

PC Interview FINAL

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00:06 Kade Twist: My name's Kade Twist. I'm a Cherokee. I was raised in Bakersfield, California, and my family's from northeast Oklahoma.

00:14 Skawennati: Thank you.

00:16 Raven Chacon: I'm Raven Chacon. I grew up in Chinle, Arizona, on a Navajo Indian reservation. I live in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

00:25 Cristobal Martinez: My name's Cristóbal Martínez, and I'm from northern New Mexico. I'm mestizo, and I grew up in little pueblito, called Alcalde, New Mexico.

00:38 Skawennati: I think your name, especially for an indigenous artist collective, is really provocative, exciting, different. And I'd like you to tell me where it came from.

00:50 KT: If you talk to my wife, Andrea Hanley, she'll say that she named Postcommodity. So we were sitting around this table. There was a group of us. I don't know who came up with it, but I'll just say, she might have come up with it. [chuckle] But, you know, what it meant at that time and what it means now are pretty similar. She was referring to the, "beyond the commodities," beyond... As a way of thinking beyond what is the existing contemporary indigenous discourses. Moving from beyond those, conceptually, esthetically. But it's also a term that's used in cultural anthropology for the transformative experience that individuals have with products, especially beyond the intended lifespan of products. And then it's also a term, an economic term, for postcommodities that are traded internationally. So it's kind of loaded. It can be positioned in a variety of ways, but possibly, right in the middle of all three.

02:16 RC: There's another one, too, and that's... In the United States, if you live on the reservation, you're able to get commodities. There's powdered milk, and cheese, and...

02:32 CM: Flour.

02:32 RC: Flour, and those very basic ingredients with this white label, black and white label, very generic. And you're able to go pick those up, and get those for free, and live off of those.

02:48 Skawennati: As part of treaties?

02:50 RC: I, I'd suppose so. But yeah, yeah, it's supposed to be. I mean, you're supposed to get healthcare. But you get the very minimum of that, and so... There's a little bit of humour in there with the name, too. Maybe we're able to move away from that a little bit and try to make a living being artists.

03:11 CM: I think of these white foods like sugar, and flour... I feel like there's another one in there. But to have given rise to high rates of diabetes and disease, and diseases in our communities.

And so, when I think about what you said, what you both said about commodities, and postcommodity. Postcommodity makes me think of the future, makes me think of a time when people's relevancy or value is no longer judged by their capacity to consume.

04:02 Skawennati: That's what I feel. That's exactly how it feels to me, that term.

04:07 CM: Yeah.

04:07 Skawennati: With all that richness that you described, as well. But you just nailed why it excited me so much, I think.

04:18 KT: There's the academic slang or jargon, post-this, post-that. And it's just a way to riff on that, or hack that a little bit, and do that. Reposition it.

04:28 Skawennati: I'd like to hear you... I mean you have covered it a bit, but I'm gonna tease it out, push you a bit more, is sort of: Why do you think, why was that so different for a Native collective to use a word like that? Or did you think that?

04:43 RC: I don't think there was any thought like that. Just wanted something that could do a lot like what you were saying, elicit someone's imagination to get them engaged and to use that word as a tool, as an entry point into our work. Something that's not fixed, where there's one definition, one way of thinking about that word, or its connotations. Because it is a term of art that's used in a variety of very specific ways.

05:20 CM: It also... It sets the tone for a lot of things that we're interested in engaging as artists, and studying and researching and critiquing. Those are market systems, and speed, multi-nodal networks, and real time media. And so, it positions us in a set of topics and issues that are, that are front and center to life for many people in the world today. So I think that really the name of our collective really helps position us and it's a framework, it's a guiding framework for discourse.

06:17 Skawennati: What will you be making during this residency?

06:20 CM: So we're making a virtual reality experience that we're trying to bring within the visual and experiential aesthetic of our practice, and so we're creating a work that is about an indigenous future that's largely influenced by the systems. Again the market systems, and weapons systems, and communications systems, these types of systems that have influence of growth and change in the region that we're interested in, which is the South-Western United States. And so it's an interesting... Working virtual reality is an interesting problem-space for us because it privileges the experience of the individual. And so we're doing a lot of work and thinking about how we broaden that experience to bring it into a community experience, or the idea that virtual reality or the consequences of virtual reality, the outcomes could be a shared experience amongst many collocated in a space together.

08:00 KT: And the medium is pretty interesting because it's for all the reasons that Cristó talked about, but also because it's such an idealized medium. It's a medium that still hasn't sunk its teeth

into the pop culture imagination. And it's almost venerated in sci-fi aesthetics and in storytelling and gaming and things like that, so it's nice to take something like that and hack at it and make it Indian, really make it a tool for storytelling, for conveying narratives, for positioning metaphor and things of that nature. That's the challenge, so it's really great working with new forms of media to, to challenge yourselves as a group, to learn as a group and to push storytelling in a new direction to push art making in a new direction. Not like we're by any means the first to do this, we're about 15 years late for that, 20 years. But it's still relatively a young medium, and it's one that you can start seeing it's potential for mass communications, virtual meetings and things like that. It's on the cusp of being fully commercialized and monetized and brought into productivity workflows, so it's nice to get at it before it's become a standard in that way and to do whatever we can to just reposition it, just a little bit, so that there's space for artistic discourses.

09:56 Skawennati: Really, yeah it's kinda your pre-commodity here.

[laughter]

10:01 CM: One thing that's interesting about this project is that typically with our work, where we tend to focus on the idea of an indigenous re-imagined ceremony, or sacred spaces. Mainly spaces where people come together to think about their physical relationship with each other in a shared collocated environment, or that they're in a relationship to a place and that there's a narrative associated with a physicality of being or being in a space. And so this is a challenge for us, because when we're working with virtual reality that it actually, it goes in another direction where we're working primarily with the idea of embodying a digitally mediated space or the idea... It's an idea that's pushing toward human experiences that are, in many ways, maybe disembodied from the physical reality in order to enter a digital reality.

11:28 CM: And so there's interesting tensions in that, because we're still in our bodies and we're still in a physical space. I think that those tensions are, we as a collective, are going to naturally exploit those tensions because we're trying to push it out from being technology that privileges individual experience with the idea that person privately engages in the world through goggles by trying to explode it outward in that that person experiencing a virtual world is having... That that experience has consequences in the physical world and that those consequences can be observed, that those consequences are a part of something bigger that has a real physical reality.

12:35 KT: I think in that way it's meditating on what a experiential environment really means. It's almost a way for studying and creating an installation environment. Kind of like how writing a screenplay might be a way to study for writing a novel. This is a way of really thinking deeply about an environment because you can step into it, into that space as you're developing it. And when you go into an installation environment, you're kind of stuck with your game plan that you've come to. You can make modifications on the fly but for the most part, you're stuck with the framework you've brought to that space and you're stuck with the physical space that you're working within that you're transforming. So, there's that quality that really attracts me to the medium as well.

13:45 RC: I think even more than being stuck in a space, it's the time that you're stuck in, this timeframe or this duration and what's interesting about the virtual reality experience is that even

though there might be a duration, that time is very distorted in a different way than you might find yourself in an installation environment especially because in the case of what we're doing, we're giving the illusion that you're being guided through something but at the same time there's these other performative things that you realize that you're doing to the outside audience or the outside installation environment. So we're having a lot of fun and trying to design ways of disorientating you more within that environment or allowing you to be a performer as well in two places at once.

14:44 KT: Classic example of this, we were watching a piece when we were doing demos trying to get familiar with the medium. We all experienced a piece, neither one of us... We all had different ideas of how long it was, like I thought it was 10 minutes or something, then so we were all listing different times, it turned out to be four minutes. And we just couldn't nail that down. And we're disciplined to think about four minutes, because that's like the length of a pop song. So it was really, really strange that we couldn't even grasp at that.

15:23 RC: I guessed correctly.

[laughter]

15:27 RC: We did have three different times.

[laughter]

15:32 RC: Music guy, you know.

15:34 KT: But also Postcommodity has had an interest for a long time in making a work that was very much story telling. Had a beginning and an end and a narrative which you could follow which maybe dealt with history, maybe not, maybe it was a true history or a shared history or a history coming from different vantage points. We thought we... There's some film projects, film and video projects we still wanna do like that and that might be a continuation of this, but where we're finding ourselves now is working on some pieces, different pieces which all combine themselves into this big story we're trying to tell about the possible future history of New Mexico.

16:25 Skawennati: Would you give us a little bit more about that story right now. I think it'll be really interesting for the final video to have this sort of what you think the piece is now and then when you see it again later.

16:40 KT: That's dangerous.

16:41 Skawennati: Yeah, it might be, it might be. You can do with that what you will.

16:46 CM: We can talk a little bit about where we're from and what we're seeing which is really the context. So we're... Raven and I, as we said in our introduction, we were raised in New Mexico and Kade currently lives in New Mexico and so we have this tie to that place, the Northern part of that place. And the Northern part is a very interesting region of the state and it's got a ancient Pueblo history, it has a Spanish Colonial history, it has a history of war between the Pueblo people and the

Spanish. History is interesting because of Pueblo campaigns were successful against the Spanish. It has a history of coalition building and it has a history of immigration of Mestizaje of mixing of peoples, a mixing of cultures.

18:08 CM: And then it has a history of, a nuclear history. Site of the Manhattan Project and development of technologies, energy technologies, computational technologies, laser technologies. And then it has a history of gentrification and commodification of all those things, which is a major economic driver in the region. It's a place of, I think, very great consequence to the broader world, but it's also a microcosm of tensions and struggles. Those tensions and struggles are, in some cases, caused by elements that are situated in time. For example, a Pueblo culture in relationship to a culture of nuclear physicists and how those things dialogue with one another, they connect in time, and they're at the same they're very disjointed by time. And so it causes an interesting... There's like a zeitgeist in that region that is unique. And so I think, we'll try to capture a lot of that in this work.

20:07 RC: I think another part of that too is the different spiritual world views that exist in the region. You have the indigenous traditions and ceremonial part of that. You have the way that the Spanish and the Catholic world view has overlapped with that, and you have in some parts of the state, you have a very odd New Age presence as well, which encroaches into these, but still tries to find I guess, identity within that, even though it's kind of a minority of people who share that world view. And then you have, because of the occupation of a lot of people, at least in that area north of Santa Fe, those who are employed in good jobs come from a science background. So having that world view, not saying that that isn't spiritual, but that's another part that complicates that. Not for better or worse, it's just that it exists. So for me, working on this, it gets me thinking more about that and how that will become some kind of shared culture down the line in this area, in this region.

21:41 KT: And what I think is really interesting about that. I mean, taking everything that Raven and Cristóbal have said so far about New Mexico, think of it in a place with one of the smallest population densities in the lower 48, and one of the most economically challenged. Especially northern New Mexico where we're focusing the narrative on. There is no real economy. The federal government's the largest employer. Local government's the second largest. So you can see there's a... It's not that anything exists in a vacuum, but it exists at slower velocity than what is happening in say, in Montreal where it's a massive city and all those competing interests that are playing out from that massive city. All of that is disaggregated, slowed down, and at the end of the day, the land always wins.

22:47 KT: So, being able to tell the story in that space allows us to critique globalism in a real subtle way. A real nuanced way. And being able to work with two guys that have deep, deep roots in that area to drive a narrative, to come up with those nuanced ways of getting our story across. It's a rich opportunity for us because like what Raven was talking about, we've been working on this idea of a longer form narrative for the story telling aspect, and thinking about larger video projects and things like that. And it's been a challenge for us to come up with a location. And all you have to do is think about home. So two of the three, that is in your blood and I'm a new transplant, so at least I am familiar with the areas now. But I'm becoming more familiar with them through their stories and their histories, and it's really giving me a deep sense of... A deeper sense of knowledge about the place because of that. So it's a really great place for us to create. There's a lot of comfort in that, so it's a great place to collaborate.

24:16 CM: Yeah, it's also good. Like Kade's talking about, what it's like to work with two people who are from there, and it's good to work with someone who has outside eyes too, and he's becoming more and more on the inside as he lives more and more of his life in that region. But what you said is really powerful, the idea of that in New Mexico because, it doesn't have such a robust economic infrastructure, things tend to move slow. Yet, at the same time that they move slow and that exact place where things move slow, people are inventing things that make the world very fast.

25:01 CM: Those types of things are what would create a sense of interest. And although, because you have those types of contrasts, there's a power and a privilege that gets associated with those things, and they have impact and they are the things that force the kind of transformations that Raven is talking about, the idea that there's gonna... This thing is changing and it's gonna lead to something interesting in the future. Those are the things we're theorizing in this work that we're doing with the art.

25:41 RC: So, and having said all that, one might not necessarily know that we're speaking about New Mexico when they experience this thing. We hope that the same story or the same experience, the same story that we're telling could be applied to other places, could be hopefully applied to more regions up here and in Canada, it could be applied to Mexico, other places in the Americas, while at the same maybe it's nowhere. It's a different planet. That's what so neat about this medium is that, and the premise for the work that we're making it for, the exhibition, is that it could be a different planet, it could be in the future, it could be so far in the past, all of that can become blurry, and when you have that freedom to do that, then you can find ways of making it adapt to different situations or have viewers find commonalities within that.

26:49 Skawennati: What is the future in your opinion of indigenous art, sovereignty, ceremony, media, fill in the blank?

27:02 CM: Well, I think we're like the way it's always been. We're constantly trying to make sense of our environment, of the world. So we're involved in, people are involved in cultural production. And so I think that for me, the logic behind that is that ceremony and sovereignty and media and indigenous media is emerging, that we're experiencing a time of emergence and that's always been the case. But it goes back to what Kade was talking about earlier with velocity. I think that's happening faster than ever. I think that's the difference, is that it's happening faster and not only in terms of productivity but the distribution is real time, it's lightning fast. It's really hard to predict exactly what the future is gonna be because we get this trope that the future is now. We hear that trope a lot.

28:32 CM: So it's like in a way, we're kinda caught in it. It just seems exciting all the time that indigenous communities and indigenous peoples, they seem to be bending it more than anything, appropriating and bending the media. So there seems to be a real critical awareness that this stuff is coming from the outside and it does encode all the values of its creators. And so we're like what we've done with cars or other technologies, hacking and modifying those things so that we can bring into focus that just seems to make sense to our peoples. And peoples being diverse. Peoples being groups across lots of diversity.

29:37 KT: I don't know where indigenous art would be going. I have hopes of where I would hope it would go. My hope would be that we stop referencing the outside world and its forces back on us. I think I don't think we've made enough new worlds or new realities. I hope that it doesn't strive to unite and make sense, or unite by a way of making sense, which is contrary to what my friend here said. But I hope it stops making sense so severely that we are able to make these other worlds at least for a while. I don't know if it even has to do with ourselves at a certain point. Maybe that's how we can join the rest of the world in collaborating with the rest of the world. I'd like to see more collaboration like that. I'd like to see native people, First Nations people collaborate with people in Africa. And that doesn't have to make sense, and it probably won't make sense to outsiders looking at such a situation, but I don't think we have to have... We don't have to tell a story, we don't have to talk about history. We don't have to do any of that. We just have to warp reality.

31:08 CM: So you're saying that it doesn't have to end code specific values necessarily? Like, the future isn't a world where a group has to feel like it has to do that? Is that what you're saying?

31:25 RC: It would be a great experiment to see what happens when we didn't do that. If we didn't make art about anything. We just collaborated with others, or perhaps... I think collaboration would be necessary though. I think collaboration with people around the world would be the next step for indigenous people. And in that collaboration, there's no other task than to change reality severely, but again that doesn't mean that the art has to be about anything. It doesn't even have to be about their own histories.

32:04 CM: Yeah, that's...

32:06 Skawennati: That's awesome.

32:06 CM: That's heavy dude.

32:07 KT: Well, I got something that's kind of like in the middle of those two. If you look at the history of the world, it's a history of world views and of competing world views essentially. And competing world views, competing over resources. And what's happened over the last hundred years for indigenous people is... At least in the US, it's really the only place I can really speak about, is we've developed a policy and legal framework that protects our interests and ensures that we have the capacity to design our own systems and to govern ourselves and to work on our own accord. And what that does, is that enables and empowers people to do something like collaborate with other people on terms that are mutually beneficial rather than subjugation. So that's something that I think our parents worked towards creating... Our parents' generation worked towards creating that policy framework and social framework of self-determination in a codified manner. And our generation has really been about building capacity to utilize that. We've got a long ways to go, we're still pretty young relatively speaking and we're making okay progress in that regard. But I think the future is about not focus so much on getting onto a level playing field in terms of capacity and resources, but knowing how to work more efficiently and strategically on our own terms, in terms of negotiating relationships with the other people.

34:35 KT: For instance, in the art world, my hope is that in the future, we're not thinking about

indigenous contemporary art. We're thinking about art and there's indigenous people that are significant contributors to the art world as artists not as tokens. Because that's what... We still get demonized as tokens, regardless of how good our art may or may not be. I think that on the capacity side, and the negotiation side, you already see this trend of us being in the field of indigenous artists working in contemporary art, being able to exhibit outside of culturally specific exhibitions and institutions and working internationally.

35:32 KT: You can see that pathway and I think what that leads to is a way to where we're allowed to share our world view and our knowledge systems on our own accord, rather than having it being taken from us and commodified in the process. When I think of collaboration, like what Raven's talking about. I see that process happening, and I see it as a way of building new capacities in society that fit, are informed by indigenous world views and to where people see the value and merit in that. And that's what's really, really exciting because if you think about the indigenous people in the world and their knowledge of locality. That's what's missing from our scientific knowledge systems, is that one aspect, so if anything I could see a future that's much more balanced.

36:45 CM: Yeah. I think, when Raven talks about art, that's like a idealism to aspire to and I think that that's what art can do. And I think it's had its times when it has done things like that. I think in music particularly more so than any other medium. But one thing about art is that it gets caught up in the technologies. A long time ago it would just be a piece of charcoal, it was good enough and then there were pigments, and innovations, and pigments, and taxes, and controls on colors, and different things were bartered and traded. And that happened in different parts of the world.

37:35 CM: Now the mediums are largely... We currently live in a fairly illiterate society now. Because a long time ago, if you didn't know how to read and write, you are considered illiterate. Many people know how to read and write but still don't have an awareness that in today's world, reading and writing isn't enough to be literate. If you can't write computer code, if you can't read it, you can't understand it then you're really not able to... You're not a tool-builder, you're a tool-user. And you can be a tool-hacker and you can be a tool... You can modify the tools and sometimes that's good enough to create that kind of equity that Kade is talking about. The kind of equity we'll need in order to aspire toward Raven's vision, which is really all our vision, really. I think humanity in us, we wanna see that. We definitely wanna see that for our people too, 'cause it means a much better place for our peoples, at least I think.

38:54 CM: But that's one of the big issues that still gets tied up into the frameworks of sovereignty and indigenous sovereignty, is that we have to build our communities, we have to build capacity. Digital media literacies capacities. So that we can get beyond what we're currently seeing. Where like in Palo Alto, in Silicon Valley, the epicentre of digital innovation. And in digital innovation is happening all over. It's happening in Seoul, Korea, in parts of China, in Indonesia, in India. But we have the real major power brokers situated in Silicon Valley in California. And that's mostly white men between the ages of in their 20s to their 40s. And so we're severely limited in terms of the world view because it goes back to the economic systems or systems of capitalism that Kade is talking about. And where the cynicism comes from is that, that very limited and homogenic world view is being encoded in the designs of VR. It's encoded in the very linguistic representations that are in the lines of code.

40:22 CM: So in that respect, in terms of building that kind of equity. We've got a long way to go. We've got a very long way to go.

40:30 RC: A long way but the challenge will be, how does one maintain a world view when a language goes away? And so that's gonna be a real critical negotiation, is how do you maintain your world view without your language? We have a number of tribes in the US that still have a lot of native speakers that it's like just like a generation away from going away. And I know people have been saying that for a long time and it's still hanging on, for some tribes. But the majority of tribes don't have any real daily use of their language. And so how do you protect and keep a world view?

41:26 RC: That's something that anthropologists struggle with, because language configures reality. And the way reality is ordered. To me that's gonna be a really fascinating dilemma, is keeping the sense of world view or what does that world view become? Is there like a pan global indigenous world view? And are we reflecting back in our stories and lived experiences in another person's language. But does that prevent us from being able to still reflect back on our stories and histories? I think it's possible to maintain a world view without a language. So, I think some people might strongly, strongly disagree with that and I would probably argue that "Yes, I agree with you." But I mean there's no hard set fast rules about that. But that's where the battle is. But that's also our greatest hope for sharing. So if we lose that, our world view, there will be no negotiation. We'll be fully subjective.

42:52 CM: I think we can...

42:54 RC: Now that balance won't exist. [chuckle]

42:57 CM: I think we can hack the language. I think we create dialects all the time. We were talking about Lowriding and pachucos, or cholos, or lowriders and in that community there's a dialect. There's a way of speaking. It's a mixture of English, and Spanish, and Nahua and made-up words and mashing 'em all together. So you have a native language and then two European languages and then lots of made-up stuff. And through that, the people have been able to create a discourse that's responsive to a way of being. Way of being in the world, world view. So, we'll always find a way. We could... I think there's lots of opportunities for us to find a way.

43:50 KT: 'Cause I know lots of Cherokees and Navajos that... There's lots of Cherokees and Navajos that speak their language but there's lots that don't. And I know a lot that don't that are still really old school. That really adhere to that world view that is a part of their heritage and their history and lineage and... So that's where I base my assumption. I know a lot of Johns that don't speak Navajo. [chuckle] But I'm pretty... I'm always optimistic about that type of stuff.

44:30 CM: The future of indigenous media will have a syntax in native languages. Just like the Cherokee nation has got a Cherokee syllabary and you can... When for example if you buy a brand new computer, Apple computer and you have to determine what language you want your OS to be in, you go and you find all these nations that are typically tied to imperialism or have an imperial foundation or history. And then in the middle of all of that is something refreshing, different. And

that's that you can select Cherokee as your OS language. And so that means you can compute to some degree in the Cherokee language. So the next logical step is to begin to create computational languages that are using indigenous words, indigenous languages. And so yeah. I just think we just need to take it. It's bendable, it's malleable and we just need to build those capacities and it'll take some time but I think we're on the path.