

**Wistful, Wayward Warriors:
Post-Movement Fatigue and Dissociative States
in Sky Hopinka's *Dislocation Blues***
Lindsay Nixon



Sky Hopinka, *Dislocation Blues* [video still], 2017. Courtesy of the artist.

Sky Hopinka's video *Dislocation Blues* (2017) opens on the visuals of a Skype call, already underway. An Indigenous person peers out from the dialog window, presumably speaking to the audience, represented as a shadowy, blurry, and phantom-like figure in the respondent window. Their tone is personal as if they are talking to a friend or community member—to Indigenous peoples. As the title suggests, this person who quickly becomes the narrator, looks dissociated, tired, exhausted, and checked out; suffering from the aforementioned dislocation blues.

I stopped thinking about my body there if that makes sense. I stopped worrying about how I looked. That gender anxiety that I had was more about roles: how I fit into traditional roles, at first, until two-spirit camp took me in. I stopped worrying about me. Back then it was just us. It was my friends. This body was just a body. It was just something that I would use to get from where I was sleeping to media hill so I could call my mom. It was something that I would use to speak sometimes.

“There,” in the case of *Dislocation Blues*, is the Standing Rock reservation in so-called North Dakota. In 2016 and 2017, Standing Rock became a site of protest and opposition to the Dakota Access Pipeline, planned to run through the reservation. For the narrator, being a part of the Standing Rock resistance connected them to the Indigenous community in ways that brought them outside of embodied gender.

“Two-spirit” roles, as the narrator calls them, are about more than sexuality. Indigenous peoples who feel and live their genders in ways that are unreadable to the aesthetics of the colonial gender binary, and whose sexualities have limitless possibilities resulting from other-worldly genders, occupy a specific, lineal space in community. At protests sites I’ve learned that as a result of gender diverse knowledges being withheld by settlers and Indigenous communities alike, in the absence of teachings, two-spirit peoples teach one another. Every action and expression in the metaphysical space Indigenous peoples occupy together as “community,” by a two-spirit person, is a precedent and a teaching.



Even in dream worlds—an example of the metaphysical space Indigenous peoples cohabitate and make kinship within when they gather together—the collective consciousness at Standing Rock superseded the narrator’s aforementioned gender and body anxieties. “We all seemed to be having the same dreams,” says the narrator. “The same pieces. Our stories were different, but they all seemed to fit together.” Gender is superfluous to the narrator in the camp, as is their body. The community becomes the narrator’s central identity, their foremost method of understanding themselves; ergo they lived-out a fluid gender embodiment defined by the roles they took on at the camp and within the relationships they forged there. There was a particular order to their life, an understanding of their gender that felt so normal, that the world made sense. “Back then,” says the narrator, “everything was right.”

Romantic descriptions of Standing Rock accompany equally romantic visuals of the site, some paced down, as if time itself was slow. A drumming group is featured while community

members dance around them in slow motion. Tall grasses are pictured blowing in the wind. The audio is a reminder that Indigenous peoples are the best, and perhaps the slowest, storytellers. The visuals are a remembering, a reproduction of moments captured while on site and reinterpreted in the present moment.

As the central narrator continues their dialog, it becomes apparent why idyllic images of Standing Rock are present in *Dislocation Blues*. The narrator says, “I feel like there’s nostalgia to it. I keep forgetting bad stuff that happened to my ability to speak. I forget that because my time there is now being cast into this magical rose-colored nostalgia.” For the narrator, dislocation extends beyond the embodiments they previously described. Dislocation is also present in rememberings and retellings of Standing Rock, which are now reflected upon through individual ego(s) removed for the collective consciousness. Post-Standing Rock, everything about the movement becomes sentimental. But what about criticisms arising amongst the community at

Standing Rock, who are now dissociated from the collective consciousness, and left to work through the events that transpired in isolation?

But, before talking about the complex criticisms that can arise at protest sites, the main narrator heeds a warning. Explaining complex relationalities, the negative aspects of Standing Rock and the relationships formed there, might result in racialized misconceptions in the white-dominated media about protesters. “I would be hesitant to talk about this with someone who is not Native,” says the narrator, “who has never been a part of a resistance movement in their life.” For instance, how can one explain the intricacies of misogyny, homophobia, patriarchy, and transphobia at a protest site and within Indigenous communities without fear of misunderstanding by settler-colonial forces that portray Indigenous peoples as a savage force to be removed from the land? Settlers would love nothing more than an Indigenous experience to point to in their own agenda to sully and demonize Indigenous resistance. But in the silence, in romanticized

remembrance, the movement becomes untouchable, and the criticisms that emerged within it are swept under the bear skin rug in the name of mutual survivance in the face of settler opposition.

The narrator's nervous tension about critiquing the Standing Rock movement accompanies an anxious look as they duck out of the frame, disassociating even more. It's a disembodiment, dualistic experience for them, to feel responsibility to community at the Standing Rock camp alongside desire to be honest about whatever it is they witnessed at the site, something so discomfiting it triggers their "dislocation blues." Dislocation is then meant to refer to a further separation of the spirit, self, from the body—in this case, the collective body of protest sites.

What of the individuals who "took up too much space," as the narrator puts it? The warriors on the front lines making the most noise in the media and on social media, often invisibilizing the daily labors undertaken by women, and

gender variant and sexually diverse community members, such as cooking, caring for children, and managing the site. The narrator continues to tell the viewers that social media helped spread versions of events at Standing Rock that never happened or were just plain untrue (or perhaps placing undo importance on the aforementioned warrior figures). The narrator acknowledges that Standing Rock might never have happened in the day of dial-up, but that society also suffers from social media conditioning—our acceptance of its fast-paced culture that ensures information is made available in real time—and its integration throughout our everyday lives amidst post-reality worlds. But social media also ultimately affected the way individuals at Standing Rock communicated rumors and hearsay that are now widely accepted as fact. How do we contend with a movement that changed the hearts of Indigenous peoples, the Oka Standoff of my generation, while also acknowledging that social media privileged the stories and egos of certain individuals over others—a break from the collective consciousness of the site?



Hopinka's representation is not Standing Rock as sacred space, pilgrimage, and altruistic movement—an image that has been spread through social media platforms. Once more, this is Standing Rock, dislocation blues. The angsty and existential affect of the video resonates with Indigenous viewers, like myself, who have been a part of movement building, and are now left in the aftermath of the movements they helped build to work through burnout, paranoia, and power differentiation that arose in isolation.

Bob Darin reaffirms the video's focus on disassociation of self from collective consciousness in the wake of movements as he plays the viewer out with his song *Not For Me*.

*Prayers are being said
But not for me
I've never known love
Or been shown love, you see
And maybe there is such a thing
But not for me*

Protesters making their way down the bridge are shown multiple times in previous sequences. The frame pulls out, and the viewer realizes they are watching the scenes projected on a crumpled blanket as if it were home videos set up in a living room. This adds to the overall feeling of nostalgia and intimacy. The viewer is not watching *Dislocation Blues* as a digital short, but as home video in their relative's living room. The camera shifts to another set of visuals projected on a screen: Standing Rock while driving along the same bridge, presumably away from the site. As protestors leave the site, as fatigue sets in, Hopinka asks a question of these now dislocated peoples, moving further and further away from the camp: *was Standing Rock a false love?* Surely, love, love as prayer and ceremony, still exists at Standing Rock for some people but not for "me." But who is "me"? It's a question that is never fully answered. Who are those displaced, forgotten, and jaded post-Standing Rock? The narrator never fully divulges. Perhaps this is a conscious choice, given the aforementioned fear that criticism of Standing Rock will be misconstrued by settler viewers. But,

from my own experience of being pushed out of sweat lodges by patriarchal chiefs, and refused hugs in ceremony for sitting on the two-spirit side of lodge, I can't help but feel it's the two-spirit camp who are expressing love lost in spaces of movement building.

Picturesque imaginings of Standing Rock, captured on camera and now disseminated through individual narratives, are idealized and memorialized, removed from the messiness of community politics and post-movement fatigue now plaguing protesters. The relational connectivity formed at Standing Rock has become dissociated, and so too have the community-based understanding of the ways in which gender was nurtured. *Dislocation Blues* is about longing and nostalgia for those fleeting moments of perfect movement building. *Dislocation Blues* is about what happens after the movement building—the work of healing oneself and the relationships forged and forked at the protest site.

Indigenous filmmaker **Hopinka**'s *Standing Rock* is a movement, a love, loss, witnessed as come and gone by its participants. *Standing Rock* is a family disbanded. It's anti-relationality festering beneath the surface just a little too long until it turns into hurt. A desperate and anxious need to reconstruct the events at *Standing Rock* in visuals and stories, hoping to find truth amongst multiple realities. It's a begrudging return to every day because how could one ever return to the monotony of school, work, and other trivial matters having been part of a collective one.

Deep-Time Construction is on view at CCA Wattis Institute, San Francisco, from May 31–July 28, 2018. This exhibition is curated by *contemporary*.

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