

DREAMING AS LIFEWAY:

Analogue Apparitions and Earthly Protagonists

by
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abstract

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Shé:kon, sewakwé:kon. KJ ní'i. I am a Kanien'kehá:ka and mixed settler filmmaker, writer and video editor. My maternal family are wolf clan, Goodleafs, from Kahnawá:ke, Québec; and my paternal family is Edwards from Longueuil, Québec. My parents met in Montréal and both became educators. They traveled around the north teaching, eventually deciding to stay awhile in Treaty 6 Territory, Edmonton, Alberta, where I was born and raised.

Skennen'kó:wa ken? This translates to: "Do you carry the Great Peace with you?" This is the Mohawk way of asking how someone is. And it is emblematic of the relational beauty of my maternal language, Kanien'kéha. An everyday greeting that is meaningful and rooted in one's experience of the world through the spiritual. As I get older and continue to redefine my value system and further develop my practice, I aim to bring this kind of relational approach into my filmmaking process. By working with analogue film and engaging with different creative cohorts, I have realized that my work thrives because of the generosity of others and through knowledge exchange. My analogue practice is possible because of those who have mentored me and inspired me. My research looks to dreams as a lifeway, as a means to communicate with ancestors and to work creatively to tell stories, along with accessing memory and ideating. I reflect on the unpredictability of analogue workflows through eco processing 16mm film, looking to the medium as that of a collaborator. I inquire about the ways in which my particular neurodivergence and training might be both challenged and enriched through material processes, returning to an attentiveness of mind and body through the work and through these collaborations.

Niá:wen, thank you for taking the time to engage with this writing.

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territorial acknowledgement

This thesis was devised while studying as an uninvited guest on unceded and stolen traditional xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səlilwətaɬ (Tsleil-Waututh) Territory in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. The Stó:lō Nation has also had a long connection to the nearby waterways for sustenance. I understand that living here comes at a cost to these communities, whose reservations are surrounded by growing infrastructure. Vancouver and the neighbouring municipalities contribute to pollution that negatively impacts the environment and continues to disrupt their traditional way of life. I would like to offer gratitude and respect to these nations; I am grateful to be living and working on Coast Salish Territory and I will do what I can to honour and respect your land while I am guest here.

niawen'kó:wa

I would like to thank the many people, whose kindness, attentiveness, advice, and generosity made this thesis possible. I never thought I would attend post secondary studies, let alone pursue a Masters Degree. First and foremost I would like to thank my advisory committee for offering their time, expertise and feedback. Lindsay McIntyre, Alla Gadassik and Siku Allooloo: it is truly a triumph and privilege to have three incredibly talented, knowledgeable, and radical women on my committee. Each of you has worked to navigate industry and academic systems that have historically prioritized the male input, and excluded femme individuals, Indigenous and racialized individuals, and LGBTQTS+ peoples. You are paving the way for us younger folks in academia.

Lindsay McIntyre, you sure are a rockstar. I had no idea that when you signed on to supervise my research that you would have such an impact on my life. From teaching me how to hand process film and contact print, to introducing me to eco processing and direct animation, to referring me for analogue residencies in exciting new places, to trouble shooting gear and checking in with me, to just having a laugh in the FMSA hallway and introducing me to your analogue film community: you have gone above and beyond for me so many times that I have lost count. You have truly changed my life. Shout out to your lovely daughter Alice, who is just the best! Niawen'kó:wa, Lindsay!

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dedication

In Loving Memory of Beatrice Melody Sidon



Fig 1. Beatrice Melody Sidon, *Bee on a Sunflower*, 1970's. Analogue photograph.

Fig 2. Michael Edwards, *Beatrice in Montreal*, 1970's. Analogue photograph.

Fig 3. Beatrice Melody Sidon, *Kahnawá:ke*, 1970's. Analogue photograph.

Much of my art since the loss of my mother has been created in response to our relationship: as it was before in three dimensions and as it is now, in prayer and dreams. My mother, Beatrice, was an incredibly kind and humourous person, who was able to make people laugh through the most difficult of times. She worked hard to raise us three children, many of those years on her own, without very little help. And she did an amazing job teaching us what is important, what kind of value system we should hold.

I have long been inspired by my mother's photography. I have with me hundreds of her photographs, spanning decades. Her compositions transfix and transport me to her point of view growing up and coming of age as a young, Mohawk woman. She photographed nature, capturing extreme closeups of flowers and wide shots of mountain ranges. She often photographed animals like deer and elk; horses were of particular interest to her. She also liked to take advantage of golden hour, shooting at dusk or dawn, to catch the evolution of cascading colours in the sky. Most of her later photographs are of her three children, running around, enjoying the limitlessness of childhood. Eventually, all of her photos would be entirely of us kids. She always supported my lofty ideas, and encouraged me to move to Toronto in 2007 to pursue my dreams of writing and directing. She continues to support me from beyond, and I am endlessly grateful to her. When beginning this journey toward a thesis, I knew that this particular collection of my mother's photographs would act as the baseline anchor for the work, alongside the guidance she has given to me in dreams. And though the content, thematic elements, and characterizations, present in each media work differ, my aesthetic aspirations have remained tethered to this desire to emulate her memories.

This thesis honours istén:'a (my mother) my maker, Beatrice. Love you istá!

dreams of istén:'a

Love is a very complicated thing

Make a budget

Keep all your writing

Don't throw any of it out



Fig 4. KJ Edwards, *istén:'a*, 2023. 16mm still.

Dreams are considered sacred and meaningful in Kanien'kehá:ka culture. It is believed that in dreams messages are passed on to us from the spirit world. But we have to put intention toward being open to it through spiritual work. Kanien'kehá:ka faith keeper Kevin Deer speaks to the importance of dreams in his guidance work. Deer is an Elder living in Kahnawá:ke and is at the forefront of Mohawk spiritual and cultural revitalization. He stresses the importance of dreams in our culture since time immemorial; that our ancestors and other spirits use our dreamstate to speak to us and that we should never ignore any dream that sticks out to us as different than our usual dreams.¹ My mother, my maker, passed away suddenly in 2008. It was and always will be impossible to accept, but she still parents me from beyond. My mother has offered me many one-liners in dreamspace. Some have been quite prophetic, while others, a little more mundane, but still important: "Make a budget." "Okay, mom, *I know*. I will." And I then did. After many weeks of regular dreaming or subconscious processing of

¹ Kevin Deer lives in Kahnawá:ke and offers teachings online and in person.

daily life, I was visited and advised by my mother to get my house in order. Possibly the most important advice has been: “Keep all your writing. Don’t throw any of it out.” I am always grateful for these visits in dreamspace, which occur every few years. I have always dreamed quite vividly and dreams offer me so much in the way of writing. Memory and ideation, though waking phenomena, are also catalysts for me as a filmmaker, along with free writing and verbal recall; all are gifts for content creation. They make space for our subconscious and our guides to get messages through to us, without us overthinking and trying to force a result.

Having attended the film production undergraduate program at the Toronto Metropolitan University Creative School, I was trained to work with performers, using a script. However, throughout my masters research, I completed all roles of production, and made work without the participation of performers. I wanted to challenge myself to move beyond the traditional structure I was used to: what new methods of storytelling might enhance my practice? What tools are other independent filmmakers using to communicate their story outside of commercial production practices? I began my explorations at Emily Carr University of Art + Design by working with one memory and one dream at a time. I created two short films and an installation with 16mm footage I filmed using an analogue Bolex camera.² While the subject matter of each work is different, core themes that thread them together are: dreams, memory, spirit, power, liminality, temporality, and relationships. My filming and editing style reflect the ways that remembering, both dreams and events, arrives in a non-linear, reconstructed fashion, and also the way that I imagine, for myself, potential events. The techniques that I commonly employ to achieve this are: handheld camera rigging, flickering light, slow motion, quick cuts, hard cuts, overlays and cross-dissolves. The result also mirrors that of my thought processes, especially when under duress, as a neurodivergent person. I have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, which informs all aspects of my practice. I often rely heavily on structure to get things done, otherwise things may very

² Filming locations, details, and acknowledgements for all of KJ Edwards works mentioned throughout this text are included at the end of this document.

easily disintegrate into chaos. And yet, it is very difficult for me to maintain structure long term in my daily life. I end up cycling through short spurts of healthy workflow that eventually fall apart and then I build the pattern back up, over and over again. Writing and filmmaking is one of the few areas of interest where I am able to maintain structure throughout. However, working primarily with an analogue production workflow directly challenged that part of my psyche that desires full control over the storytelling process. Analogue workflows come with inconsistencies and unpredictability. Hand processing film in particular produces varied outcomes. But the work has challenged me to inquire: are these inconsistencies actually mistakes? Or are they happy accidents? What possibilities are born from this materiality and might I consider the film a collaborator rather than simply an object to be manipulated to my liking? How might analogue workflows encourage me to embrace a lack of control over final outcomes in the work, and might that extend beyond my practice into other areas of my life?

tethers



Fig 5. KJ Edwards, *(the) untethering*, 2021. 16mm still.

(the) untethering (2021), is an experimental short film about my last memory of my friend Alex at a party prior to his death. Something was off in his energy that night. I asked him a few questions about how things were going, but he assured me that everything was great. As I prepared to leave, I looked back to say goodbye. He was leaning against the wall with his gaze to the floor and I had a strange thought that something was tugging at him. As if something was trying to drag his soul up and out of his body. It was as if I had a mini dream in waking life, a split second visioning. I nearly decided to stay longer but colonial conditioning led me to second guess myself. I had not yet done the work to learn to honour intuition. That was the last night I would ever see him alive. Though it was almost a decade ago I think back to this memory all the time. There is so much that I can learn about myself, about this world and also the spiritual world, through revisiting it.

I wanted to create something that felt and looked like a memory, that emulated a feeling of being young and walking aimlessly about town. Alex and I first met in high school and most of my memories of us are from our adventures running around the city and the river valley as reckless kids. Our friend group would often go on really long winter walks with no set destination.



Fig 6 & 7. KJ Edwards, *(the) untethering*, 2021. 16mm stills.

I chose VISION3 500T Color Negative Film 5219/7219 for all of the exterior footage.³ This stock is meant for interior filming, and is balanced to make tungsten tones more natural. Instead I wanted the footage to lean heavily blue, like the light in Edmonton during winter at latitude 53. For me this suggests a sense of loss in this revisiting of *place*, that is supported by other visual elements and narration. The film opens on a shot of a young man facing the viewer, silently looking. The viewer's eye is the camera in that moment, which is fleeting. The shot changes and the young man never looks into the camera again. The perspective then shifts to identify with another person who never faces the camera. This second person walks aimlessly throughout the film as if searching for something. The frequency that both people are depicted on screen decreases until the viewer is seeing mostly exterior shots of sky and trees. The placement of these shots is meant to increase the sense of absence by re-aligning the viewer primarily with the point of view of the camera, as if it is their eyes once again. I was inspired by Terrence Malick's *The Tree of Life* (2011), where the camera moves back and forth between an objective and subjective perspective, which invokes a sense of lost time, a desperation in the point of view, that is trying to hold onto the moment but time

³ Some exterior footage, 16mm and digital, was filmed prior to the program and re-edited to suit this project, though the majority, and all colour stock, was filmed on a Bolex in Vancouver.

slips forever forward. Though the images move quickly, the narration acts as an anchor, calmer than the visuals, to distance the viewer into a disassociated position, in and out of watching themselves. The camera movement becomes more erratic. Some shots move forward and then backwards. The result is a sense that the viewer is witnessing two timelines converging. This is meant to reflect the way in which my neurodivergence often leads me to go into my head and maladaptive daydream as a coping mechanism for grief and anxiety, as well as in avoidance of my responsibilities. I replay memories again and again, trying to find the exact moment where I could have changed the chain of events that followed, searching for new answers to old questions of: *why?* Frozen in a state of executive dysfunction, I find myself stuck in the emotional state of that memory. However, by way of this isolation inside the mind, the present moment also slips away.

analogue apparitions

I had a dream that my eyes were ground glass

I was sitting in bed when my vision shifted. Suddenly, all I could see was the grey and white speckled blur of the glass used for focusing the Bolex camera to one's individual sight. I realized that my view had in fact, all this time, been filtered and processed through this ground glass without my knowledge. Everything I had ever known about my own optical experience, my own perceptual relationship with the world, was flipped on its head. My heart pounded quickly, while my breath grew shallow - fear set in. But moments later I was enveloped in a sense of calm. I looked ahead of me into the blur, and for a time, enjoyed this way of looking. Then I woke up.

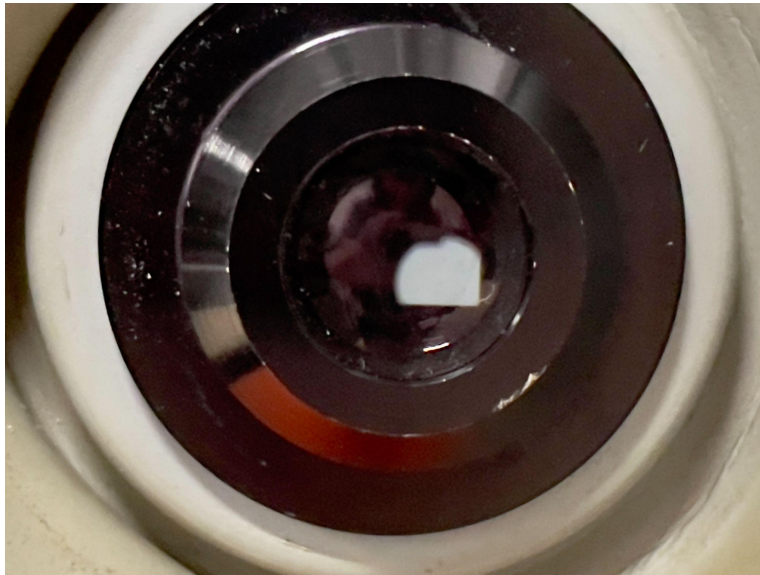


Fig 8. KJ Edwards, *Bolex Viewfinder and Ground Glass*, 2023. Digital photograph.

This dream came to me part way through my second semester, while I sought revelation about how to finish my next project and how to approach changes to my final thesis deliverables plan. I first pitched a Virtual Reality (VR) experience as my final output, that was to be derived from a short Indigenous Realism⁴ Science Fiction

⁴ Indigenous Realism is a term I coined to address that Indigenous works regarding spiritual experiences ought to be considered as such, rather than as works of Magical Realism.

screenplay called *Konnorónhkwa* (I love you), based on a dream I had of my mother where she visited me from the spirit world. It was to be aesthetically inspired by Lisa Jackson's dystopian work *Biidaaban: First Light VR* (2018). This dream, in my tradition, was a true meeting, a crossing of worlds. My sister had a nearly identical visit around the same time, where our mother sat in her chair surrounded by flowers, plants, and warm light, smiling. This visit marked a shift in my life as I had begun practicing ceremony and Mohawk traditions for the first time. I had not dreamt of my mother for a few years, which brought me great pain, and this visit from her was a healing moment. It was a caring hand on a child's back. It was the moment I knew she was not actually gone, but that she had to move around a bit to do spiritual work in that realm; that she had healed and she would always be back again. This dream meant so much to me that I really struggled to tell the story through non-conventional means. The independent nature of analogue filmmaking is quite involved and required me to reassess many things. The stakes are higher with each decision, without the safety net of popular convention. I was concerned I had taken a wrong turn. But this dream, it was so vivid, and shocking: someone, *something*, assured me that I was on the right path.



Fig 9 & 10. KJ Edwards, *the return*, 2022. 16mm stills.

I had the support of someone with decades of experience during this creative crisis, so I was in good hands. Lindsay McIntyre, an Inuit and settler filmmaker and multidisciplinary artist who specializes in analogue practices, and my thesis supervisor, offered me endless guidance and technical advice. She suggested that I throw away my pre-production plans for the next project. However, with the footage for *the return* (2022), the analogue version of this dream of my mother, already shot, she suggested watching as many analogue films as possible to get an idea of how other filmmakers work with the medium. Though I was stuck on the edit, I was really happy with the footage itself. For *the return* (2022) I had pre-planned a shot-list, complete with location scout details and photographs. I wanted to emulate some of my mother's vintage photographs of domestic architecture, flowers, and plants taken in Québec, where the light is of a warmer tone. And so, I used the same VISION3 500T Color Negative Film 5219/7219 stock, but with an 85 filter, so that the image would have a neutral colour balance when shot outdoors. I warmed up some of the footage later, bringing in more red. I filmed aging architectural exteriors on Union Street, as well as flowers and plants in Queen Elizabeth Park. While some of the imagery I captured worked well, other imagery seemed to be too vague or didactic when paired with my narration. It made sense on paper but not in the edit suite.

McIntyre pointed me to the VUCAVU and CMFDC websites and archives, whose categorization helped me to contextualize different genres of experimental filmmaking aligned with my interests: "Experimental," "Environment + Nature," "Architecture," and "Landscape." Many established analogue filmmakers are working in these genres creating time-capsule films, where there is no traditional narrative, but rather, captured moments-in-time. *Facing The Waves* (2016), by Eva Kolcze, a Toronto-based filmmaker whose work looks at landscape, architecture and the body, caught my attention. Shot on Super 8, it is a study of the qualities of light and shadows on a summer afternoon. Kolcze manipulates her camera lens to distort images of people and infrastructure so that the image appears stretched and blurred at the edges. Human figures weave in and out of focus and are cut by the edges of the frame. Some of the imagery made me think

back to *The Tree of Life* (dir. Terrence Malick, 2011). However, Kolcze does not use sound or performance to lead the viewer toward experiencing a specific feeling, but rather she allows the materiality of the footage, the distortion of her lens, and the way that light moves, to position the viewer with a particular state of being.



Fig 11 & 12. Eva Kolcze, *Facing The Waves*, 2016. 8mm stills.

And like Kolcze, I noticed that most of the analogue filmmakers I began watching really took their time with their edit. They slowed footage down or used repetition, even with shorter clips. They allowed the footage to live longer in the sequence, whereas in commercial narrative you normally use a shot once. I played around with these techniques and the edit began to improve. I then looked toward the photographic works of Shelley Niro, from whom I derive a lot of inspiration. Niro's Indigenous Realism film *The Amazing 25th Year of Mitzi Bearclaw* (2019) was also one of the films on my mind while writing *Konnorónhkwa*. Niro is a Bay of Quinte (Tyendinaga) Kanien'kehá:ka filmmaker and artist, born in Niagara Falls (NY, USA), and raised in Ohsweken, where she is a member of the Six Nations of the Grand River First Nation. Niro's *In her Lifetime* (2022) includes six portraits of her sister, where her expression bounces from joy to ambivalence, from avoidance to defiance, to calm. There is lyrical text included with each photograph that relates to the cycles of thinking that keep the status-quo in place, prioritizing the domesticity of daily life that both comforts and distracts. It is

cognitive dissonance within the general populace that keeps colonialism thriving. Settlers abandon ethics for short term rewards in exchange for their compliance within the system. As a result Indigenous people are forced to seek that same short term relief in order to survive a world built on our subjugation. But we do experience joy. And here Niro showcases images of her sister's joy, rather than trauma, to make this point, combining the poetic and personal with the political. She demands that the inner worlds and hidden points of view of Indigenous people compete with that of pop culture, which prioritizes whiteness.

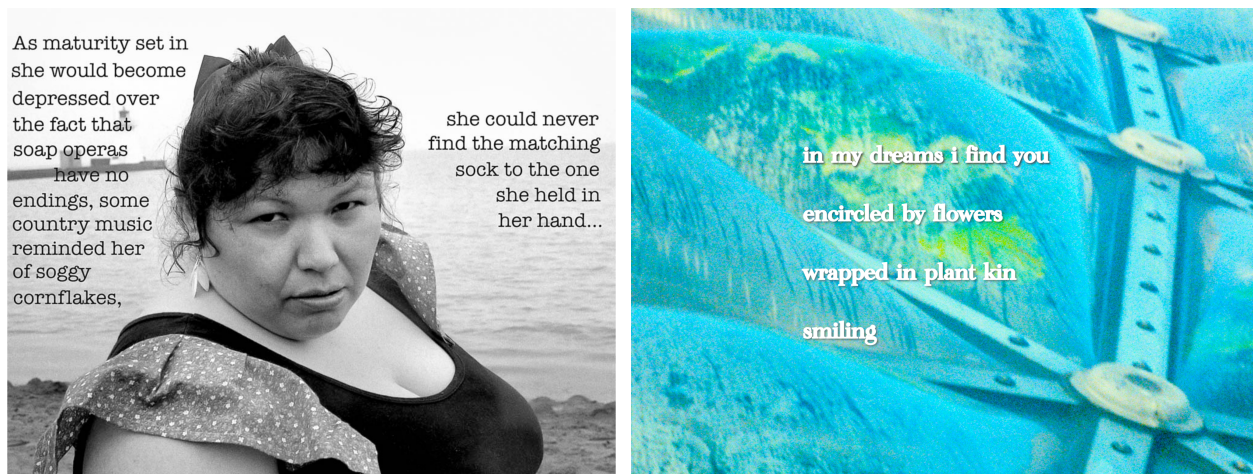


Fig 13. Shelley Niro, *In Her Lifetime #3*, 2022. Digital photograph.

Fig 14. KJ Edwards, *the return*, 2022. 16mm still.

A refusal to generalize and portray trauma for the colonial gaze is really an act of rebellion, of *Indigenous narrative sovereignty*, a term coined by Ojibwey author, filmmaker and writer Jesse Wenthe, from Serpent River First Nation. He points out that the nuances of our experiences are often lost or not understood as possible by non-Indigenous storytellers. “Too often when First Nations, Métis, or Inuit are asked to tell stories, we’re asked to tell sad stories, stories of pain and trauma...our trauma in service of the goal of Canada.” (Wenthe, *Playback Magazine*).⁵

⁵ Quoted from *Playback Magazine* in conversation with Jesse Wenthe, “ISO calls for greater Indigenous presence in Canada’s communications future.” 26 Feb, 2020.

Though I finally got the visual edit for the *return* (2022) to a good place, after viewing Niro's work I became very aware that I had given up too much specificity by taking my narration out. I came to feel very strongly that in order for me to work authentically, the audience needed to understand that this dream was a *spiritual visit*, not a regular dream, and that perhaps this particular project was not the one where I should abandon language altogether, *not yet*. I then experimented with incorporating text in a similar fashion to Niro (Fig. 13 & 14). I adapted my original narration into lines of poetry that came up on screen. Though I ended up deciding that the narration was the right choice, using text on screen was a new way of working that opened up possibilities for me. Discussions around the text confirmed that it was the specificity that most resonated with audiences, regardless of format. The detail was integral. So after having shelved the film for many months, I brought back my voice with use of additional footage, creating *istén:'a* (2023), which premiered as part of the *Response: Resonance Residency* with the Polygon Gallery in Vancouver.

This experience was important for me and moved my practice forward. In the absence of all the infrastructure a crew and script provide, I really struggled to communicate my vision. As someone with ADHD, I fear imperfection so much that I often will not finish projects, especially if the content is really important to me. The fear of not getting it right outrides everything else and I freeze. If I get stuck, I refuse to continue. I have hard drives and hard drives of unfinished work. However, this time, I came away with new workflow strategies to move through these creative blocks. Taking the narration out at the start of the process helped me to set the visual edit without worrying first where the voice would sit or if I should use my voice at all. Letting my tool kit ebb and flow, rather than remaining rigid, moved my work forward. I may never have finished that film had I not taken these risks in workflow. This experience moved me to embrace imperfection, while also trusting the process. I was able to shift my own habits. It is absolutely possible for individuals with ADHD to develop new neural pathways over time.⁶ It requires the repetition of new lifestyle patterns, and can be

⁶ From Gabor Máte's *Scattered Minds: The Origins and Healing of Attention Deficit Disorder*.

assisted through different drug therapies. Contrary to what most people believe, ADHD is not a solely inherited condition. I began reading the work of Gabor Máte, Canada's most well-known physician, writer and activist, when I moved to Vancouver, where he is based. Máte has proven through years of research and frontline work with patients that ADHD is a condition that is also heavily influenced by early childhood trauma and lack of attunement. He has flipped the script on neurodivergence treatments, and argues that long term lifestyle repatterning is absolutely possible. Shifts in my own life are happening slowly since adapting my treatments and coping strategies over the past few years, and since beginning my traditional spiritual practice. And so, might I eventually be able to fully embrace variance between my artistic vision and final outcomes without my process spiraling into chaos each time? And with my next artwork, what kinds of audio-visual storytelling methods might I look to in place of voice-over narration? What else is possible?

colour reversal

Flying into Treaty 4 Territory felt like coming home. Though I had never been there before, Regina's prairie terrain immediately set my heart at ease. This comforting sense of familiarity extended throughout my experience with the Saskatchewan Filmpool Cooperative, a non-profit artist-run centre supporting independent analogue filmmaking in Regina. The Colour Reversal Program, offered to emerging BIPOC filmmakers in March of 2022, was facilitated by the cooperative's Executive Director, BIPOC artist and writer Hagere Selam "shimby" Zegeye-Gebrehiwot. The analogue workshops were led by Lindsay McIntyre, who recommended me to the residency, and award-winning Métis filmmaker Rhayne Vermette, from Treaty 1 Territory in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Programming was also offered by educators, filmmakers, and curators: David Garneau, Alyssa Fearon, and Niki Little. Colour Reversal began with an opening circle and prayer led by Osawastim-otahkophiw-iskwew (Brown Horse Blanket Woman), Marie Alma Poitras, an Elder originally from Onion Lake Cree Nation, living in Peepeekisis Cree Nation. After the prayer, shimby gifted us tobacco ties that many of us would later use to make an offering on the land in Lebret (Qu'Appelle), where we had an opportunity to meet with Elder Alma in person, at the Lebret Industrial School site. The former residential school grounds are now in the process of being investigated for findings related to countless unmarked gravesites, though they should be referred to as crime scenes because that is what they are. This experience of being part of a mixed cohort where such respect was given to the traumatic history of colonial violence carried out against the host nation, was profound. This inclusion of care for traditional protocols really set the tone for our time together.

The cohort spent about a week shooting and hand processing high contrast B&W 16mm film. McIntyre and Vermette taught us many techniques, including direct animation, where paint or other material is placed onto clear film or found footage; as well as how to make myriad eco-developers using everything from dates and oregano, to caffenol, even using cedar and spruce needles. Essentially, to make an eco-developer, first source plant or other material, like coffee containing phytochemicals: phenols,

polyphenols or terpenoids. Other than caffenol,⁷ where the instant coffee crystals are easily dissolvable, these recipes generally require that the materials be broken down into smaller pieces by cutting them, and then hitting them with a mallet or tool to release the juices. The matter should then be steeped for at least one hour in 2L of boiled water. Typically about eight handfuls of material are required for 2L, which is ideal for developing half a roll (50ft) by hand at a time. Once steeped, the plant or other material must be filtered out, and the remaining liquid brought back up to a temperature of around 27-30°C, developing for several minutes depending on the phenol content of that particular material.⁸ The next step requires the addition of washing soda and ascorbic acid (vitamin c power), in that order, mixing well, using immediately.



Fig 15, 16 & 17. KJ Edwards, *Colour Reversal Program*, 2022. Digital photographs.

The physicality of this workflow proved to be really rewarding. I found myself far less in my head than usual, and more in my body, in a way that allowed me more creative flow in and out of the darkroom. I found that I “lost time”, which for an ADHD creative meant that I was hyper-focused on the activities because I really enjoyed them, therefore the passage of time ceased to be perceptible. The shared spaces were also quite

⁷ More information on caffenol can be found in *sources*.

⁸ Temperature and developing time work in tandem. One can utilize trial and error with different plant material. All developing compounds are derived from phenols, traditionally from the oil and gas industry.

kinetic with excitement around the work. This experience taught me that filmmaking can be centered around forming a community and connecting through collaboration. Further, by hand processing a high contrast film stock, I have become enamored with the textured black and white images. The optical outcomes reflect the power that the materiality of this medium carries, which can enhance meaning in various ways, according to Kim Knowles, a seasoned academic and lecturer at Aberystwyth University, Wales, who is also an author and programmer based in the United Kingdom. Knowles has invested her research and analytics primarily in experimental film, analogue practice, and materiality. In *Experimental Film and Photochemical Practices* Knowles asserts that celluloid film is “...capable of communicating across multiple materialities: bodily, earthly, human and non-human.” (Knowles, 25). For Knowles, the unique textural qualities of analogue, which can be further enhanced through experimental darkroom techniques, offer new modes of communication that challenge the mainstream or traditional optics of commercial cinema. “...rather than present themselves as a reflection of the world, these images emphasize the fact that they are of the world—their visual form resulting from the physical transformation of matter.” (Knowles, 73). And it is these very qualities that have since shaped, for me, a new way of communicating. So much can be expressed, implied, and interpreted through textures, light, and subjective continuity editing; all held within a non-diegetic soundscape.

future maybe

After many conversations, perhaps therapy sessions, with Lindsay McIntyre, I came to understand the ways in which I was blocking myself creatively. With decades of experience working with the medium, she understands well the challenges, but also pitfalls that a filmmaker might encounter while learning the techniques of the trade. McIntyre challenged me over the summer session to try to let go of endeavoring to have total control over every aspect of the process. Her strategy entailed lending me a Bolex camera with no viewfinder, and just three fixed lenses. This meant that I would not be able to see how I was framing my subjects. I would need to assume my framing based on my knowledge of each lens focal length and I would only achieve my goals through trial and error: *film, develop, view, troubleshoot, repeat*. She also encouraged me not to pre-plan any shots but rather only to plan my filming locations.



Fig 18 & 19. Lindsay McIntyre, *In The Backyarden*, 2016. 16mm stills.

“*You make the film you have.*” McIntyre offered me this mantra, in regards to approaching filmmaking practice. Her film *In The Backyarden* (2016) is an example of one where she did not pre-plan shots, but rather only the location and subject matter, that being her daughter Alice playing in the backyard on a sunny day. The entire edit takes place “in-camera”, meaning that she did not do any editing after the fact. All of her shot changes, fades to black, titles, and double exposures she achieved by hand, with the camera, in real time. As a viewer, watching *In The Backyarden* (2016) feels to me as though I am stepping into a memory that then becomes a slow waterfall, a cascade of

moments held in time. The visuals move between high contrast and low contrast, with imagery of plants and water overlaying that of a young child exploring the natural wonders of a garden. I am witness to the wonderment of innocence and unconditional love. I can feel when the artist moves through her decisions in the camera-work. And I never once feel cut off from that sensation of being a part of her breath and body, of being inside her point of view. And while the subject matter is simple, this technique requires a lot of technical experience and skill. *In The Backyarden (2016)* is an emotionally impactful narrative that did not require an extensive production plan, but rather skill and patience from the creator. And though it will be some time before I attempt to make a film in this way, I was able to find enough motivation through appreciation of it to let go into my summer session. I set out to test the waters of uncertainty: *how might I embrace the unpredictability of working with analogue film? And might I approach these inconsistencies as happy accidents rather than mistakes?*



Fig 20. KJ Edwards, *Bolex without viewfinder, film stock and lenses*, 2022. Digital photograph.

future almost

First caffenol developer hand processing adventure of the summer: successful. First two rolls of high contrast 12 ISO B&W film processed by this developer: an epic failure. Completely overexposed and unusable. I let too much light into the camera for double exposures, which I applied to the majority of the footage. Without a viewfinder, I am not as accurate in accounting for the position of the sky or light added by movement in my composition, and I have blown out all of my highlights. I also do not know these lenses well and assumed that erring on the side of stopping up⁹ would be beneficial for such a low speed stock. This turns out to be incorrect and I feel defeated. While I have less issue with these techniques when utilizing a viewfinder and high speed stock, it would appear that I do rely heavily on my eye to confirm or adjust my light meter readings. Lindsay McIntyre reminds me that prior to viewfinders becoming commonplace, camera operators often went without them. They measured distance only by hand to achieve focus and relied solely on their light meters or assumption to achieve the proper exposures. It was all about developing skill and trust with the equipment. I just have to get to know the camera, film stock, and lenses better. And so I try again.



Fig 21, 22 & 23. KJ Edwards, *Caffenol 16mm film processing*, 2022. Digital photographs.

⁹ Stopping the lens up decreases the F-stop number, which widens the aperture, and each stop out of range doubles the amount of light that the film is exposed to.

Third round: my caffanol skills execute faithfully; it is a pretty simple recipe after all. However, I end up with only a small fraction of quasi-usable footage that is in focus and well framed. But this time much more is properly exposed. It appears I have gotten better at gauging the amount of light present by erring on the side of stopping the aperture down slightly. Okay. However, my subjects are still mostly blurry and only partially framed, and not in a good way. It is obviously not intentional. My hand measurement skills are still not up to par. Using a handheld pistol grip to operate the Bolex rather than a tripod is tricky. Some operators can measure by eye externally, but I have always been terrible at estimating distances. And since I refuse to work with still footage at this time and I want it to feel handheld, I risk my focus shifting due to the movement of my body holding the camera. And so I try again.

Fourth and fifth rounds I slow down even more. And then I develop.

Wow. Okay. *I get it.*

I get why people are obsessed with this. And why there are filmmakers dedicated to keeping hand processing a part of their practice. There is nothing quite like it. I feel simultaneously like a sort of chef, chemist, and artist all at once. While I still only come away with about two thirds of a roll of usable footage at the end, I could care less. Once I have all of my negatives scanned, what has turned out is unlike any footage I have ever produced. The scratches, burns, and variance in development are complementary to the jitter of the spinning Bolex shutter, the film grain, and the camera movement. All of these elements come together and the result is this haptic, painterly kind of image. Haptic Cinema, a framework devised by Laura U. Marks, scholar, philosopher and professor at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, is an essence present in textured optics that invites a shared intimacy between the viewer and the image. This affinity moves beyond the average state of identification a viewer may engage with through less inclined imagery, and toward mutual recognition with the materiality of the footage. She suggests that the “haptic” engages the eyes to act as organs of touch, encouraging the

viewer to give in to the sensory power of what is on screen. Marks points to key methods, such as utilizing low-resolution, pixelation, or film grain to enhance an image's haptic qualities.¹⁰ It is as though we can feel the footage on our skin. The textures that hand processing brings to high contrast film stock are captivating. Otherworldly even. Of a different dimension. With this stock, the black tones are quite dark and crushed. When paired with the medium grays, and highlights, which are more blown out than with other stocks, the contrast is striking. I fell in love with the footage and could not wait to start editing.

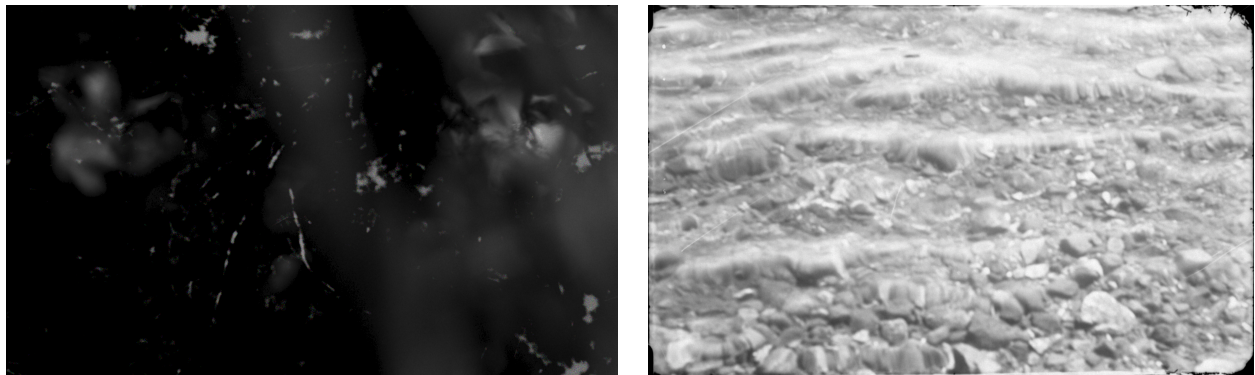


Fig 24 & 25. KJ Edwards, *future ready*, 2022. 16mm stills.

future ready (2022) is a culmination of everything that I learned and shed over the summer months. The title was inspired by one of my favourite songs, *Future Politics*, the title track to Austra's 2017 album, written by Katie Stelmanis. Jaded by hyper-individualism driven by late stage capitalism, Stelmanis is concerned for younger generations, she sings: "There's still a hope somebody needs to feel." (Stelmanis). I had been thinking a lot on climate change, and the colonial and capitalist exploits killing our planet. This violence brings me so much concern, just as I am also coming to a place where I deeply desire to have children. Our reality is in conflict with my deepest desires and imagining a future for myself feels, at times, impossible. I was struck by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's *Land as pedagogy: Nishnaabeg intelligence and rebellious*

¹⁰ Laura U. Marks, "Video haptics and erotics." in *Screen* 39:4, Winter (1998): 331.

transformation. Simpson is an Anishinaabe, author, activist, musician and writer, and a member of the Mississauga community of Alderville First Nation. Simpson writes a lot about building a better future for their children through reclamation of traditional land-based practices. The text moves between prose, poetry, and academic writing, exploring themes related to land, spirit, and family. Within their own text they quote: “The freedom realized through flight and refusal is the freedom to imagine and create an elsewhere in the here; a present future beyond the imaginative and territorial bounds of colonialism.”¹¹, which so perfectly frames this feeling I have of wanting an “elsewhere” to exist. An imagined future that moves beyond the imagination and into the material world. There is work to be done in the present to fight for a better future. And existing as though that future is already here is a radical act, a decolonial act. It is a hope that so many of us hold on to. All these ponderings and desires are also the thematic base for the later installation iteration of this work, *future ready: cusp (2023)*, which was presented for the final thesis exhibition.

future ready (2022) is dreamlike and somewhat ominous in tone, in response to the optical qualities of the images, and also in reflection of how I felt while filming on the land and hand processing for hours alone in the dark. My friends Natasha Naveau and Jackie Lyn took me to Bowen Island, unceded and stolen Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Territory, where we spent several days exploring and relaxing. The land and elemental energies are quite palpable in the less touristy areas. I remember feeling as though we were not alone on our hikes and beach adventures. I had this strange feeling of being watched by non-human energies, odd but not negative in nature. I thought to myself: if the earth has to take everything back, then I accept that. I would rather the earth have agency than see it all disappear. And when I saw the footage played back, that is what it emulated. This sense of something else present, unseen but potent.¹² In the edit, heavy, dark, looming images repeat, flowing both forwards and backwards. Nearly everything has been slowed down and many

¹¹ From “Fugitive indigeneity: Reclaiming the terrain of decolonial struggle through Indigenous Art” by Jarrett Martineau and Eric Ritskes in *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, Vol. 3, No. 1., Spring 2014.

¹² The majority of footage included in *future ready (2022)* was filmed on Bowen Island. Additional filming locations are listed at the end of this document.

images overlay each other. An expressionless face blinks slowly at the viewer, their head cut awkwardly by the frame. The specificity of my facial features are somewhat lost, however the shape of my eyes and facial lines stand out. These features are those that are the most like my mother's. The vagueness of my expression, when paired with other imagery and soundscape, I feel implies an otherworldly almost spirit-like encounter. My colleague Eliot White-Hill commented that he felt as though he was looking at a spirit, and at something he maybe should not be. This was the reaction I had hoped to invoke.

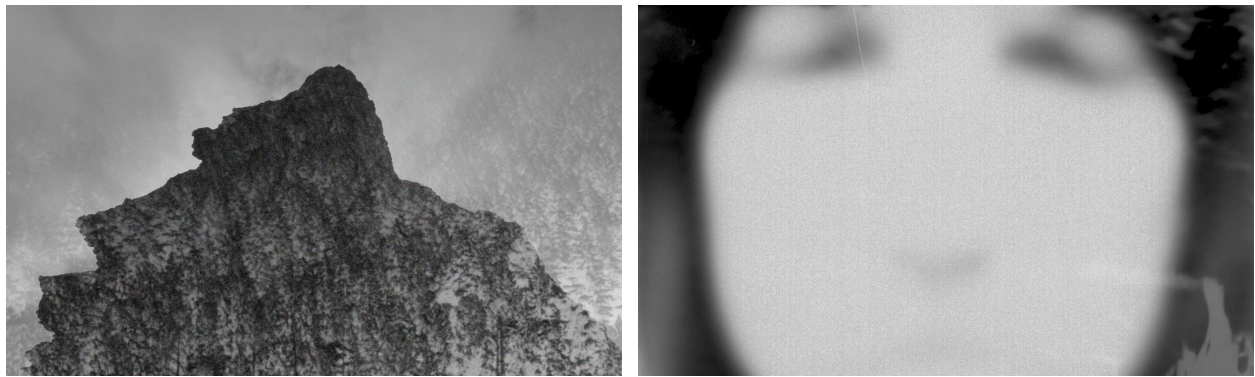


Fig 21 & 22. KJ Edwards, *future ready*, 2022. 16mm stills

For the soundscape I layered my own pre-recorded atmospheres with other licensed materials. I was inspired by the late composer Jóhann Jóhannsson's work on *Arrival* (Dir. Denis Villeneuve, 2016), which is one of my favourite films and is based on an incredible short story by Ted Chiang, *Story of Your Life*. Jóhannsson's soundscape is made up of highly processed, compressed ethereal vocals and effects, informed by whale song. The musical themes are some of the most beautiful I have ever heard. My own composition is far less complex, but still reaching for that sense of the sublime. I sought out deep water and wind recordings and whale cries, and I adjusted their pitch and looped them. I also utilized a sound byte of a submarine alarm that is of a somewhat off-putting quality. It causes slight discomfort but not enough that the listener will tune out. I want the audience to feel as though they are in the presence of an energy that could, at any moment, turn on them, but never does. A powerful energy, connected to nature, that should not be underestimated.

dawson film lab

In September of 2022 I boarded a plane bound for Dawson City, Yukon, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Territory, with a Bolex in hand to attend the Dawson Film Lab,¹³ a ten day analogue residency focused on eco processing techniques, held by The Klondike Institute of Art & Culture. The program was facilitated by filmmaker and producer of the Dawson City International Short Film Festival, Dan Sokolowski, who brought in Ontario-born filmmaker, photographer and educator Philip Hoffman, who specializes in analogue production. From the moment the lab began, there was a sense of film family between all of the participants, mirroring that same sense of community present during the Colour Reversal Program. After a long summer of filming mostly on my own, while doing solo processing in the evenings, it felt like coming home again, to work collaboratively with other analogue filmmakers.



Fig 23. Annie Kierans, *Dawson Film Lab*, 2022. Digital photograph.

Fig 24. KJ Edwards, *Castlerock (YT)*, 2022. Digital photograph.

During the Dawson Film Lab we foraged for plant material on the land. We took a trip on the Top of the World Highway, which leads to Alaska (USA). Located in a valley flanked by low-lying mountains, atop absolutely stunning tundra, is a special site known to locals as “Castle Rock.” A large formation of fieldstone left behind by the transference

¹³ I would like to thank the Klondike Institute of Art & Culture, the Indigenous Screen Office, and the Canada Council for the Arts for their support of my participation in the 2022 Dawson Film Lab.

of glaciers long ago.¹⁴ The ground surrounding the site was covered in a variety of plants, mosses, mushrooms, and wild cranberries. The air was fresh and there was a persistent mist that held low along the horizon. I was speechless, having never seen the boreal forest, with plateaus and mountain ranges, up close as an adult. I had lived in the Yukon as a baby and many of my parent's photographs are from that time, but I had not been back since. At that moment I knew that something serendipitous was taking place and that filming there was special.

I had brought along tobacco to make offerings, but I was delighted to discover that the program provided tobacco for the cohort. Dan offered insight to those who did not already hold the practice about the kinds of offerings they should make in respect to the land and in respect to the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in peoples. He also checked in with me in regards to my own practice, which was aligned with the information that he held. The most important part of respecting the land in this context is never forcing a piece of a plant to come off, the plant should never be ripped or tugged at with force. I always hold a piece in my hand and give energy toward the plant by asking: "Do you want to come with me?" If the piece comes off with ease, then it is okay to take. Offer the tobacco in thanks. But if the piece is reluctant, you should leave it alone and move onto a different part of the plant or a different plant altogether. And no more than a few pieces should come from one individual plant, ever. Spreading your foraging out over more areas is paramount. Taking too much can kill the plant or impede growth. It takes more time, but part of having a connection to the land requires slowing down and cultivating patience. I was struck by the care that the other participants took making their offerings as they went along. It meant a lot, as the only Indigenous person in the cohort, to witness genuine respect from the group. And this level of care was sustained throughout our days together in the lab, sharing space, filming, and foraging.

Once we completed collecting for the day, Hoffman demonstrated how to make a phytogram recipe with washing soda and ascorbic acid dissolved into water. The plants,

¹⁴ I included a digital clip of Castle Rock shot on iPhone 12 Pro in *future ready* (2022), which I spent more time finessing upon my return from the Yukon, prior to the State of Practice Exhibition installation.

which we soaked in the developer, retained the liquid, so when placed on the film, their shape was imprinted on the emulsion. This required the film to be unspooled out in broad daylight. We held down strips of film with rocks and placed our plant materials down. They had to be set in the sun for one hour, after which we then bagged the film strips and set them for three days in a salt-fix solution, in closed buckets, once back at the lab. For developing we experimented with different plant types. The only way to know what kind of result each plant would produce was to test each of them individually; the same plant species might contain different levels of phytochemicals depending on the specific climate, soil, and season. My favourite was pine, which produced a natural purple tint on the film.

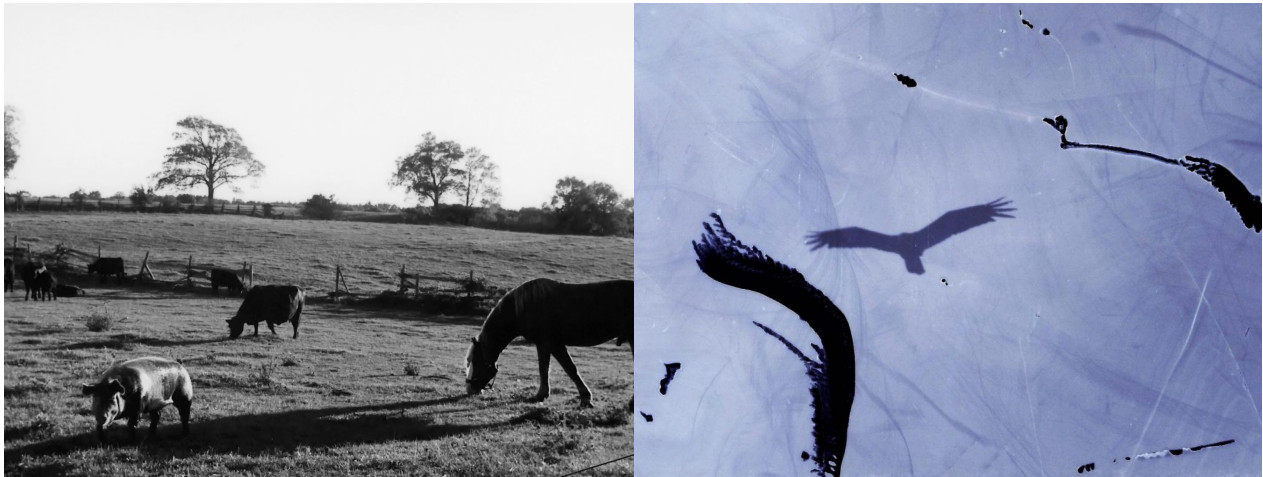


Fig 25 & 26. Philip Hoffman, *vulture*, 2019. 16mm stills.

During the workshop Hoffman showed us one of his most recent well-known works *vulture* (2019), which was filmed over several years on farmland that he occupies near Kitchener-Waterloo, known as The Film Farm. Slow movements of farm animals are held in long static shots with slow zooms in toward them. The voices of a child and Hoffman discuss the vultures circling above the other animals, which appear partway through the film. Hoffman uses a high contrast B&W stock and both cold and warm tints to produce a series of beautiful, painterly images. *vulture* (2019) focuses solely on non-human forms. As a viewer, this moves me to inquire why one might decide to exclude images of people while including human voices? How does this impact the

viewer? For me, it made me feel as though I was in a memory or dream without the conscious ability to control the navigation of it. I wanted to see the faces of those speaking, however I was denied. With the optical focus on animal life, how is this desire for connection transferred to them? The viewer, like the voices, observes and contemplates the animals' activities, without direct interference. *vulture* positions other forms of life centre stage. Hoffman noted that this film was particularly important to his practice because the developer was made from plants on the same land where the images were shot and processed. The film is "of a place" that is dear to him, therefore meaningful in a multitude of ways. "What I tend to do is collect images over a long period of time...the images sort of tell me which way to go. I don't really have a plan." (Hoffman, Norton). For me, foraging, offering tobacco, filming, and developing out on the land in the Yukon was meaningful too, to have the land and the experience of this lab present in my images both optically and materially.

konnorónhkwa: flowers & phytograms

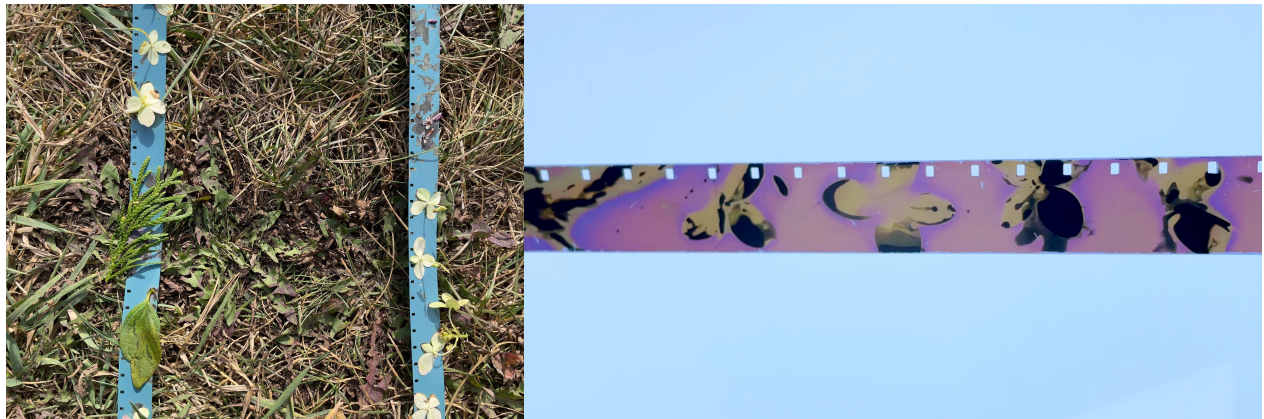


Fig 31 & 32. KJ Edwards, *Phytograms*, 2022. Digital photographs.

During my Fall 2022 research, I visited my family and friends in Alberta after not being able to see them for nearly a year. I pre-purchased as much film stock as I could and set out on my travels with the viewfinder-less Bolex in tow.¹⁵ I spent most of the trip at my sister's house in the countryside near Calahoo, Alberta, which is in Treaty 6 Territory, the traditional territory of the Nehiyaw (Cree), Denesuliné (Dene), Nakota Sioux (Stoney), Anishinaabe (Saulteaux) and Niitsitapi (Blackfoot) Nations; and within the Métis Nation of Alberta Region 4. This territory has also been home to the Michel First Nation, a community of mixed Kanien'kehá:ka, Nehiyaw (Cree), and Métis families. I asked my niblings Emma, Ethan, and Everett, to help me forage for plant material to make two rolls of phytograms. They were very excited to learn. As we foraged, I passed along tobacco teachings and showed them how to know if the plant would like them to pick it or not. This was the first time that they would hear these teachings. We were brought up Catholic, like many people from Kahnawá:ke and Longueuil. We were christened at the St. Francis Xavier Mission Catholic Church on the reservation. I decided to shift my value system and learn about Mohawk traditions about ten years ago, in mourning my mother's passing. It was through ceremony and prayer that I finally made huge leaps spiritually and emotionally. And now more of our nuclear and extended family are doing the same. And so we offered tobacco to the plants and surrounded my sister's home with these good intentions. While their young

¹⁵ Lindsay McIntyre graduated me back to a viewfinder, however I gave that camera one more try.

attention spans did not last the entire phytogram session, they really enjoyed the foraging and offering activities. They also managed to place a few of the developer soaked plants down before becoming distracted. Eventually the phytograms were ready to wash and I placed them in a salt water fix for three days, in complete darkness this time. By leaving them this long, the salt shifted the emulsion into vibrant pinks, purples, and oranges.

When I watch this footage back, it is imbued with that experience of teaching and exchange with my family. There is a new layer of meaning present, akin to what Phil Hoffman described in relation to the making of *vulture* (2019). I also think of the work of Siku Allooloo, an Inuk, Haitian, and Taíno artist and filmmaker based on Vancouver Island. Allooloo's *Spirit Emulsion* (2022) is a short documentary filmed on Super8 and processed with a flower-based developer. Made in partnership with Akia Films and Lantern Films, Allooloo received guidance through Vancouver's Cineworks and Echo Park Film Centre North to create this beautiful homage to her mother, activist Marie-Helene Laraque, and to Taíno culture. We are introduced to Laraque's story through a blending of Allooloo's personal archival photographs and footage of flowers. The gentle flow of the flower imagery signals that of a memory, and as the viewer I am reminded of what it is like to be enveloped in that kind of unconditional love.

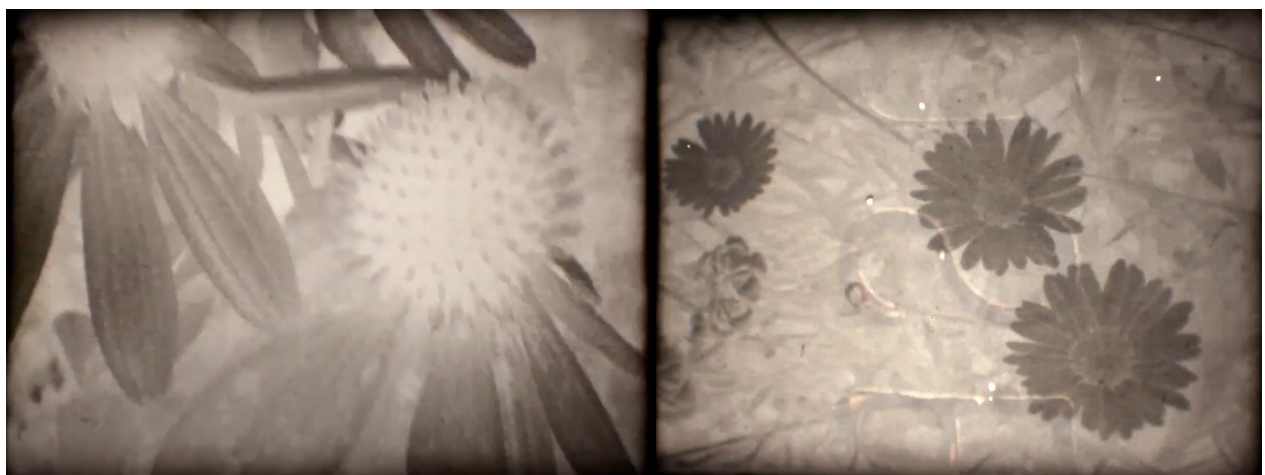


Fig 33 & 34. Siku Allooloo, *Spirit Emulsion*, 2022. Super 8 stills.

During a Q&A, after a screening, which took place at the 2022 Skoden Indigenous Film Festival, Allooloo spoke to her practice, and mentioned that forming a connection to the land, where medicines and plants from that land were integrated into her process and footage, was important to her culturally and spiritually. She approached the film and the making of the film as a form of prayer. This really stuck with me. I thought back to her words and *Spirit Emulsion* (2022) while in the Yukon. I also thought back to Lindsay McIntyre's *In The Backyarden* (2016), and the ways in which she often works with her family and their voices. Family is such a huge element in both of their work. It felt like coming full circle for me to have made the phytograms with my own nibblings, while making offerings. The footage holds such special meaning for me now, weaving connections to family, prayer, and place.

future ready: reach

Expanded cinema refers to different moving image projected events that go beyond the more formal seated spectator experience of viewing a film in a traditional theatre. These events most often include live performance, while offering the technical or material aspects openly for the viewer's observation. Being trained in commercial production, I had no knowledge of this categorization prior to my thesis research. And while I had watched individual 16mm films via projection, the world of analogue performance was entirely new to me. Through the analogue film community in Vancouver, I have since been introduced to expanded cinema works in many forms that have reshaped my relationship to the medium; in particular, the *Live and Expanded* (2022) event, held at The Cinematheque. With projector performances by Lindsay McIntyre and Alex Mackenzie, and live sound by Peter Bussigel and Clare Kenny, this show changed the way that I think about cinema. McIntyre ran six 16mm projectors with hundreds of loops that she changed out one by one on the fly, rather than using an individually spooled film, run linearly from start to finish. The audience navigated multiple screens at once, as soundbytes accompanied visuals from the Fairy Creek blockade. It was like being inside a tesseract, with all time being observable at once, and jumping from observation to observation. Mackenzie ran a single, handmade, hand-cranked 35mm projector capable of moving forward and backward at varying speeds, creating a meditative flow. The experience was so immersive, and far less passive for me as an audience member than with a traditional screening. The addition of live sound made me feel as though I was watching a cinematic dance between the artists, themselves, and their materials.

I wanted to move beyond single channel work for my next iteration of *future ready*. And so, McIntyre provided guidance on how to navigate the different equipment and importantly, how to manage running the continuous analogue loops without burning through the film. I filmed one final time without a viewfinder and that footage was of a quality that we felt ready to graduate me back to using an optical assist. The rural footage of grasses, plants, and horses were taken in Calahoo, near where my mother is buried, and they are reminiscent of my mother's own photographs. I grew up

in Alberta, and for me, these images link my coming of age with her coming of age in a sense. I was also inspired by the farmland and farm life observations of *vulture* (dir. Phil Hoffman, 2019).



Fig 35. Beatrice Melody Sidon, *Kahnawá:ke*, 1970's. Analogue photograph.

Fig 36. Beatrice Melody Sidon, *Kakisa River (NWT)*, 1982. Analogue photograph.

I brought all of the footage I had filmed since the beginning of this research together with the phytograms and worked them into *future ready: reach (2022)*, a multi-projector installation that included three digital loops on digital projectors and three 16mm loops running on analogue projectors, with an overall runtime of 00:04:44. *future ready: reach (2022)* is a temporal observation of power and spirit, reflecting on the relational, the tethering of animal, earthly and human energies through moments of connection, both calm and chaotic. I wanted to make the viewer question whether they are in a dream, a memory, the present or future moment, or all of the above. The haptic nature of the images lent to a dreamlike quality. In the edited projections, I oscillated the footage between their positive and negative formats. With my images scattered across various surfaces and walls, with synchronous and asynchronous footage flickering, changing, and repeating; I created a physical representation of what dreaming and remembering feels like. The editing, with quick cuts, slow motion, and overlays, is reflective of how my neurodivergent brain processes and disseminates information, out of order, and with repetition related to higher interest images.



Fig 37 & 38. KJ Edwards, *future ready: reach*, 2022. [16mm installation] documentation.

Something about the sound of the projectors and the smell of the heated celluloid enhanced the viewing experience significantly. For many, it brought them awareness of their body in space. I watched over the loops while viewers experienced the work, and though I would not consider this a performance, it perhaps emulated aspects of an expanded cinema event since the viewers took interest in me being there. There is much about our society, and capitalism, that encourages overall passivity, cognitive dissonance and sleepwalking through life. Perhaps this is why there is a resurgence of interest in analogue and hybrid media. Artists and audiences are hungry for a more involved experience. And as dreamers, Elders like Kevin Deer encourage us not to be passive. In order to be engaged in sleep, we must be engaged in waking life. We must take daily action with prayer, with healing our body, mind, spirit, and emotions, so that we are better able to engage with the spirit world. Throughout my research I have found that I remember more of my dreams and also more of my past. Through cognitive exercises, attentiveness, and curiosity, so much more has become accessible.

future ready: cusp

I had the opportunity to view *Road Trip*, an exhibition exploring the past and present through works related to the “road trip” presented at the Alberta Gallery of Art (AGA) in early 2023. This exhibition, curated by Catherine Crowston, featured nearly one hundred artworks from the AGA Collection. Included in the collection are works by Terrance Houle, a Blackfoot and Ojibway filmmaker and multimedia artist from Kainai First Nation and the Sandy Bay Reservation. I have been a long time fan of his photographic works related to spirits and plasma, showcased on the first floor of the gallery. Installed as part of *Road Trip* was an iteration of Houle’s *Your Dreams Are Killing My Culture* (2009); where a projection of three Indigenous people is reflected off fifteen rearview mirrors hanging at different angles. I was blown away by the multi-layered meaning contained in both the content and form. Houle’s use of rearview mirrors made me think of many things, but primarily of the trafficking of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit peoples (MMIW2S).



Fig 39 & 40. KJ Edwards. Terrance Houle, *Your Dreams Are Killing My Culture*, 2009.

[Mixed-media] documentation.

This work also references capitalism, consumption, and the oil + gas industry. These oppressive forces fracture the present and leave a shattered past, and this is represented so well through the mirrors and the way in which they disperse the projection into parts. It is through the presence of these unexpected materials and this fracturing of the image that this work moves beyond a single-channel projection.

Houle's story is told through his material choices that engage a viewer moving through 3D space. The interactivity of walking through, and at times obstructing, the projection, and viewing thematic elements as very tangible objects, implicates the viewer in the work, and by extension the colonial processes that are harming our people.



Fig 41. Michael Love. KJ Edwards, *future ready: cusp*, 2023. [16mm installation] documentation.

For the next iteration of *future ready: reach* (2022), I sought to expand on this notion of fracturing. Installing in the RBC Media Gallery at Emily Carr University of Art + Design meant that I had three bare walls to play with, in a smaller enclosed space, that would provide a more immersive experience for the viewer. I added an additional analogue projector, for a total of four. I placed two in the centre of the space, projecting onto opposite walls. One played a colour loop of cedar from Stanley Park, the other, of water from Bowen Island. I placed the other two 16mm projectors opposite one another

along both corners of the central wall that played the same loop of an extreme closeup of a tree. Lindsay McIntyre lent me three 37mm projector lenses so that the images could be made larger, which made kerning and distorting the corner projectors more profound, suggesting a stretching of time or a temporal breach. I decided to have one central feed, with a distinct edit, and then to have two parallel feeds on either side with matching edits. At times the central and side feeds come into sync and move back out again. This suggests a convergence of real time and dreamtime; of past, present, and future time.

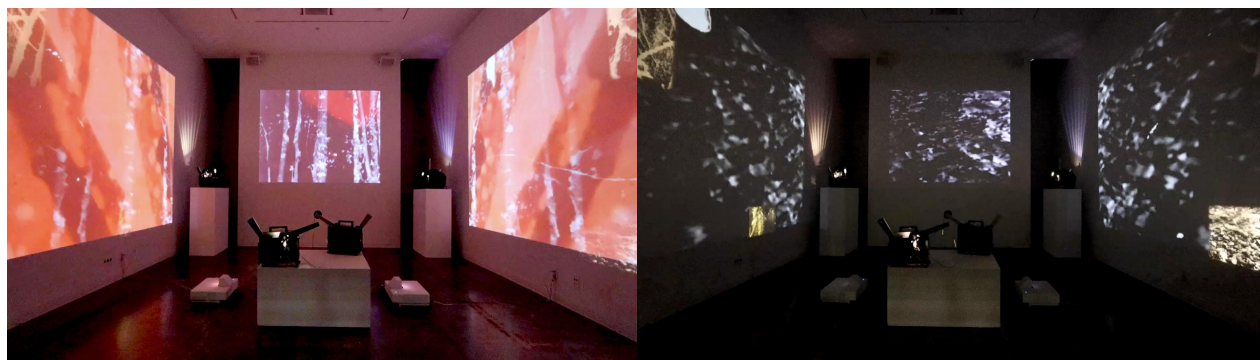


Fig 42 & 43. KJ Edwards, *future ready: cusp*, 2023. [16mm installation] documentation.

All three feeds utilize footage from my combined film shoots over my two years of research. The main projection is an extension from the original central feed, which emphasizes the importance of the phytograms, my blinking portrait, and Castle Rock. The side feeds include this imagery as well, at times, in support of the central feed. Overall, *future ready: cusp* (2023) weaves together a non-linear, rhythmic suggestion of a dream or memory and a scattering of time throughout a seven minute loop, with individually timed analogue loops. Keeping in line with the last iteration, it is a temporal observation of power and spirit, reflecting on the relational, the tethering of animal, earthly and human energies through moments of connection, both calm and chaotic. Quick cuts and slow motion shots of eagles, salmon, moose, and snow-capped mountains call out to viewers with urgency, to reconsider their relationship to the

natural world. But what does it mean to look at these images mediated through multiple technologies?

Filming these animals, out on the land, was a very different experience than watching them on screen. My friend and colleague Byron Dueck took me up to Squamish Territory on two occasions to witness the salmon run. We traversed along the Squamish River excitedly, and I made tobacco offerings along the way. Watching the salmon up close was quite moving. I had no idea just how many there would be. At the end of the run, closer to December, the salmon die after spawning. They then become nourishment for eagles and other nearby animals. Our second trip we saw quite literally hundreds of eagles. However, watching the footage as part of this installation, with the hum of the projectors, the smells of the nearby cafeteria, while enclosed in a white box gallery, changes the meaning. Even watching the footage back on my personal computer made me hyper-aware of how disconnected I am from nature and animal life in my day-to-day experiences. I thought of climate change, the killing of salmon, and the disruption of the run through pollution from extraction projects. I thought of the harms of fish farming. Watching the eagles and moose, I thought of their power and importance to Indigenous people. I hope that they are able to survive the human interference that is harming their habitats.



Fig 44 & 45. KJ Edwards, *future ready: cusp*, 2023. 16mm stills.

The experience of sitting in *future ready: cusp (2023)* is both calming and anxiety inducing all at once, which was my intention. The sound of the projectors has a kind of lulling effect, putting some people into a meditative state. Other viewers described being overwhelmed in the space or feeling both things simultaneously. My sound design, which was somewhat lost due to a lack of forethought on my part during the install process, was further inspired by Darlene Naponse's *Stellar (2022)*, which is a film about native love, climate disaster, and acceptance. The film is set in limbo, where spirits take up shelter in a bar while the earth resets itself. Characters come and go, some restless, others not. Great storms, fires, and floods can be seen through the windows, taking over the cityscape. But the two protagonists wait out the change, falling in love and making the most of it. They accept the new path that the earth sets for mankind. While my work is far less conceptually specific, I utilized sound effects like earthquakes, volcanos, and avalanches, to create a four part cycle. The Air segment begins with light exterior ambient sounds overtop of images of mountain ranges, eagles, tall grass, and grazing horses. The phytograms appear as a warning signal, then the images begin to distort, moving into the Earth segment. Low rumbling risers and an earthquake rumble are slowly introduced overtop of images of the moose and eagles. My portrait flashes, signaling the start of the Fire segment, where the coloured phytograms overlay trees, suggesting that they are burning. I then bring in volcano and avalanche sound effects, while whale, elk, and moose cries fade in and out. The loop comes to a climactic point, when my eyes stare at the viewer from behind the red abraded blaze. Then comes the aftermath (of the change), when the earth rebuilds itself. This is the Water segment, with water being the power behind all life on earth. The sound design calms down. Whale calls, rather than cries, sit quietly underneath a deep ocean ambience, suggesting a great flood from the melting of glaciers has cleansed the land and that life will continue on. These sounds are paired with images of water, salmon, Castle Rock, and flashing blue spirit light. This segment suggests hope: the hope that as a result of whatever change is coming, that life will continue, in some form. The soundscape floats above the white noise of the analogue projectors, however with the next iteration I hope to put more technical focus on the overall auditory experience.

the world you make

My whole life I have collected, cataloged, and sought to harness and recreate the essence of my dreams, memories, and ideations, in response to my curiosities, joys, and grief. I came into this research having been trained to administer blueprints for final outcomes, and letting go into a process of allowing things to unfold step-by-step has been a real journey. The risks and rewards have been incalculable. Celluloid film changes over time; it is like a living being. The deterioration is a process that can be stalled, but never stopped. And outcomes may be desired but are never guaranteed. And yet it is this existential indexical bond between the subject, the light, and the emulsion, and this ephemerality of the material, much like mortality, that makes the beauty of analogue possible. And it is through inconsistencies and imperfections that the work really takes form.

My storytelling abilities have been challenged and reshaped by this experience. Analogue workflows and my neurodivergent mind get along well together, and editing sessions can go on for hours without loss of interest on my part. Through incorporating aspects of expanded cinema, I am able to engage the viewer in a new way, by implicating them and asking more of them by way of adapting my installation of media. I have developed a sense of independence and confidence through taking on this craft and by allowing myself to manage all roles of production. With these kinds of technical skills established, filmmakers of all walks of life can utilize this workflow to tell their stories authentically, and with an aesthetic edge that does not require high end special effects or software. What we need is more cameras in the hands of Indigenous creatives: “The age of *consultation* is over.” (Wente, *Playback Magazine*). The materiality of analogue film has a lot to offer. And whether the story is a re-telling of a traditional oral history or a dream, whether it is a tale that explores traumas, joys, or futurisms, or all of the above: this workflow is empowering.

And though my graduate research journey has come to an end, I will continue to nurture these same conditions of making throughout my practice. I will share the knowledges that have been passed along to me by my mentors and colleagues with

others, fostering community and building film families along the way. I am so grateful to have had the privilege of going on this creative journey. Originally in Kanien'keha there was no word for goodbye: we said *Ó:nen:ki'wáhi* (till I see you again, dear one).¹⁶ So, *niá:wen* (thank you) for reading. And *Ó:nen:ki'wáhi!*



Fig 46. Michael Edwards, *KJ Edwards & Beatrice Melody Sidon, Kananaskis, 1990's*. Digital photograph

Fig 47. Unknown Photographer, *Beatrice Melody Sidon and KJ Edwards, 1990's*. Digital photograph.

¹⁶ Recent interpretations include the English word “bye”: *Ónen:ki'wáhi* (Bye for now, dear one). Today some people might just say *Ónen* (now, then) and nod or gesture.

territorial filming acknowledgements

(the) untethering (2021)

- 16mm (Bolex, Kodak 7207, 2021) colour cinematography by KJ Edwards filmed on unceded and stolen xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Territory in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.
- 16mm (Bolex, Kodak 7222, 2017) B&W cinematography by KJ Edwards, featuring Natalie O'Neill, filmed on the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, Anishnabeg, Chippewa, Haundenosaunee and Wendat Peoples in Toronto, Ontario, Canada.
- Digital cinematography (2019), featuring Levi Marshal, by Nendujan Ratnarajah. This footage was filmed for *Something Along Those Lines* (2019), a documentary directed, produced, and edited by KJ Edwards, and filmed on the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit, Anishnabeg, Chippewa, Haundenosaunee and Wendat Peoples in Toronto, Ontario, Canada.
- Digital scans by Toronto Metropolitan University and Niagara Custom Lab.

istén:’a (2023)

- 16mm (Bolex, Kodak 7207, 2021-22) colour cinematography by KJ Edwards filmed on unceded and stolen xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Territory in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.
- Digital cinematography (iPhone 12 Pro, 2022) by KJ Edwards filmed on the traditional territory of the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council and the Kwanlin Dün First Nation in Whitehorse, Yukon, Canada.
- Digital cinematography (iPhone 12 Pro, 2022) by KJ Edwards filmed in Treaty 6 Territory and within the Métis Nation of Alberta Region 4; the traditional territory of the Nehiyaw (Cree), Denesuliné (Dene), Nakota Sioux (Stoney), Anishinaabe (Saulteaux) and Niitsitapi (Blackfoot) Nations in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.
- Digital scans by Niagara Custom Lab.

future ready (2022)

- 16 mm (Bolex, 3378E, 2022) B&W cinematography by KJ Edwards filmed on unceded and stolen xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Territory in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada; and on unceded and stolen Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Territory on Bowen Island, British Columbia, Canada.
- Digital cinematography (iPhone 12 Pro, 2022) by KJ Edwards filmed on traditional Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Territory near Dawson City, Yukon, Canada.
- Digital scans by Filmhouse.

future ready: reach (2022)

- 16 mm (Bolex, 3378E, 2022) B&W cinematography by KJ Edwards filmed on unceded and stolen xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Territory in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada; and on unceded and stolen Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Territory on Bowen Island, British Columbia, Canada.
- 16mm (Bolex, Kodak 7207, 2021) colour cinematography by KJ Edwards filmed on unceded and stolen xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Territory in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.
- 16mm colour and B&W phytogram footage created by KJ Edwards, with help from Emma, Ethan, and Everett Patrick, on Treaty 6 Territory: the traditional territory of the Nehiyaw (Cree), Denesuliné (Dene), Nakota Sioux (Stoney), Anishinaabe (Saulteaux) and Niitsitapi (Blackfoot) Nations; and within the Métis Nation of Alberta Region 4, in Calahoo, Alberta, Canada. This territory has also

been home to the Michel First Nation, a community of mixed Kanien'kehá:ka, Nehiyaw (Cree) and Métis families.

- Digital scans by Filmhouse and Niagara Custom Lab.

future ready: cusp (2023)

- 16 mm (Bolex, 3378E, 2022) B&W cinematography by KJ Edwards filmed on unceded and stolen x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səlilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Territory in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada; and on unceded and stolen Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səlilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Territory on Bowen Island, British Columbia, Canada.
- 16mm (Bolex, Kodak 7207, 2021) colour cinematography by KJ Edwards filmed on unceded and stolen x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səlilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Territory in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.
- 16 mm (Bolex, 3378E, 2022), (Bolex, Kodak 7266, 2022) B&W cinematography by KJ Edwards filmed on Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) Territory in Squamish, British Columbia, Canada.
- Digital cinematography (iPhone 12 Pro, 2022) by KJ Edwards filmed on traditional Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Territory near Dawson City, Yukon, Canada.
- 16mm (Bolex, 3378E, 2022) B&W cinematography by KJ Edwards filmed on Treaty 6 Territory: the traditional territory of the Nehiyaw (Cree), Denesuliné (Dene), Nakota Sioux (Stoney), Anishinaabe (Saulteaux) and Niitsitapi (Blackfoot) Nations; and within the Métis Nation of Alberta Region 4, in Calahoo, Alberta, Canada. This territory has also been home to The Michel First Nation, a community of mixed Kanien'kehá:ka, Nehiyaw (Cree), and Métis families.
- 16mm colour and B&W phytogram footage created by KJ Edwards, with help from Emma, Ethan and Everett Patrick, on Treaty 6 Territory the traditional territory of the Nehiyaw (Cree), Denesuliné (Dene), Nakota Sioux (Stoney), Anishinaabe (Saulteaux) and Niitsitapi (Blackfoot) Nations; and within the Métis Nation of Alberta Region 4, in Calahoo, Alberta, Canada. This territory has also been home to the Michel First Nation, a community of mixed Kanien'kehá:ka, Nehiyaw (Cree) and Métis families.
- 16mm (Bolex, Kodak 7207, 2022) colour and 16mm (Bolex, 3378E, 2022) B&W by KJ Edwards filmed in Treaty 6 Territory: the traditional territory of the Nehiyaw (Cree), Denesuliné (Dene), Nakota Sioux (Stoney), Anishinaabe (Saulteaux) and Niitsitapi (Blackfoot) Nations; and within the Métis Nation of Alberta Region 4, in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.
- Digital scans by Filmhouse, Niagara Custom Lab, and Frame Discreet.

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