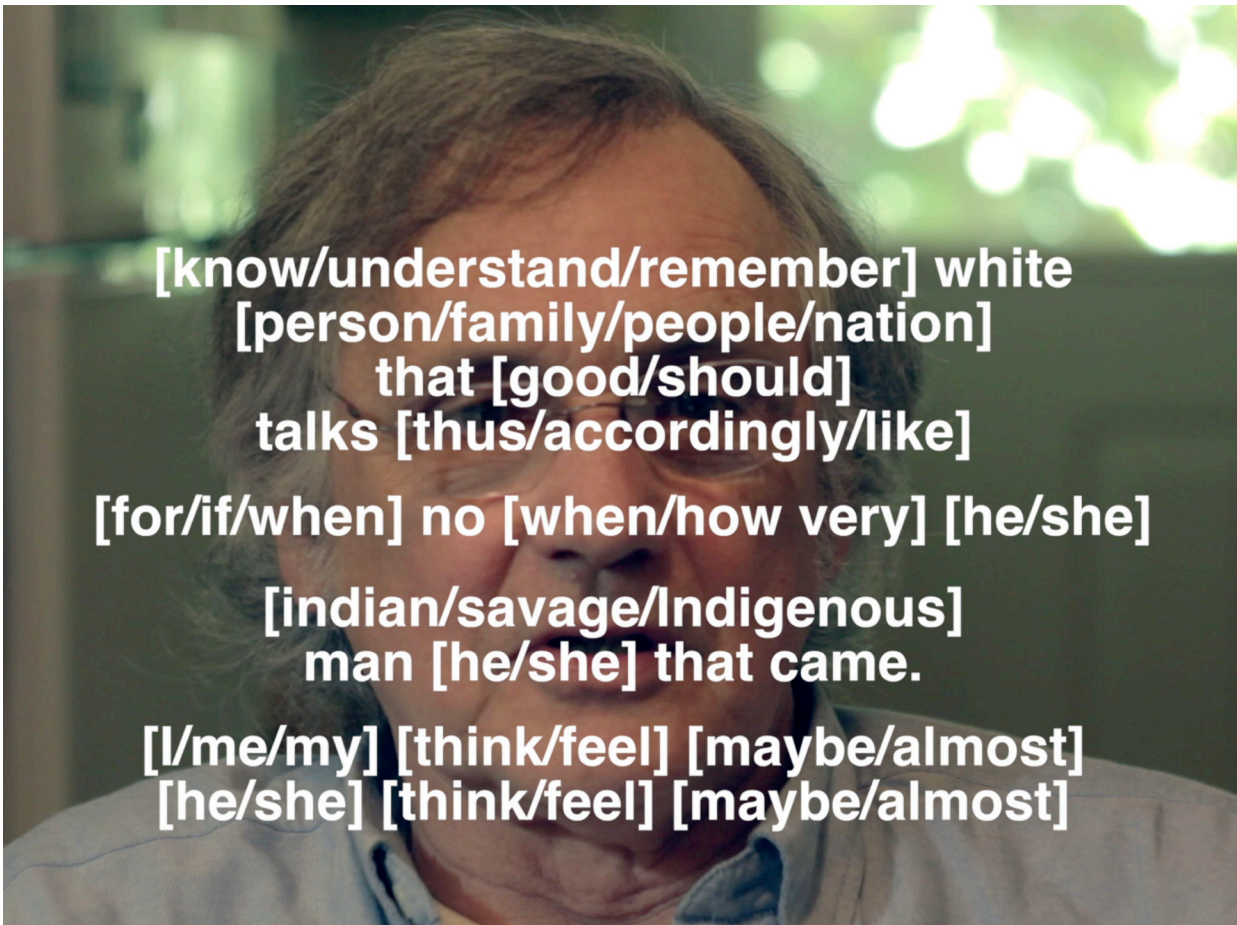
where, from what region geographically, that dialect comes from; what region in terms of family structures or any sort of clan systems that may be in place. And so, with that, you have all these different layers of information collapsed into how you speak the language or how you engage with the language. With *wawa* I was trying to contend with all these different ideas and represent them in different ways that would be a gesture toward the complexity of all of this, but at the same time, I wanted the experience for someone who speaks Chinuk Wawa to be different than someone who doesn't speak the language. When I listen to it or watch it, I know what's going on because I made it, and because I understand what everyone is saying. But it gives me a lot of anxiety watching it, and I think it does the same thing for viewers who don't speak the language.

—AK: What I find powerful in your work is this line between what you give to the audience, and what you don't give. It reminds me of indigenous information ecology, where the idea is that information is for all, but knowledge is for some. It's the way you're working around these different registers in how you're communicating with the audience, where you're also behind the curtain, pulling the strings. It's powerful for indigenous stories and ways of thinking and being to be expressed in that way.

—SH: Yeah, I like that. You see this popping up in different nodes of art over the past five or ten years. I always heard about western entitlement around knowledge, this idea that if something exists, then we have a right to know about it as scientists, scholars, academics, or whatever. I really resist the idea that just because something exists, just because something has the opportunity to be studied or document-



Sky Hopinka, calligram of the Bird Effigy Mound, text by Paul Radin.
 Still from *I Will Remember You as You Were, not as What You'll Become* (2016)



Sky Hopinka, Henry Zenk under layers of subtitles with translation choices. Still from *wawa* (2014)

ed, then it should be. I'm a big fan of the mystery of culture, and how certain people have access to information that others don't.

—— AK: Ojibway language was never written, it was only spoken. And then the Jesuits came along and made the Ojibway dictionary. There's a double flipping. And in *wawa* too, when it cycles out of control and there are all the different meanings for all the words, I'm assuming based on inflection, or dialect, or context. It's cool to relay this complexity in a way where it's like, okay, you guys can have it — but you also can't have it.

—— SH: Yeah, here it is — figure it out!

—— ZK: This makes me think about how western cultures think all other cultures should be accessible. There's a long history of visual anthropology that we need to be familiar with as indigenous filmmakers, whether we like it or not. I'm curious about some of the ways you've addressed this. How have you shot back against ethnography or visual anthropology and their treatment of indigenous issues?

—— SH: I guess the first thing is to be aware of what these documentary and ethnographic films look like over the past hundred years, starting with *Nanook of the North*. This has definitely influenced how I approach documentary, or how I approach cinema. The very first video I made was in 2010. It was my friends and I building a fishing scaffold on the Columbia River. Our plan was just to build a scaffold and to fuck around and fish, to do something on the river, and through that process I thought, I'm going to shoot this, I have a little point and shoot camera. I wanted to capture the experience and to use it as an excuse to try to learn how to edit.

We talked about shooting it beforehand, not in any serious way, but in relation to the art we were interested in. We were interested in the idea of representation. The main gist of the project is that we were going to show some Native dudes doing Native stuff and not explain anything. We're not trying to teach you anything, you know? You're not going to come out knowing the history of scaffolds on the Columbia River, or the history of our tribes, or anything that you might think is useful. It's a documentary of us being friends and existing in 2010. That's my interest in ethnography. I think it was in 2013, when I first started *wawa* in grad school, that I came across the Sensory Ethnography Lab, and sensory ethnography in general. The idea intrigued me, in terms of the history of ethnography and how fraught those histories were with exoticizing the other, with trying to capture this untainted culture existing in isolation, untarnished. Diving into sensory ethnography and thinking about that more, I definitely see problems with it that I don't have the language for, or even the interest in addressing. I was reading a collection of essays edited by Lucien Castaing-Taylor which addressed this idea of the ethno-poetic, which I've thought about as I've been making this work. What does work look like when the group of people who traditionally have the cameras pointed at them instead have the cameras themselves? What do they shoot, or what do they want to shoot? What do we want to shoot? In terms of how that's translated into my own work, I'm always thinking about who my audience is, and it's always my tribe or my family or a group of people who may have access to information that others do not. I like starting at that point where it's about all these different things that I don't have to explain, that exist in shorthand. That drives how I think about ethnography.

— AK: That's also the beauty of poetics. You're communicating to the people who are most important to the work. But the general public also sees it as this mysterious slight of hand.

— SH: Yeah, I like the idea of knowing and not knowing, when you know that something's there but you don't know what it is. Knowing that it's there is enough for an audience.

— AK: There's a mysterious quality to a lot of your work.

— ZK: And it's really powerful. We can relate to work that speaks to multiple audiences. Can you maybe talk about some of the things that you like, and some of the things that are difficult or challenging, about making films that speak to the audience at home as well as to the experimental film community?

— SH: I think it gives me a lot of permission to experiment, to do what I feel intuitively makes sense for the project. That sort of freedom is really important, especially when you think about the language of cinema or documentary or narrative films, all those different canonical ideas that guide how we approach filmmaking. When I first started making videos, I thought I would make a straightforward conventional narrative, or a straightforward conventional documentary, because I wanted to learn what these things are, what they do, and what they look like underneath, on the timeline. I wanted to learn about constructing interviews and all this stuff. Getting a glimpse of that, dabbling in it, is another way to get permission to do things that are more mysterious, more poetic. You can find different ways of getting there.

— ZK: I'm reminded of *I'll Remember You As You Were, Not As What You'll*

Become, where you address different understandings of what reality or an experience actually is.

— SH: The shapes?

— ZK: Yeah.

— SH: Those were shapes of effigy mounds that my tribe built in Wisconsin. I was working with anthropological texts written about my tribe, the Winnebago Tribe, about our belief systems and our beliefs in reincarnation. In the film I credit the author's informant also, Jasper Blowsnake, because I think it's important to recognize him as a contributor to this. But aside from that, approaching my tribe's belief systems from the perspective of an outsider looking in, and then appropriating that to reflect my own tribe's beliefs, and then manipulating the texts into a form that has to do with effigy mounds my tribe built — that's the train of thought.

— AK: That's the oppressive power of ethnography too. It fixes our cultures and makes them into traditions, so they're not contemporary. But you take that, fold it back in, and make it present is as a way to *detourne* that system to make it work for us in a contemporary mode.

— SH: In that piece in particular, in the credits, I wanted the dates of all these different sources that I was using to be present and to be felt. It may not be obvious as you're watching them film, but as the credits roll, you realize, oh, this came from 1915, and this came from 2016, and this came from 1994. It's a piece about reincarnation and looking at the world, and life and death; it was a way to recontextualize my tribe's beliefs, which seemed so foreign and distant to me growing up, as they do to others looking in. It's about weaving

something new together.

—— AK: You're reincarnating information that was extracted from your community by an anthropologist by re-presenting it in an indigenous context.

—— SH: Yeah, even in my tribe there are stories about this book, this anthropological text, not being that accurate. Or I heard of misinformation given on purpose to keep things secret or sacred. I don't know what those things are, but I like that idea.

—— AK: It also gets at the trickster nature of a lot of indigenous culture. It's like, okay, we'll tell you what's up — sort of. But even the idea of anthropology calling people informants, you know what I mean? It's like espionage.

—— SH: It's the same with linguistics. You hear about language informants. But what about the collaboration between an informant and a linguist or a scholar trying to document or revitalize the language?

—— AK: How many languages do you speak?

—— SH: That's a hard question. What is fluency? What does that look like?

—— ZK: How many languages are you trying to speak?

—— SH: I'm most fluent in English and Chinuk Wawa, and I'm now trying to learn Ho-Chunk, which has been difficult. Speakers are passing away. I live in Milwaukee and the language teacher I was working with for the past year, she passed away. It's been hard finding a replacement teacher in Milwaukee when the tribe is two or three hours away. Just dealing with that, with elders dying, is one more step to, well, I don't

want to say to the language being lost, but it increases the urgency of trying to do what I can, what we can, to preserve the language, to speak the language, to continue enacting the language.

—— AK: We had a similar situation happen in our community recently where a fluent teacher passed away in a car accident, way too young.

—— ZK: In their 40s, and they were really active in offering online language classes.

—— AK: There's something in your work about the experience of spending time with people, listening to people, letting things unfurl, not quite knowing where things are going.

—— SH: *Anti-Objects*, the last video that I made, is about the relationship between Wilson Bobb and Henry Zenk—

—— ZK: Can you talk a little bit about who they are, and your relationship to them in your films?

—— SH: I was taught Chinuk Wawa by Evan Garner, and he was taught by Henry Zenk who, as a linguist in the early-1980s, studied Chinuk Wawa in the Columbia River basin. Wilson Bobb was his teacher. In the early-80s Wilson was in his mid-90s and probably the most fluent speaker alive at that time. When Wilson passed away, Henry became one of the most fluent speakers by default. So here's this white guy in the 1980s who speaks this language very proficiently and who began working with the tribe, helping them in all these different ways that they asked him to, to help preserve their language. So there's this tradition of teacher to student, teacher to student, teacher to student, and always hearing about Wilson from Henry's stories or Evan's stories. This

was an important part of my learning process. So to hear audio recordings of Henry learning the language and Wilson giving him a hard time, teasing him, joking, laughing, hearing them driving around together, hanging out together, that was really beautiful and really impactful and affected the way that I thought about the language that I speak and how I not only speak it on a technical level but also speak it on a social level. With that video I was really trying to capture just what their process was like. There's this line that I love, when Wilson tells Henry, "Soon you'll speak it really well and you won't be white at all, you'll be an Indian then."

— AK: "You don't know anything until you're a *real* Indian."

— SH: Yeah, it's such a heavy statement, you know? I mean what does it mean to be a Native? Is culture a part of it? Is it the color of your skin? Is it your blood? All these questions affect how we're dealing with identity today. Are you a real Indian or not a real Indian? This has been a conversation for the past couple hundred years.

— AK: For sure. You ever read Paul Chaat Smith?

— SH: No I haven't.

— AK: You should check out his stuff. He wrote this book called *Everything You Know about Indians Is Wrong*. He's a contemporary art curator at the NMAI Smithsonian, but he's totally self-taught and the book's fucking brilliant. He talks about this prison of authentication that we put ourselves in. Has Henry seen the film?

— SH: He's seen *Anti-Objects* and *wawa*. I don't want to speak for how he feels, but he's had really positive re-

sponses to it. He's concerned with the details and says things like "Oh, I actually misspoke here," or "instead of saying this, I should have said that." He wants to share with people and I want to help him with that. More than anything else, I don't want to exploit him or misrepresent him. When I record people, I want them to see it and tell me that it's okay or it's not okay. I don't think that I have the final word on anything. I just want to make sure that they're happy with it and they feel that I'm doing them justice. It was really great when I showed Henry *Anti-Objects*. He said, "I think you really captured the process of how we talked," and I felt really happy with that.

— ZK: Obviously languages are really important for indigenous cultures, because they contain a worldview that has been systematically eliminated. I'd like to hear more about why language is such an important device and theme in your films, but also in terms of indigenous language revitalization. How is *video* important for indigenous language revitalization?

— SH: You mean video versus film? Or just video in general?

— ZK: Video in general, as a tool to move languages forward, if that's something you think about.

— AK: In the same way that these recorded conversations between Henry and Wilson Bobb continue the language in some capacity.

— SH: I started making videos at the same time I started learning languages, almost seven years ago. At that time in my life it was really important to have these two things to do, to give me guidance and also to express what I had been thinking about over these past few years, learning in college, getting

involved with the Native community in Portland, where I was living at the time. So language was an outlet that's helped me contextualize what I was doing. It takes a lot of time and energy, but I got to see how important it was to build community around language. My language teacher told me that ninety percent of what we do is community building and ten percent is language. You can't learn language sitting on your bed, looking at an iPad, and saying words to yourself. You have to speak it and you have to test it and ask hard questions, like how do you say this word or represent this idea that didn't exist a hundred years ago, when your grandfather may have been speaking it? Language has been a tool to help me think about how to view the world I live in as a 32-year-old Ho-Chunk person in the United States trying to gather what I can. Sometimes with language revitalization projects there's this desire to maintain the language as it was spoken a hundred years ago, two hundred years ago, as the authentic form of the language, as if any change that happens is seen as inauthentic or as if you're doing the language an injustice. But I'm of the belief that language is constantly shifting.

—— AK: It has to shift.

—— SH: The language my tribe spoke 200 years ago was probably different than the language they spoke 250 years ago, you know? Language changes with what's going on socially, politically, culturally in the world, and it grows. Then bands break off and start their own tribes.

—— AK: Yolo!

—— SH: (laughs) So yeah, seeing language as a tool to represent the community that you live in. Language identi-

fies a community, whether it's a dialect, or slang, or jargon. These are all markers of culture. It's an expression of the different values we have, in terms of interpersonal communication. What does it mean to describe what you're doing as you're weaving a basket, or gathering spruce roots, in language? And how simple can a language be? It doesn't have to be complex. It can be these small gestures that you make verbally as you do something physically.

—— AK: One can't understand a culture without knowing the language, because they're so intertwined. It's through language that we understand the reality of the world. In Ojibway there's a bunch of things that are animate that would be inanimate in English, and they have a different context and resonance for that reason. But there's also a poetics to creating new language.

—— SH: One of my favorite things to do when I was learning Chinuk was to pose new names for objects. The word for "cell phone" translates as "a hello box" but it can also mean "a very pitiful machine." Playing with language like that is fun, and it's one of those things that should be done. I want my students to question what I'm teaching them, question what the language can do, and what it can't do.

—— ZK: This perpetuates a language into the future and makes it a real thing. And if a language doesn't evolve, if there aren't new words, if it doesn't change, then it's effectively dead. It needs to evolve to move forward. That's what living languages do — that's what living cultures do.

—— SH: Yeah, when you stop thinking in it, and using it, then not only is the language dead, but so is the culture.





— AK: What language do you dream in?

— SH: I dream in English, but I've also dreamt in Chinuk Wawa when I've been speaking it a lot, or when I've been wanting to speak it. Sometimes there are conversations that are easier to have in Chinuk Wawa than in English. It's a cultural thing, or a way to interact with someone in a specific way. Some things can be said softy or more deliberately in one language or another.

— ZK: It's interesting that you started learning the language and learning filmmaking around the same time. There's a visual language to filmmaking. When it comes to language and communication, what is it about film that appeals to you as a way of thinking about language?

— SH: I started out making music when I was in my teens: playing the bass in a band, and from that it went into me wanting to record myself or my band playing music, making songs. I would play guitar, bass, keyboard or whatever, and layer those on a non-linear editing timeline. That's how I started with editing. Just cutting things up and moving things around, doing it on my own. I was studying English at the time and I wanted to be a writer, because I enjoy literature. But those things didn't click for me. I like the *idea* of it — I like the idea of music, I like the idea of writing, but I am not dedicated enough to dive into it and really hone the craft. I knew that, and when I was holding a camera and shooting a video, it clicked for me. I like this a lot. It's taken all these different interests I've had over the years and combining them into this thing — editing with sound, and editing in general, and thinking about stories and storytelling and how those are represented or not represented in texts. This all pointed to video for me.

— AK: Compared to the more rigid modes of documentary or narrative cinema, do think the freedom to play with form in experimental film provides an opportunity for you as an indigenous filmmaker to reject more colonial modes of representation in the service of a different way of seeing the world?

— SK: After the fishing scaffold video, I started making work that was based around Native poetry. There's this video that I did called *Tangles* and I was using poems by Adrian C. Louis as a framework to build around. I showed it to a friend of mine and he said, "Ah, it's an experimental film!" And I was like, *what's an experimental film, what does that mean?* Through the years, I was focused on more conventional forms, but in grad school I didn't want to make a straightforward narrative or a straightforward documentary. I wanted to do something more intuitive. I feel really grateful that the grad program I was in was very open to this. I think it started with asking, what does a Ho-Chunk film look like? Or what does a Chinuk Wawa film look like? What sort of things do I want to see in film, as a speaker of this language or as a member of this community? That was very freeing in terms of getting out of the existing modes. I started off by using existing cinematic tools and cinematic language and then I shucked that language for my own purposes, for my own community. This was helpful for me in realizing what it is I am trying to do. I don't plan any of this stuff out. A lot of it is just a matter of how it feels, and then going back and thinking about it, and then editing it, moving things around. The whole process begins in this cycle of making, thinking, editing, you know?

— AK: It's like cognition, the sensory, the physiological are all collapsing in on each other at the same time.

— ZK: I was thinking about *I'll Remember You As You Were, Not As What You'll Become*. You've mentioned that Apichatpong Weerasethakul was a reference for you and your work. He has a way of getting into the metaphysical, or of making the unseen seen in his films. I get a similar vibe from some of the work you do, from some of the ways you manipulate the image and play with color. Can you talk about those connections? Or about working with metaphysics, if that's the proper word?

— SH: *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* and *Tropical Malady* are two of my favorite films. When I saw them, it just blew my mind to see what you can do with narrative film in such a culturally specific way. I love that I had no idea what was going on — not in the sense of "this is so exotic," but in how I don't have access to it all as a viewer. There are a lot of parallels between the beliefs that are represented in these films and my own culture's, indigenous culture's, beliefs. I don't know what the specifics are, but I know there is something there. These gestures are important, the choices to represent reincarnation and life and death, and all these different layers that exist in the present in the film. I was really interested in that as I was looking at my own tribe and our belief systems, our reincarnation, thinking about life and death and what those things mean. What does it look like without the influence of Christianity on my tribe's beliefs?

I'll Remember You As You Were began with Diane Burns. I loved her poetry and unfortunately she's one of those poets that is often forgotten in the Native canon. But her line, "This ain't no stoic look. / This is my face." is something that I think we've all heard in Native pop culture. Finding this video of her perfor-

mance in 1996, her reading poetry and performing, buried in the middle of this huge variety show, felt sad. It felt like she was forgotten, and I didn't want to forget her. I was thinking of the Native Renaissance of the 1980s and 90s and the amount of literature and art and poetry that was being generated, and that informed so much of what we're doing today. There's that element of it. And then there are my beliefs in reincarnation and life and death. I don't know what I'm answering with this video, and I have no idea what questions I'm asking, either. I do like to think of it as an elegy to this person, but also an elegy to something that might come back.

— AK: It's kind of like a resurrection, in a Christian sense.

— SH: Yeah, in the text that opens the film. I really love the idea that a road to perfection isn't in heaven, that's not the goal. The goal is to come back to all the bullshit we deal with as humans. That's what we want. That's the dream. Who wants the happy hunting grounds when you have this? Is it counter-Christian? I don't know. I'm not a Christian person, so I want to respect my family who are Christians. But at the same time I want to acknowledge that there's this whole other way of looking at the world and at life and death that's important and valid and maybe that will change how we deal with those that have gone, and those that are being born.

— SH: It's also understanding that those different worlds are transposed on top of each other, and are always present. We get this at the beginning and ending of *I'll Remember You As You Were*.

— ZK: It's interesting what you're saying about time being layered. People pass on, but are still here in some sense.

The collapsing of the past, present, and future is something both our tribes think about. Adam and I always think about this playful idea of “movie magic.” When you go out to make a film, whether it’s the production process or the editing process, there’s something magical about things having to come together in some way. I think there’s something about film in general, specifically about layering time, where you can take the past, present, and future and you can mix it all up together. Do you think film is a good way to express a cyclical or collapsed idea of time? Is that something you’re interested in doing in your work?

—— SH: I was thinking about that with *Anti-Objects*, with the anti-object itself, the architectural idea of moving through spaces in a nonlinear fashion, and how making a video about anti-objects sort of betrays that idea because it is an artifact of my movement through space. You can’t escape film being a linear medium that it has a beginning, middle, and end, but how do you relate a viewer’s experience of that to the question of what is a beginning? What is a middle? What is an end? And what does it mean to start all over again? I like to think about that stuff, but it hasn’t evolved in a sophisticated enough way to express into video or into these works. But I think about it.

—— ZK: You were talking about moving through space, and it seems like the road, traveling, driving, walking, is a common theme in your work. When I think about roads in an Indigenous context, I think about caravans to Wounded Knee or Standing Rock, or classic Native American movies like *Powwow Highway* or *Smoke Signals*. And like Adam was saying, *what’s more American than a Native American road movie?* Could you talk about your use

of the road and travel and why you’re drawn to it or what it represents to you?

—— SH: I was born in the state of Washington and my tribe is from Wisconsin — my dad’s tribe, which I’m enrolled in, is from Wisconsin and my mom’s tribe is from Southern California. So growing up in Northern Washington, in a town right next to the Lummi Nation, I was part of the Native community, but I wasn’t part of the tribe. I was simultaneously growing up as an insider and as an outsider, knowing that I don’t have access to certain things that Lummi people do, whether it’s social services or cultural practices. That was normal for me. And then moving to Southern California with the same sort of situation in the Coachella Valley, where there are five or six different tribes, desert tribes, that I don’t have much connection with, as it is with my mom’s tribe, which is still further away.

—— AK: I’m driving to these places, it’s to get to these places, for the most part. I love driving and I started when I was in Southern California. I would drive up to see family in Washington. It’s a twenty hour drive, and I love taking that. I really like experiencing the world one mile at a time, so you can see what things look like, and you can smell what they smell like, and you can see who lives there, and who doesn’t live there anymore. Driving across Montana, you have a sense of this vast prairie, the vast plain, that used to be Indian lands. Now it’s bisected by roads and fences and highways and gas stations. In one sense the road is a bridge between different communities. It gets me from my tribe in Wisconsin to my family in Washington, to visiting my friends who are in Montana or Minnesota. It’s also a very physical boundary that separates different spaces and bisects them. It’s like fences and cages in some ways.

—— AK: The boundary and the bridge. I see it now. In the first *Fast and Furious*, Vin Diesel says “I live my life a quarter-mile at a time.”

(laughter)

Keep that one in your back pocket for Q & A’s.

—— SH: Yeah, I’m definitely going to. “The prophet Vin Diesel said...”

(laughter)

—— ZK: I was curious about your intense manipulation of color, and the inversion of the image or the superimpositions that we see in your work. Why do those appeal and what do they mean for you?

—— SH: It’s important for me to see the things I’m representing as bright and vivid and colorful, and not as black-and-white or sepia or desaturated to make you feel emotional about the pitiful Indians. Making things bright and vibrant is a way to counter that. And also, what does reality look like on a video camera that shoots flat, desaturated video profiles that are taken to be manipulated in post-production via color gradient? What does it mean when you turn up the saturation? Does it feel more real? Does it feel hyperreal? Does it feel surreal? How does it affect what you’re viewing on screen? Especially the really bright and vivid colors paired with the video manipulations and the superimpositions and overlays and the filters that are going on at the same time. On the one hand it’s dealing with a history of cinema and how color informs an emotional judgment on a subject, but also a reality that has existed for me in what I’m trying to construct.

—— AK: I love the final shot of *Jáaji Approx.*, in the car, where it’s all the different windows, the different colors. It finishes the film in such an elegant way. Is that your dad in the film?

—— SH: That’s my dad. When I shot the ending, it was three months after I did the initial shooting for the film. I knew I needed something more, and I knew that I wanted my dad to be a part of it, not just me using these recordings of him that I had from the past. So I went to go visit him in the Bay Area, where he lives, and he wanted to take me out driving around the country to his favorite spots that are beautiful. So we stopped at the top of this hill that overlooked the ocean, and I got out of the car to shoot it. As I was walking back to the car, he was just sitting there, looking out the window. With the way the sun was at that moment, my dad looked beautiful, and I wanted to shoot it. So I held the shot there until he turned around and noticed me. Then he was like, “What the fuck you doing?” (laughter) And then, you know, I just cut that part out. It wasn’t until I put it in the timeline and started messing with the color, and adding different layers on top of it, that I saw that the tinting on the windows affected those colors in different ways.

—— AK: What about the older recordings of your dad that you used in *Jáaji Approx.*? Did you make those?

—— SH: Yeah, those started about ten years ago. I was living in Portland at the time and I wanted to get down to my dad. I knew him as a Powwow singer from when I was little. You know, he’d pop in and out as I was growing up. He was present and not present. We didn’t have the best relationship, but we have a good relationship. So I wanted to be proactive. I said, “Hey Dad, let’s do something

specific here.” Actually the first recording that opens the video is the very first one that I did. He stopped in Portland at his friend’s house and I went and hung out with him. He was watching this football game and I was trying to ask him questions. I was hoping that he would take it a little more seriously, if I had a recorder. So I was asking him stuff, and he just started talking, telling me about being on the road and how the song interacts with the Powwow and how that is then transported into driving on the road. Over the next ten years, whenever I’d see him I’d ask, “Hey dad, got a song for me? Got a story?” One time I drove him from Portland to California and I just had my iPhone’s recorder running. These recordings were more for my personal relationship to him than trying to create some archive about Powwow culture or whatever. I would listen to the songs that he recorded. I love singing along to them when I’m driving, learning them. That’s how they found their way into *Jáaji Approx.*, because I was taking a road trip and shooting and every now and then I would listen to them — and then there’s a connection between me and him, from the span of years when he was on the Powwow trail, versus me and what I’m doing now, not on the Powwow trail, but traveling and visiting people. It felt like a stronger connection between us than had existed in the past.

—— AK: It’s also making manifest how knowledge is transmitted.

—— SH: Yeah, like how would I have learned to sing if he hadn’t been present in my life? It’s funny. It’s sometimes easier for me to interact with these recordings than it is to interact with him.

—— ZK: We can definitely relate to that too. There’s an element of control in the recording, where it’s somewhat easier to deal with, and think through. In terms

of your future trajectory, you said you’re working on a Standing Rock film next. Do you see yourself continuing to make short, experimental films for the most part? And do you envisage the Standing Rock film being different than your previous work in some way? Is it more explicitly political?

—— SH: I don’t know if it’s going to be political or not. My interest in going there for shooting wasn’t in the politics. I mean, I knew that there were a lot of people there shooting and covering the politics and the actions on the front lines, the things going on with the pipeline and everything that’s important to it. It wasn’t so much about avoiding what other people were doing, but knowing that my interests personally, usually, are in people and the construction of culture. What I was interested in finding out when I went there was what it looks like to have all these different tribes in this one place, this large gathering that hasn’t happened like this in a hundred years or however long. Powwows kind of count, but not really. They only last for a weekend. But how do you navigate different tribal beliefs, with decolonization being such a hot topic? What does it mean to decolonize a camp and the various hierarchical roles that may have existed in some tribes but not others? How does the role of women fit in this camp, when in some tribes the roles are very different? How is this community navigating this and how am I a part of it? And how am I not a part of it? All those things are what I was really interested in. I knew that I wouldn’t find an answer, but those are the questions I wanted to ask.

When I got there, people joked: “This isn’t a Powwow, this is important.” But sometimes it felt like a Powwow camp. My favorite part of a Powwow is at night, when all the spectators have

gone home and it's just people dancing for themselves, and visiting and laughing and being irreverent in all these different ways. Drinking coffee by the fire and visiting. In the early morning, people are walking around from camp to camp, doing the same thing. That's what it felt like at Standing Rock and that's what I thought was very beauti-

ful. It's a part of our culture which is often ignored or not thought of as being a place that represents the survivance. I'm not sure how this project will turn out, or how long it will be. I think it will be short. I want to do longer pieces, I want to do feature stuff. It's just figuring out where to start.