

**Zoe Todd**

Inaugural Future Imaginary Lecture  
(transcript)

**PRAIRIE FISH FUTURES**  
**Métis Legal Traditions and Refracting Extinction**

hosted by  
the Initiative for Indigenous Futures  
&  
Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace  
&  
Concordia University Research Chair  
in Computational Media and the Indigenous Future Imaginary

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video available at  
<http://abtec.org/iif/output/lecture-series-zoe-todd>

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[pause]

**0:00:14 Skawennati:** [0:00:14] [REDACTED]. Good evening everyone. Skawennati [0:00:18] [REDACTED]. My name is Skawennati. And I would like to say, [0:00:22] [REDACTED]. Welcome to this talk and [0:00:28] [REDACTED] Montreal. Zoe... Which is, of course, I now am searching unceded [0:00:37] [REDACTED] territory. That's mostly all I'm here to say. [laughter] But I just wanted to say that I'm very happy that you're here Zoe and I really look forward to hearing about the Future Of Fish!

**0:00:54 Jason Lewis:** Okay, hello everybody. Welcome, thank you for coming out on a Friday evening, thank you Skawennati for the welcoming to the territory. So I'm Jason Lewis. I am a professor in Design and Computation Arts here at Concordia University and I co-direct with Skawennati Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace research network, which is sort of the host for the evening. This is the fourth and final for this year, installment of the Future Imaginary lecture series, which we started in order to bring indigenous makers and thinkers here to Concordia to help us dream about what the future of indigenous life in this territory might be like.

**0:01:34 JL:** I wanna thank our supporters for this series. Concordia's aide to research related events. And Milieux Institute For Art, Culture, and Technology. I also wanna thank, since this is the last one, I wanna thank our research assistant crew and our lab crew, so Sabine Rosenberg, Emmanuel Forg, Travis [0:01:56] [REDACTED], and the coordinator of the series Mikhail Crew, who's making a runner up there.

[laughter]

[applause]

**0:02:08 JL:** And also Lindsey Nixon, who did the research for the interviews that we did, we conducted with each of the speakers when they came in and made me look really good because they all told me afterwards about what smart questions I ask. [laughter] So thank you Lindsey.

**0:02:22 JL:** So first a formal introduction, for Zoe. Then I'll add a few remarks. So Zoe Todd is Métis from Edmonton. I can't pronounce the Cree name... Which is located in Treaty 6 territory in Alberta, Canada. She is an assistant professor of anthropology in the department of sociology, anthropology at Carlton University. She researches fish, colonialism and legal governance relations between indigenous peoples and the Canadian state. Her work employs a critical indigenous feminist lens to examine the shared relationships between people and their environments and legal traditions in Canada with a view to understanding how to bring fish and the more than human into conversations about indigenous self-determination, peoplehood and governance in Canada today.

**0:03:06 JL:** So after we spent yesterday and today in Zoe's delightful company conducting an interview, chatting over dinner, sitting in on the graduate seminar that she conducted this morning which she was extremely generous with her time and her good [0:03:21] [REDACTED] mind. I can say that I think of no one better to close out our inaugural series. Her work touches on issues of past and future models of kinship as did [0:03:30] [REDACTED], how to perturb and perhaps replace settler time as Jolene Rickard did and the importance of supporting creative spaces where we could imagine anew what it means to be indigenous as Allen Turner did. But she has her own way of shining new critical light on these issues and in particular, of examining the question of kinship in ways that can profoundly re-orient our epistemology.

**0:03:51 JL:** Ways that allow us to think about how we might make kin with oil and other pollutants, how we might use indigenous kinship frameworks to understand how to make friends with aliens and how the desire to be considered kin to the Indian makes settlers do really crazy things. So she said something today in her seminar this morning that struck me particularly hard, and which sums up what I find most powerful about her work, "The challenge always is to find ways to assert loving kindness across difference." So join me in welcoming Zoe Todd.

[applause]

**0:04:36 Zoe Todd:** Tansi. Hello. Welcome. Thank you to Skawennati and Jason for welcoming me here and just the beauty in what you're doing here with your collaboration and this collective is really inspiring, so I'm really excited to share my work with you and everyone else here tonight. So I wanna thank Skawennati and Jason and Lindsey and Mikhail for inviting me and all of the labor you've performed to bring me into this space with such kindness. And I wanna thank Emmanuel and Travis and LeeAnn and Sabine for your technical support with the filming and the interview last night and your support with the talk this evening and also thank you to the staff here at Concordia who maintain and clean and tend to this building and make it possible for us to be here in such comfort. And I also wanna thank all of you for coming here on a Friday night. I know that I usually just wanna go home and cuddle my cat, so to all of the pets out there that aren't being cuddled right now 'cause you're here to learn about fish, I thank them.

**0:05:34 ZT:** And thank you definitely to the Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace and the Initiative for Indigenous Futures partnership for hosting this event. This is really exciting to be brought in for this. So I've hesitated with how to do territorial acknowledgements properly since my friend and colleague Chelsea Vowel, so succinctly pointed out the limits of these acknowledgements and white settler spaces, and so I've joked in the past that they risk becoming like the antique furniture of reconciliation, present in their original form but maybe not performing what they were intended to do. So I want to nod to the way that Skawennati has brought us into this space and into relation tonight. And I just wanna state how grateful I am as an [0:06:20] [redacted] to travel through this territory and to think with and about fish, with you and with all of you. And I hope that I may be a useful accomplice in solidarity, with the struggles of [0:06:31] [redacted] in this territory and beyond. So thank you all for being here.

**0:06:36 ZT:** So I wanna start with a pun, and my students know this all too well, that I bring a pun into everything. And so this is my pun tonight, a 'speculative fish-ction'.

[chuckle]

**0:06:48 ZT:** And it doesn't roll off the tongue, so it probably won't get published, but I had to use it tonight. I wanna open with a story, or maybe it's best sort of thought of as a snapshot, from an upcoming chapter that I'm contributing to in a book on prairie indigenous urbanisms. And in this story, the Ness [0:07:09] [redacted] Namweyo, whose my speculative fish hero, carries out her anti-colonial magic in the waters of my home territory and the cool lakes of the Scottish Highlands. So, we're gonna come into, I just want you to sort of like sit with the Ness Namweyo for a moment. Like here she is, she's fabulous, she's loving and rageful and everything all at once. And when we last saw her, circa 2015 in this very building, the Ness Namweyo was traveling the cool, deep waters of Loch Ness, haunting and teasing the Scottish psyche in order to viscerally unsettle Scottish refusals to engage with the long and tangled reach of their enthusiastic complicity in the

British Colonial Project.

**0:07:53 ZT:** She was languidly and purposefully swimming the long lengths of the cool Highland Loch, setting Scottish nerves on edge. Her message coded in her steely flesh, set off on the scoots along her back, was unrepentant. You are responsible for the devastation of the waters I have swam through since time immemorial. My haunting is your shaming. She enjoyed this anti-colonial journey, traveling the lengths of the Lake Winnipeg watershed with petty and delightful revenge in mind. She swam the long twisting [0:08:28] ██████████ Saskatchewan Sippi with her briefcase full of scientific reports on the pollution, diversions, and desecration of prairie waters. She also carried a parchment copy of Treaty 6, signed at Fort Carlton in 1876, to complement the version of that agreement passed on to her by her mother, who herself had swam along the Sippi on those fateful days of the treaty commission as it negotiated with Cree leaders. It should come as no surprise, given the long reach of fish throughout every single territory that first the British Crown and now Canada laid claim to, that fish bear witness to all of our deliberations. And fish have thoughts on the strategies the state has taken in refusing political agency to namewak and other fish philosophers.

**0:09:13 ZT:** And I'll just state here. She definitely has thoughts on Justin Trudeau, but we won't discuss that tonight. [laughter] We're in polite company. So, the Ness Namweyo, she has been busy in the last two years. She swam the length of the Lake Winnipeg watershed, made her way through the choking blue-green algae that plagues Lake Winnipeg and wound her way along the Nelson River. She passed north of York Factory and paused for a moment to consider the devastating impact that the fur trade had on many of her namewak kin. Once she found herself in James Bay, she had to swirl her way through polynyas and unseasonable hydrological shifts caused by Quebec's massive hydro projects along the Eastern James Bay and Hudson's Bay coasts. She promised the eider ducks, dying as they are as a result of the James Bay Hydro projects, that she would do her best to honor their stories. She carried herself purposefully up the length of Hudson's Bay into the Arctic coast and steeled herself for the cool journey through the Northwest Passage.

**0:10:17 ZT:** Once she crossed the Atlantic, she teased her way along the north seacoast, hugging western Scotland and greeting it with splashes of her long tail. "I come bearing gifts," she laughed. "Gifts of de-colonial revenge," she added with a devilish smile. Like many a de-colonial sturgeon before her, she followed the current with care, made her way up the North Scottish coast. Once she reached the mouth of the River Ness, she paused. She breathed deeply. "You got this, Beebee," she told herself. She shook her fishy body, psyched herself up for the last leg of her journey. She knew this was the hardest but most rewarding part. Soon, reports would erupt on social media and in British local news, "Monster spotted in the River Ness." That was when she knew her work was taking hold. Peakish Scottish faces would soon appear on the shores of Loch Ness and would crowd over the sides of tour boats.

**0:11:14 ZT:** After a few playful laps of the lake to drum up interest in her sudden reappearance in the Loch, she would set up shop near Urquhart Castle, with a booth festooned with prairie water quality reports, a full print out of all 4,000 pages of the report from the Royal Commission on Aboriginal peoples and a DVD player featuring every single documentary film by Indigenous filmmakers ever made in Canada for the Scottish public to view. Phew, that was a long journey. After that journey she needed a rest. She took a short vacation in Iceland on her way back, making friends with local sharks, but she would not have the luxury of relaxing for too long. As she swam languidly in the blue lagoon catching up with other de-colonial critters, crisscrossing the Atlantic on their own journeys she got a private message on Twitter from her pal Eric the Walleye. "Stuff's

going down in [0:12:07] [redacted] amiskwaciwaskahikan again. Come quick. We need your help."

**0:12:09 ZT:** So she made her way back to her coastal hotel room nestled in the rocky shores of the western Icelandic coast. She logged onto her laptop and got the full story from her dear friend Eric. She did not always see eye to eye with Eric on all manner of political engagement. He was a bit more of a homebody, preferring to stick to prairie lakes and engage in long but important debates with settlers about how to share territory reciprocally. But she knew that if he was asking for her help things were serious. And so it goes, "Never a moment of rest for the Ness Namweyo, because the mess left by colonial ideologies and erasure is ever present and ongoing. And here's where I ask myself, 'How can I as a good Métis [0:12:50] [redacted] feminist be of use to the Ness Namweyo and her colleagues now and into the future?' Indeed, what futures do we hold for one another on the prairies in the Lake Winnipeg Watershed? And what ethical philosophical legal paradigms do I need to orient myself to in order to be good kin to the Ness Namweyo and other prairie fish?" Okay, so that's the opening story. So just think of her... There we go. Okay, yes, let's applaud her. She works very hard for her money [laughter] I don't even know what fish money would be. It would be like... I don't know. Algae or something. Yeah, sand dollars. Yeah. [laughter]

**0:13:30 ZT:** Okay, so I wanna think tonight about sturgeon time and this is an idea that kind of I've used recently in an article that I published in [0:13:38] [redacted] TOPIA in the summer. And I reflect in that piece on how a healthy lake sturgeon, like the Ness Namweyo can live at the very edge of its life span, up to 150 years. And I've been thinking about this a lot lately, about how sturgeon time and temporality are so very different from human time. On the prairies 150 years, which is also the life span of the Canadian nation state, this time frame encompasses many things. It encompasses the time that has passed since Canada violently mobilized to assert its dominion over prairie lands. It marks 147 years since the Riel Resistance. It marks 141 years since Treaty 6 was signed at Fort Carlton and Fort Pitt. It's also 141 years since the Indian Act was implemented and the Ness Namweyo also has thoughts on the Indian Act and we'll cover that in another story. And it's a 132 years since Batoche and the North-West Resistance. In this time sturgeon have been nearly extirpated from the North Saskatchewan River. They are making an audacious comeback as biologists in Edmonton have shown.

**0:14:46 ZT:** This is the river that I grew up along and it's the river that four generations of my Métis Todd family have been born alongside. I turned to sturgeon and to the Ness Namweyo in particular to think through what it means to live in time and space in the prairies with care and I do so because of the powerful presence and history that sturgeon present in prairie watersheds like the one I grew up in. But I also wanna think here for a moment about what it means for us to contend with fish stories and our responsibilities to fish on the prairies in the spectre of the sixth mass extinction event and large scale fish population crisis across my home province of Alberta. As fisheries biologist Lorne Fitch has passionately argued in his work numerous fish species across Alberta are in decline. And he links this population decline directly to massive large scale habitat destruction accruing from agriculture, resource extractive activities, urban development and cumulative impacts of climate change.

**0:15:45 ZT:** So in almost every talk that I've given in the last four months I keep turning back to two quotes from a talk that Blackfoot scholar, thinker, philosopher Leroy Little Bear gave at the Congress of the Humanities in Calgary last year. So this is where we're gonna think about fish and dinosaurs or sturgeon as temporal travellers. So I want everyone to just close your eyes. I mean you can consent, you don't have to, but I'm going to suggest that it will help you absorb these two

quotes, 'cause they're fairly long and I wanna make sure that everybody's getting them. Well don't imagine I'm Leroy Little Bear, 'cause I don't wanna do violence to his being, but imagine that I'm reanimating his amazing thinking here in this space.

**0:16:25 ZT:** So the first quote that I want us to think about is "We as humans live in a very narrow spectrum of ideal conditions. Those ideal conditions have to be there for us to exist. That's why it's very important to talk about ecology, the relationship. If those ideal conditions are not there you and I are not going to last for very long. Just text neanderthal, ask the dinosaurs what happened to them. We asked one of our elders, 'Why did those dinosaurs disappear?' He thought about it for a while and he said, 'Maybe they didn't do their ceremonies.'" So that's the first quote that I want you to think about. So this idea of the fact that we exist in this narrow set of conditions of existence as humans, and it doesn't take much for us to shift those conditions away from something that supports us. And this teaching from the elder that he spoke with that extinction may be scientifically understood as accruing from physical action, but there's also sort of cosmological, sociocultural, legal, ethical reasons the dinosaurs might have disappeared as well. So maybe they didn't do their ceremonies.

**0:17:38 ZT:** So the second quote I want us to sort of sit with tonight which animates so much of my thinking right now is as follows. "Western science is largely aimed at exploration. Native science is aimed at sustainability. We exist in a very narrow gap as we've mentioned and the fish, for instance, nobody's talked about the fish in this congress. Not that I know of. But the fish has been around, think about it, way before the dinosaurs, way before the neanderthals, way before our time. The fish is still around. I wonder what scientific formula the fish has discovered, we should ask the fish, they've survived." So in that quote, I want us to sort of think about fish have survived multiple mass extinction events. They've been able to populate waters all around the world, marine and fresh waters and they've created these life worlds that are so rich and dynamic. But, but, even though they've survived that, have they survived us? So, with all of that in mind, I turned to sturgeon to help me understand Métis law where human narratives have failed me. Lake sturgeon have existed on this planet for a 135 million years or possibly more. Fish have existed in one form or another for 510 million years. Fish as a form of being, have managed to weather five mass extinction events and lake sturgeon managed to survive the last major mass extinction event. The formerly labelled KT extinction, now known as the Cretaceous-Paleogene extinction event, that occurred some 66 million years ago.

**0:19:16 ZT:** I have to ask myself, in line with Leroy Little Bear's ruminations on fish, dinosaurs, ceremony and extinction, what ethical, political and socio-legal formula, have the sturgeon come up with to enable them to weather such massive upheavals on this planet? What can we learn from their efforts to maintain life, love and liberty in the waters that snake across this very country. Okay, so in thinking with sturgeon time, this temporality of lifetimes that are a 150 years long that... Here in Canada, we're so excited that Canada is 150 years old, and the Ness Namweyo's like, "Pfft, that's nothing." But that disjuncture between fish lives like the Ness Namweyo's and ours, but also that temporality of sturgeon that they have lived for over 100 million years in this place and honouring the stories that they have carried with them through all of that. I want us to think about sturgeon time in relation to the kinds of stories that they may be carrying with them, and I do think they're carrying stories with them.

**0:20:28 ZT:** So I have to also ask what grief and anger do sturgeon feel towards us as humans for the fact that sturgeon, these time travellers who carry stories of millions of years of existence within

their bones, have barely managed to survive a few hundred years of Settler Colonialism in Canada. Scientists discuss sturgeon, a label which encompasses 27 species of fish as living fossils. Though this idea of them as living fossils has been challenged by scientists who've shown that sturgeon have also evolved very rapidly in one regard, which is that sturgeon species demonstrate a stunning array of body sizes. So a sturgeon can be this big and they can be two meters long. And so they're really exciting for fish biologists because they kind of demonstrate this ability to adapt to environments, in ways that other types of fish like Gar haven't. But the question for me is, is this idea of a kind of sturgeon continuity over millions of years, can it come to matter in my work, as I ruminate on the responsibilities that humans owe to fossil canon carbon beings? The oil and fossil fuels transform through time in biological action and the rich Earth of my home province.

**0:21:38 ZT:** This idea of fossil canon and living fossils, these all come to matter to me because I argue that we have reciprocal responsibilities, not only to the present and future, but also to the beings who once lived here, whose stories are embedded in the Earth, water and air all around us. We have duties to those beings who's pasts have been violently operationalized to fuel Petrostates and Capitalist Imperialism, which lays waste to most of the planet. So sturgeon, as perhaps a kind of living fossil, have so many stories to share with us and this is an idea that I drawn from my friend and interlocutor in Paulatuk, Millie Thrasher. I'll get to the story about that in a moment. So in the the fur trade, the value of sturgeon was not accorded to their political theories, their kinship or their stories, but in fact to their flesh and even to their swim bladders, which were traded as isinglass and this was valuable to European markets because it was useful for making wine. So, I was reading today about isinglass, it was also used in making candy. And I don't know why, but that felt so violent to me that the Ness Namweyo and her kin were valuable to European markets as like Bonbons and there's something so... I don't know. It's like the Soylent Green of kind of the fur trade.

**0:22:49 ZT:** It just really upset me reading that. But this is the reality, the sturgeon was really valuable on the fur trade because its meat was highly valued by fur traders but also other parts of its body were useful in capitalist markets. And unfortunately for the sturgeon, their long lifespans are a marvel in comparison to the staccato generations of humans they live along side, but this also means that they have infrequent spawning habitats. And I wanted to make a Donna Haraway joke here, so just bare with me. So sturgeon which have these either they have long lifetimes and it takes them a while until they're mature enough to spawn and then when they do spawn, they don't do it very often. All of this is sort of contributed to the decline of their populations in line with all of the heavy fisheries that depleted them and so my Donna Haraway joke is, maybe the sturgeon time travelled to 2017 and read Donna Haraway's books stating "I'm with the trouble." And they took Donna Haraway's motto "Make kin not babies!" a little too seriously and now we have too few sturgeon babies and were in trouble. So, that... Anyways a little levity.

**0:24:00 ZT:** Unfortunately for sturgeon, all of this sort of combines and creates a weakness for them in the context of settler colonial capitalist extraction. The heavy fishing of sturgeon in the fur trade and into the 20th century nearly depleted them across all of Canada. So if I may, I wanna think of sturgeon as a kind of bridge between past and present. They have a lot to teach us about how we may bridge between the now and the future. What can we learn as we face the uncertainty of the times to come from the ways in which sturgeons steadfastly continue to move through prairie waters with grace. And indeed even if this only occurs in my imagination what can we learn from the Ness Namweyo as she swims across the Atlantic to haunt and tease Scottish colonizers. So despite the violence of settler colonialism here in this country a few tenacious lake sturgeon held on and it is here that my imagination runs wild with the possibilities that sturgeon temporarily and

sturgeon theory may offer us if we're willing to listen.

**0:25:00 ZT:** So here's where we're gonna get to this idea of stories in the bone. So when I was working in Paulatuk in the Northwest Territories in 2012, I worked closely with two amazing fishermen, Andy and Millie Thrasher and their family. One day when I was eating lunch at Andy and Millie's house, Millie picked up a bone from the fish soup that she'd made for lunch and she sort of said, "Did you know that there's a story for every bone in a fish?" And some Inuvialuit elders still know the story that corresponds with every bone. And I was like, "Oh, that's really amazing." And she said, "But those aren't stories for you to know." I was like, "Oh yeah, that's true." I have no right to know these stories. I'm not tied into Inuvialuit cosmologies, I don't know the legal traditions that correspond with these stories. But when she shared that with me it really stuck with me for the months and years to come, and it made me think about the ways that the fish in the home territories I've grown up in have stories in their bones. And so this idea of the Ness Namweyo carrying stories in her bones really comes from Millie sharing that with me back in 2012.

**0:26:04 ZT:** So it also was interesting to think about this idea of stories in the bone because... I don't know how many of you are scientists? Like did a few sneak in? Yes. Okay, great. So there's a few scientists here and some of you might know that the way that scientists age fish is that they take the otoliths, the ear bones out from behind the head of the fish. And so that's what this is. Actually I should have asked you. I should have been like a teaching moment and been like what is this? [laughter] But I'm a little nervous tonight. So I'm like not on my game. But what is this? [laughter] So I'll answer my own question. It's an otolith. It's an ear bone. And what does it remind you of?

**0:26:42 S?:** Trees.

**0:26:42 ZT:** Trees, yeah. So you guys are great. So the thing that I got really excited about when Millie sort of told me about this idea of fish carrying stories in the bones was how neat it was the sort of synchronicity between how scientists have come to realize this as well in their own way through their sequitous Euro Western traditions. But you can actually measure the growth and sort of the lifetime of a fish by looking at the rings. In the same way that we can look at a tree and see how it has grown and what kind of conditions that it experienced year to year. So in every fish there really is... I don't wanna make that sort of reductionist comparison between different kinds of stories but it's interesting to think about how they carry this sort of like history within their ear bones as well as all the other stories that scientists may not understand or realize they're there.

**0:27:39 ZT:** So this idea of ear bones carrying this Temporality within them as well, the sort of idea that you can imagine what a sturgeon's otolith might look like after 150 years and what would it be like to sort of look at that record in comparison to like we have the Canada history moments, like the heritage moments. Can you imagine if like we did a sturgeon one? And it was just like this and we're like, "a moment of our history" and people would be like, "I just don't get it." And you're like, "That's the point, [chuckle] you haven't been listening." [laughter] So I just want us to kind of think about this this way that time can be measured in ways that maybe don't afford with our linear sense of time or there are being and structures that are recording time in ways that maybe we haven't been attuned to. So there's stories in the bone. There's stories in the otolith. There's stories in the water and all of these matter and we should be sort of trying to listen to them.

**0:28:34 ZT:** So, the ear bones also offer us more than age. Scientists are now finding that they may be able to analyze otoliths to give them a sense of which waterways fish have travelled through, and



fish scales can also be used to measure time and travel. So it's just kind of interesting to think that like fish scales are time travelers. They're recording this time and they have this ability to sort of show us where fish have been. It's like captain's log, "Star date January 12th, I ate some minnows, they weren't very tasty" and you know like that. I don't know. Captain Kirk, he scrubbed those lines from his record. I've got a hook up to this secret source. I'm glad you're laughing 'cause my family is like, "We don't get it. We love you and we're glad that you're happy and you're employed [laughter] but we still don't get it." [laughter] So I just want us to think about this way that time and temporarily and movement are recorded in the bodies of fish in ways that maybe we haven't been attuned to. When we think of fish as specimen or products, we're not necessarily sitting with each scale and thinking about what stories it contains.

**0:29:53 ZT:** So I wanna shift here from the individual ways that past, present, and future encapsulated in fish ear bones and scales and then turn to the collective span of sturgeon life on this planet. So Lake Sturgeon have reportedly been around for 135-150 million years, and the dates that I could find on the internet today vary. So, after some very serious research, that's what I'm going to go with tonight. This means that the very, very, very ancient ancestors of the Lake Sturgeon that we know today knew the dinosaurs and they may have even asked the dinosaurs themselves what they were doing to contend with the upheavals of climate and terrain in their time. Perhaps they tried to urge the dinosaurs to perform their ceremonies. As I look to the future, human futures, fish futures, I wonder what responsibilities, if any, future beings will hold to us here in this time. Are they thinking of us? Are they wondering if we are performing our ceremonies? Are they thinking of the Sturgeon? Will the Sturgeon still be there? I hope they are.

**0:30:56 ZT:** So how can we live in a way that holds us in reciprocity to future lives and future worlds? And how can we ensure that both we and the Sturgeon move forward? So, you may be wondering what this all has to do with Métis Law, 'cause I'm sure a lot of you read the abstract and I promised Métis Law, so I'm gonna give it to you. I... What do they say, over promise, under sell? No, it's under promise, over sell.

[laughter]

**0:31:20 ZT:** Okay, so we're gonna go with the latter. [laughter] So you might be wondering what this all has to do with Métis Law, and I promised to discuss it, so here we are. I think that we need to turn to the ways in which fish and humans co-constitute life throughout the Métis homeland. And here, for the purposes of this evening, is the Métis homeland as I understand it. So my friend and colleague Darren O'Toole, who's a legal scholar at the University of Ottawa, emailed me last spring and he was like, "So, you really have to see this amazing map." Right there. And so, he sent me the link and he said, "Do you notice anything about it?" And I was like, "Huh, it looks a lot like all of the places that most of Métis political action in the mid 1800s... Mid to late 1800s, sort of occurred." And he was like, "Bingo, isn't it interesting that a lot of our political history takes place bounded to this watershed, an adjacent watersheds?"

**0:32:17 ZT:** So, if you kind of look at it, you can see how the watershed stretches from the Rocky Mountains to the west, all the way across Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. It brings in the Lake of the Woods area in Ontario, and also Minnesota, North Dakota and a little bit of Montana, which are all places that are deeply connected to the Métis political being, that I'm familiar with.

**0:32:43 ZT:** So I don't wanna say that we're only limited to this watershed, but that this is where the

bulk of our kinship and political history has really been rooted. And what I find really exciting about this map is that, it explicitly forces us to think about Métis homelands in a watery sense. So the state has, sort of, gotten us to think about land as territory, but of course water is also a kind of territory. And my colleague and mentor Chris Anderson, who is Métis scholar at the University of Alberta, he has this really elegant way of explaining the Métis, kind of, presence in the prairies, and he said, "It's important to think of, in the 19th century, Red River settlement and Fort Edmonton as these heartbeats, and they're pushing and pulling people, and stories, and ideas, and goods in and out. And so my addition to that metaphor is that, I think the rivers are like the arteries, that connect Métis communities. And Brenda Macdougall, who is the Métis chair at the University of Ottawa, she's doing this beautiful work, and she's also using this map, and she's demonstrating how Métis kin-scapes stretch across this watershed and adjacent watersheds.

**0:33:50 ZT:** So, I want you to think of the arteries that bring all of these communities together. I want you to think about how Métis share time and space, and do share time and space with [0:34:00]       , and Anishinaabe, and Dene peoples throughout this watery territory. And I want you to think about how we co-constitute ourselves alongside fish, because of course a watery territory is a fishy territory. And so that means that we have to pay attention to who we have responsibilities to, not just up here in the world that we walk on, but also in the world that the fish are in.

**0:34:22 ZT:** So, I've discussed this idea extensively in talks that I've given across Canada and the US, that we are bound to the Lake Winnipeg watershed. And the crux of my argument regarding Métis legal traditions is this. Métis are often imagined as co-constituted alongside and with Bison, and also alongside and with French and Scottish fur traders, and this is true. But Métis moved through the many waterways of the Lake Winnipeg watershed and adjacent waters throughout the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries. And within this watery territory we were and are deeply beholden to fish. So as Brenda Macdougall demonstrates in her book, *One of the Family: Métis culture in Nineteenth-Century Northwestern Saskatchewan*, Métis women alongside Cree and Dene women were responsible for the arduous labor of processing fish at the Hudson's Bay Company post of Sakitawak, also known as Ile-a-la Crosse, which was in the English River district of Northern Saskatchewan.

**0:35:20 ZT:** She notes, "One of the most important company tasks in which women participated was the full time, year round, operation of the post fisheries. Fish was a food staple for people, as well as the dogs used in the winter transport system. Officially fishing was a job reserved for skilled male servants, yet wives and daughters of HBC men, especially fishermen, found their services required to provide the support for the companies fisheries. Women were often assigned the task of checking the nets scattered at different points along Lac Île-à-la-Crosse, at the mouths of rivers and at nearby lakes, as well as producing and maintaining nets."

**0:36:00 ZT:** So I want us to think about the way that women's labor was co-constituted alongside fish and how this undergirded, this relationality between Métis, Cree, and Dene peoples at the Hudson's Bay post and how this brought us into a sense of kinship not only with human but more than human beings. So, Macdougall goes on to point out that relationality and kinship that shaped life at Sakitawak was deeply informed by the Cree legal principle of wahkohtowin which she explains in the following way, "The Métis family structure that emerged in the northwest and at Sakitawak was rooted in the history and culture of Cree and Dene progenitors. And therefore in a world view that privileged relatedness to land people living ancestral and those to come the spirit

world and creatures inhabiting the space. In short this world view, wahkohtowin is predicated upon a specific Aboriginal notion and definition of family as a broadly conceived sense of relatedness of all beings human and non-human living and dead, physical and spiritual."

**0:37:00 ZT:** So, what I really like about this explanation that she gives for wahkohtowin it's so succinct but it also demonstrates that there's a temporality to kinship, that it's past, present and future, that it incorporates human and non-human beings and that it deeply embeds this sense of responsibility to one another across time and space. So, through this principle of wahkohtowin we're bound to fish through time and space and that means that if we apply the principles of wahkohtowin towards fish, if we think of our relationality to them and the responsibilities that accrue from this relationality then we must also consider how to manifest this relationality into the future.

**0:37:39 ZT:** This becomes difficult perhaps to envision in the current state of things as we face the dire futurities written for us by scientists and policymakers studying the sixth mass extinction event and the Anthropocene events which they argue may result in up to three quarters of the earth species going extinct in the next few hundred years. We really are on the verge of the point that the dinosaurs were at and so I'm hoping that we can find some kind of relationality to bring us back into a good way of being in the world. So, often in science and wildlife conservation discourses futures are imagined as a matter of simply conserving wildlife and environment, I.e. The future is one of mitigation, harm reduction. But rarely do we ask in scientific and wildlife conservation work how sociopolitical and economic issues like white supremacy, settler colonialism and late stage extract of capitalism shaped the lives and laws of more than human beings.

**0:38:36 ZT:** Settler Law here in Canada built as it is on British common law and French civil law evacuates the more than human for most of its reasoning, imagining animals instead as subjects of the state or objects to be managed rather than as co-constituents of that nation. Conservation then risks being and often is imagined as what I gloss as a kind of non-human politics of recognition and reconciliation. Drawing here on the work of Elizabeth Povinelli and her writing on non-human agency in Belyuen cosmology in Australia and the ways that she demonstrates that Settler Law cannot imagine more than humans as sentient beings let alone as beings with whom humans labor to co-constitute community and life.

**0:39:19 ZT:** In this sense settler legal reasoning in Canada can only imagine its domain over lands, waters and more than human beings. So, thinking here too of the work of the Yellowknives Dene scholar Glen Coulthard and Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson the neo-liberal White supremacist colonial logics of recognition and reconciliation work to evacuate indigenous liberty thought and praxis from the discourses of Canada as a nation state and in line with Patrick Wolf's work the state indeed seeks to dispossess and eliminate through its erasure of the plurality of legal traditions and philosophies which center our relationality to more than human beings such as fish.

**0:40:00 ZT:** So, these non-human politics of recognition operate in the following way. First, we recognize that non-humans are possibly in decline and often we only notice fish and other beings when they are in severe decline or outright extirpated or extinct. So we only notice them when they're in trouble. Second, animals and water and other beings are expected to reconcile to capitalist extractive settler colonial incursions and violations of the more than human. And finally, humans are positioned as the only sentient agents who can intellectually engage with the human politics of resource extraction and settler colonialism in places like Canada. All of this combined creates the

situation we're in right now. We don't understand fish as kin, we don't understand them as political citizens or beings who could have laws of their own and I think they do.

**0:40:53 ZT:** So, all of this was possible because in liberal settler nation states like Canada, animals and more than human beings exist outside of politics and legal thinking. This is in opposition to so many indigenous legal traditions which explicitly center relationality and more than human agency at the very core of their being. So, as I know in a recent talk that I gave in Yellow Knife, when indigenous peoples assert their laws in relation to fish and other more than human beings, this is an act of inter-nation diplomacy between indigenous peoples, the settler colonial nation state and more than human collectives. Therefore questions of co-management and conflicts over governance of lands and waters between the state and indigenous people should be reproached as a matter of legal governance plurality and an expression of indigenous legal orders and traditions.

**0:41:42 ZT:** This moves the discourse of human-animal relations in Canada beyond questions of querying epistemological and ontological and incompatibility of indigenous knowledge with science and western law and instead necessitates an acknowledgement of an engagement with wildlife co-management bodies, science, research, and policy as sites of the reproduction of European law, epistemology and ontology. So how do we deal with this? How do we deal with this fact that we're recreating European laws that evacuate more than human agency from the spaces where decisions are made. How often does the Ness Namweyo come in question, period? Probably not yet, but I'm working on it. Like I'm hoping if I tweet Justin Trudeau enough, and he'll probably just block me but there's other ways for us to sort of try and encourage our legislators, our government to think about it's responsibilities to the fish and I have a few thoughts on this. So is everybody with me? I feel like I've like thrown a lot at you. Just like nod if you're doing okay. Okay, I'm really nervous tonight. Normally I'm way smoother but tonight is, you're getting the raw, unfiltered thoughts of a professor at the end of term. So, it's great. You're wonderful.

**0:42:57 ZT:** So, how do we deal with the fact that fish are deeply un-centered in settler ideologies and temporalities and how do we deal the fact that this is swiftly carrying us towards a future of non-life and extinction for fish and many other beings here in Canada. So, I put forward an idea, I put forward two ideas in my current work. One is refraction, so here we are, refraction. I've been using this a lot lately and I don't know that I've completely figured out how to explain it clearly but here's how I'll approach it. Given that I've spent a lot of time explaining it in recent talks, I don't want to belabour it because I have a whole bunch of propositions at the end that I'm really excited to share.

**0:43:39 ZT:** But here's how I'm gonna sort of like approach this and I'm gonna do a thing that I think is maybe it's, I'm just gonna quote myself 'cause it's easier to do that. So, the academy needs to be deconstructed anyways. I'm quoting myself from an interview that my colleague, Caroline Picard of Sector 2337 Gallery and Green Lantern Press in Chicago did with me in the summer for the Bad At Sports blog. So quoting myself, "I realized that the visual in my mind as I was talking to Inuvialuit interlocutors in my research at Paulatuk in the northwest territories was one of indigenous legal orders, kinship and relationships to space and time, literally bending and dispersing the colonial efforts of the state, the church and corporate capitalist institutions. Through this bending and dispersion, indigenous peoples assert local knowledge, local praxis in creative ways to maintain local self determination in the face of often very violent colonial incursions into local life. See for example the legacy of the Indian Residential School System in Northern Canada. But I also see it as something related to fish, too. The way fish see us up here in our air world is refracted by the water

and the way we see fish is also refracted by water. Things are not always what they seem. We have to adapt our actions to the water interface in order to actually catch a fish, to actually physically interact with a fish".

**0:45:07 ZT:** So, I just wanna take a moment, I'm stepping out of my quote I'm coming into like present me. I just wanna... Everybody's probably taken basic physics courses and so you learn about refraction and how water and air, light travels at different speeds between the two and so when the light in the air hits the water, it's bent and where we think the fish is is not where it actually is. So it creates this kind of boundary across which we have to adapt our actions and we have to develop a certain amount of skill to be able to engage with fish on their terms and so this air-water interface I think is a really interesting literal and metaphorical kind of boundary across which to engage across sameness and difference. So, coming back into my quote going to past Zoe.

**0:45:58 ZT:** "Refraction is a physical imperative creates conditions that are complex and require care and skill to navigate the boundaries between interfaces and I see this as an apt metaphor to also query and understand the complex and dynamic interface between indigenous legal orders and the state. For me, refraction is an active process, conscious, creative labor is required to shift, distort the efforts of the state to subsume, control and erase indigenous laws and stories. I see refraction and dispersion as pretty bad-ass processes, too and dispersion well, that's the process we get when a prism scatters a ray of white light and reveals all the constituent wavelengths. In Canada, we've been sold a story about the country as particular good. But when these stories of Canada as a human rights champion are refracted and dispersed through indigenous legal orders and through the stories and histories of diverse marginalized communities in the country, you get the full spectrum of our history. You hear more than just the white washed history of this place. So, that's why I've been using these metaphors of refraction and dispersion in my work. I'm continuing to flesh them out more as I write".

**0:47:02 ZT:** So, that idea of refraction and dispersion I'm trying to sort of adapt them, I'm not the first person to use them at all. Karen Strassler, who's an anthropologist uses it in her work investigating how photography is used in Indonesia to disrupt colonial understandings of life in the nation but I'm approaching it kind of from a fleshy, fishy perspective and I'm interested in how fish actively work across this boundary and yet still engage with us. Like the Ness Namweyo is refracting across her watery world and yet she's still haunting the Scottish psyche. Now I invented that in my brain, so maybe that's not a convincing example but I'm gonna show you some real live examples, 'cause I know that science needs proof. I see refraction as both metaphorical and deeply literal. Métis peoples have to engage across sameness and difference in order to navigate day to day life here as indigenous peoples in a settler state populated by the universe-less Euro Western logics of human exceptionalism, white supremacy in late stage capitalism.

**0:48:05 ZT:** And then I have this idea of tenderness that I've been bringing into my work as well, and so I encourage you to read the stuff when it gets published. But tenderness is what I argue we need in opposition to, or in order to transform the very core of the extraction that lies at the heart of our current world order. Tending to as a complex and multifaceted principle that requires we center relationality, and all of the responsibilities that accrue from being in relation to the world. Tenderness in tending to disrupt the logics of violent extraction, that animate so much of the current political discourse. So mostly I just want a world where we pay attention to one another, where we pay attention to water and fish, and where we care for one another, and where we disrupt the ways that we've normalized violence against lands and water and humans and more than humans. And so

I've presented a lot of words and verbiage here tonight, but the core of my message really is: We need to care about one another. We need to care about the fish. And we need to think about how they inhabit the world, because as Leroy Little Bear tells us, they've survived so much.

**0:49:08 ZT:** And we're kind of at the point of no return. We've used up all our "Don't pass Go" cards of Monopoly, and now it's real. So I think it's time that we sat and asked the fish what they thought. So to argue for a futurity in which we radically reorient our relationships to the world, to land, to water, to more than human beings and fish. Here's where my work on refraction and tenderness posit that are responsibilities to more than human beings are absolutely a matter of legal ethical reorientation. And to illustrate what I envision the future of Métis peoples and fish to look like, I reiterate that wahkohtowin is a legal ethical principle, which is at the very core of Métis being, offers promise. In other words I envision a relational fishy future for us here in these territories that Canada lays claim to. But how do we enact this refraction, tenderness and transformation? Perhaps we can turn to the very work being done here by AbTech and Indigenous Future Partnership for clues. So given that you're precisely the kind of crowd that I can propose this to, I'm really excited. And I wanna show you how my aunt Loretta Todd's liberatory work on Métis stories film making and futurities has deeply shaped my own thoughts, on how to reengage our responsibilities to fish.

**0:50:23 ZT:** And despite my in Twitter prowess I won't pretend that I actually know how to do these things, I'm not technologically inclined. But I wanna sort of present some of this ideas around fish and augmented reality, virtual reality, fish stories, in digital another media, as way to ask the fish what they think, as Leroy Little Bear asks us to do. So, we're gonna move to... This is where I'm making proposals, and I don't normally get to do this in a talk, 'cause normally it's just like information, but you guys are a really great, exciting place to be, because I can say like, "Okay, there's other ways to do this." So command tab is how I bring up the video.

**0:51:02 ZT:** So my friend Pat Thrasher, Patrick Thrasher is an amazing fisherman and hunter, full time hunter. In Paulatuk, and he is Andy and Millie's son, and he posts these amazing photos and videos of his hunting and fishing all the time on Facebook. And he does a heartbreakingly talented filming, well, filmmaker but also photographer. So, I wanna have a little bit of fun now, and I want us to imagine ways for us to engage with fish to celebrate and center their worlds. To decenter our air world, and envision and tend to the large of this country that is below the water line. In fact, argue that a lot of really important legal thinking needs to occur under water, and across that air-water interface. One of the last times I chatted with Jason was at a Trudeau Foundation event. And I had asked you if you could think of any first person fish games, and you couldn't think of any off the top of your head. But I've been thinking about that since. What would it be if we had a fish game where you were like you were the Ness Namweyo, and you're like, "I'm going to Scotland." And like, "I'm gonna bring air quality reports this time instead of water." I don't know if that would be a game that would sell, but I would play it.

[chuckle]

**0:52:09 ZT:** So that's a population of one in that community.

[chuckle]

**0:52:16 ZT:** It's not a community if it's one, isn't it? No, we'll bring my cat in, and we'll make him

play. So we have to make it multi species accessible. So [chuckle] nobody's gonna fund this. So. [chuckle]

**0:52:31 S?:** [0:52:31] [redacted]...

**0:52:32 ZT:** So... [laughter] So, I'm really excited it was a little bit hard to get this to make this video accessible, so Pat posted this last week from one of his fishing trips, his ice fishing trips. And when I saw it... I don't know if you can see here. Just imagine that's what it looks like under the ice in Paulatuk. And so Pat wanted me to sort of point out to you, when he puts a Go-Pro camera down under the ice in the water around Paulatuk, he doesn't need a filter, or anything it's just this clear arctic water, it's so beautiful. And in Paulatuk people can still just dip a water bottle into the lake, and drink it, and make tea when they're out at their fish camp. And so there is this magic in Paulatuk that the water and fish are still in relatively good shape compared to where I'm from in Treaty 6 territory, where fish have been so heavily depleted in the waters are so heavily contaminated from all sorts of resource extractive and agricultural and urban development projects. So being in Paulatuk is a space where I think we can kind of already imagine a futurity in a way, because it's a place where fish and water still thriving, and in a lot of ways. But there also under threat, because there's heavy, heavy pressure on the community to accept mining. Both nickel and diamond mining interests in the area are currently pretty, pretty serious.

**0:53:56 ZT:** So I wanna be clear, it's not for me to say whether or not the community should or shouldn't engage with mining, but it's really interesting to think about all of the labor and thinking and creativity that has gone into sort of the ways that Paulatuk [0:54:09] [redacted] to assert their laws in relation to fish and water. And I think the proof is in the pudding, I'm gonna show you this video and hopefully it's high enough resolution that we can kinda see just how amazing it is. But I just wanna read out Pat's statement, so I asked him for permission to share this and he said, "Absolutely," and then he said, "Show them that our waters are healthy and we sustain them as best we can. We follow rules for our fishing to keep them healthy and our waters too. We make sure we don't over-fish ourselves, we only take what we need yearly."

[pause]

**0:54:58 ZT:** So, can you see the fish? Yeah.

[pause]

[laughter]

[pause]

**0:56:21 ZT:** Okay, perfect. And then, I do control tab again?

**0:56:23 S?:** Yeah.

**0:56:24 ZT:** Command tab, okay awesome. So, thank you, so I wanted to show that to you, I just was so viscerally impacted by it when I saw it on Pat's timeline last week. I just thought, "Wow, it's very rare for us to get sort of a glimpse into an Arctic fish world like that." And then to see, we're really lucky here to get to see Paulatuk has done so much work. People in Paulatuk have done so

much work to protect fish in their community and they were able to shut down a commercial fishery that it was imposed by the government in 1968. They used all of the tools they had available to them in their land claim.

**0:57:00 ZT:** The Inuvialuit final agreement that came into force in 1984 and within two years they'd worked with scientist and they had applied Inuvialuit law and science together to shut down that fishery, and that's no easy feat as probably many of you know it's very hard to convince the state to shut down a commercial fishery. So, in Paulatuk, I think, this is a place we can kind of look to and think about that's the kind of future I envision for fish in this country. Clear water, abundant fish, so many of them just hanging out there but also finding ways for us to engage across many different platforms to encourage other Canadians to see what it's like in a fish world and what a healthy fish world would look like. So, I don't really have a lot of like well-formed thoughts here other than I think it's important for us to tell fish stories to use all of the means available to us to kind of immerse ourselves in fish worlds in whatever way we have possible. And so, the way that Pat is kind of just very quietly loading these videos up for sharing across his community and across the Arctic, but also deeply informing indigenous people down south like me and what it can look like when we're living in a good way with fish the way the people in Paulatuk are.

**0:58:16 ZT:** So, I don't know, I have this kind of vision that maybe there's ways to use augmented reality in cities to sort of like you could catch Pokemon but you could like catch fish like you are walking down [0:58:25]        you're like, "Oh, man there's a sturgeon, that's so cool." And then you don't get to eat it but you get to like collect it and then maybe it tells you stories like, "This one time, I made it all the way to the Columbia River, and I met like a sturgeon over there." And then they have like secrets that they tell you. I don't know, I'm just imagining that if I was in another line of work, I would just dedicate myself to these kind of weird fish projects. But unfortunately, I've have to make a living as a professor, and so instead I'm sharing this with you here tonight and hopefully someone takes the idea and runs with it, or you are like totally bananas and you are like, "Zoe Todd, we like this fish idea and we're gonna work with you on it."

**0:59:05 ZT:** And I'm like, "Yay, an outlet for my creative weirdness and my love of fish." So, on that note, a way that I've been trying to use the tools I have available to me to encourage Canadians to think about the fish they share time and space with is I have this ongoing drawing project and it started in the fall of 2015 when the first fishing I drew was a pike and I just was like really inspired to draw a northern pike just like the one I'd caught when I was little. The big first I ever caught and I called it like jokingly because my dad was raised Catholic and I have like a lot of Catholic resistance. And so, I was like, "Oh, I'm gonna call this my Fish Friday series." And so, I post it on Twitter and it turns, a lot of other people do Fish Friday as well. So, it's like a movement but that garnered a lot of attention.

**0:59:55 ZT:** And so, because I'm like a cat and I like attention if you give me positive reinforcement, I will continue to do the thing until you like, "Please stop." And nobody said please stop yet so I'm still going. So, I had to continue a weekly sort of series for a while before I had to teach two and two courses, you could tell I had a course release that term cause I was drawing these fish every week. But I started drawing fish, first I was drawing fish from home and then I drew some fish inspired by fish that I caught in Paulatuk with Andy and Millie so I drew an arctic char that is from a picture of a fish I caught, the first char I caught with them in June 2012. And then I drew a lake trout because lake trout are really important in Paulatuk.



**1:00:40 ZT:** And then I started drawing other fish so the day after Brexit, I drew a Mackerel as a lament for my Scottish friends who were now swept up in this complex, political, reality or nightmare of the Brexit, sort of disaster and so this is sort of like my... And I took that photo when I passed my viva last June, I flew back from Aberdeen to London to Toronto and I took WestJet and British Airways and then I booked a train from Toronto to Ottawa so that photo is actually from the last leg of my journey back from defending my thesis and there was this bug that stuck on the train for the five hours from Toronto to Ottawa. This little bug managed and I thought, that is a tenacious bug.

**1:01:29 ZT:** And so that kind of combined with the drawing of the Mackerel was sort of my homage to the Scotts who though they have a complex colonial history I do really care about them. Contrary to what people on twitter think, I've been accused by a lot of people British people of being racist against Brits which I don't know how that's possible but I really do care, I want Scotland to be free and so this is my fishy homage to them. But also like trying to think of fish that have been pushed to the verge of some pretty serious declines, this is homage to the Atlantic cod which has had its troubles in the history of this country. It's sort of the fish I think of when we think of mismanagement in this country and how Canada hasn't been good kin to fish people.

**1:02:11 ZT:** And then I also like puns as you know from the beginning and so I like to like finish on a continuity note so I drew a Mullet in the fall. No, no, it was in January and then Kyle Shepherd who follows me on twitter was like, "What if you put a mullet on a mullet?" and I was like, "I'll be right back." [laughter] And I did it right away. So that's my homage to my home province, right on Fubar. This is my way of kind of getting people to think about fish and care about fish and I don't have the scientific skills that my step dad whose a Fisheries Biologist has. I don't have the like, gravitas of certain other people who would speak to these issues but I do have a deep love of fish, I deeply care about them, I know our futures are bound together, I imagine a future where we are all thriving cause if fish are thriving we're thriving but if fish are in decline, we're not far behind.

**1:03:12 ZT:** So I just want us to find whatever ways, whatever way you have possible and available to you to sort of re-story fish as one of the things that really matter here and I want us to think of the next 150 years of this place whether you think of it as Canada's time or Sturgeon time or human time. I want it to be a fishy one 'cause we really do need the fish in the water to be healthy and strong. And so the fish also have thoughts about Trump. Very strong thoughts about Trump. So I actually, I'll digress for a moment. I was invited to give a keynote at this amazing grads student conference at Penn State. I wasn't thinking, I put fascism in the description and I was like, "Ah it won't matter".

[laughter]

**1:04:04 ZT:** Because I'm not that well-travelled yet.

[laughter]

**1:04:10 ZT:** And I got to Toronto, I flew... This time I flew Air Canada and I got to Toronto and I had all my paperwork, I had the like HB1, like Visa and everything filled out. Everything was as far as I knew, tiptop shape. I've crossed the border before on the same Visa to do exactly the same thing. And I got to Toronto and the guy at Pearson asked me... Well first of all actually I got randomly selected in Ottawa for full check. Then I got randomly selected by the airline at Pearson

for full body pat down, swab of all my stuff and then a scan and then they were like, "We found something so we have to do a full body pat down" and I was like, "Ah!"

**1:04:52 ZT:** So that was like foreshadowing because then when I got to the US, customs control, they were like, "Why are you crossing the border?" And I was like, "I'm going to give a talk". And immediately they were like, "Why would they invite you, what do you do?". They didn't believe I was a Professor and then... Which I don't blame them. But then it got really quite... So he went to get his supervisor and I should've known that was the end 'cause then, they came back with like a yellow folder. They put all my paper in. And the he's like, "Do you have anything to declare?" And I was like, "Three pepperonis and two boiled eggs" and he was, "Okay that's fine". That was not the problem. The problem was that, I don't know but I think that putting fascism in the description of your talk, going to a de-colonial feminist conference in Trump's America probably was the problem. Nobody ever told me what the problem was. But then they put me in secondary for an hour and a half and people were like, "Why are you waiting here"? . And I was like, "I think its because I'm in an outspoken indigenous feminist but I'm not sure."

**1:06:02 ZT:** And so I had to wait an hour and a half and the Air Canada person kept coming in and being like, "Which flight are you on, when do you leave, how many bags do you have?" and so she came in three times and my fish. She's a hero cause every time she came in she would look at the customs people who were totally ignoring us at their computers and she gave them the most withering look. Like she just clearly all day everyday she has to watch them treat people poorly. So she just would come in and just, "Hah," and the she would walk around and kind of like give us a little bit of comfort but when they finally called me up after an hour and a half they just basically ran through, "Why are you here?" and then it was really great 'cause they were like, "Why would they have invited you," and like, "Where do you work? Are you really a professor?" And I finally got really annoyed and I was like, "I'm an emerging scholar in my field!" and then I was like, "Oh, No! That wasn't smart."

**1:06:57 ZT:** I immediately had to slide over the conference pamphlet and it had this really beautiful drawing of a nude on the front, and then it had my shining face being in it, I was like, "I'm gonna talk about dismantling fascism through fish," and so she read. It was excruciating, she read every single description in the pamphlet and I just sit there and wait and be like, "Okay at one point like either she's gonna get mad or she's gonna let me go," but they just made me wait and then they finally they were like, "Yeah, okay you can go." But it was like 15 minutes before my flight took off from the small little terminal and the end of Pearson and so I had to like run, and so it was a whole thing. I'm supposed to go to Harvard next, like on April 10th and maybe just follow my twitter account 'cause there'll probably be some live tweeting either way. [laughter]

**1:07:49 S?:** [1:07:49]        Maybe don't tweet?

**1:07:50 ZT:** Yeah, and maybe I won't tweet, I won't have my phone with me at the border. I don't know why I told you that story but I was really comforted by the fish being against fascism, 'cause I think that they can imagine futurities for us that are much more expansive than the ones that involve borders and patrolling and policing of human bodies.

**1:08:14 ZT:** "I have dreams of us building virtual worlds where we can encourage Canadians to re-imagine the present and future as a fishy one. Many a biologist on the prairies has asked "How do we get people to care about fish?" I think that a combination of legal principles like wahkohtowin

and creative application of stories, art, digital media are what we need.

**1:08:31 ZT:** We need to decenter our focus on land and water, and our human concerns and turn our minds to the bodies of fish worlds. I'm embarrassed that I don't have concrete things to say about how to accomplish this, but my aunt's work and the work of many other people inspire me. So Fish Worlds, let's make them happen. And the Ness Namweyo, she keeps swimming. She keeps working to address the violence enacted upon human, and more than human beings in this country and beyond, and she refuses and refracts the logics which imagine a future without her. I will do my best to keep tending to her stories, do my best to enact principles and actions which center a fishy future for Métis and all other people in this place and I'll do my best to think and live in sturgeon time."

[applause]

**1:09:26 JL:** Thank you, thank you so much, Zoe. It's actually very nice that a little over 20 years ago now I met your aunt, Loretta for the first time. And actually Loretta is sort of one of the seminal thinkers in terms of thinking about indigeneity in cyber-space actually. So it's nice, and that helped us get launched in the direction that we have ended up in in aboriginal territories in cyber-space. So it's really nice to have you here now sort of continuing in that kind of fierce intellectual tradition. Okay, so questions, or comments or observations for Zoe?

**1:10:03 ZT:** Fish Jokes are also welcome.

[laughter]

**1:10:03 JL:** [1:10:03]        talk about fish!

**1:10:06 S?:** Fish jokes are awesome.

[laughter]

**1:10:08 S?:** [1:10:08]       .

**1:10:13 JL:** Okay. Well I'll ask a question then we've sort of bumped up to you a couple of times since you've been here. Actually I'm gonna ask this slightly differently now after this morning which is, if we're gonna sit down and fish, how do we get consent from fish?

**1:10:29 ZT:** That's a really good question. A lot of indigenous legal traditions that I've been sort of sensitized to center around this idea that, if fish are caught it's because they've consented to being caught, and Millie actually talked about this in Paulatuk the idea of stingy fish. When you get skunked when you don't catch any fish. It's because the fish have decided, "Nope, I'm not going to give myself to you today."

**1:10:58 ZT:** We could say that in one way if a fish is allowing you to see it or is allowing you to engage with it, it has consented. But given that we're also working across multiple sort of cosmologies, and not everyone necessarily would take the time to think about whether a fish has been stingy or not like they might go out and buy like a fish finder and disrupt that kind of interplay, then I think we have to sort of maybe come up with some alternate politics of consent for fish to make sure we're constantly checking in with them. I don't know how we do it but I think that we

have to... We can maybe draw some inspiration from indigenous legal traditions that center this idea of reciprocity with more than humans, and this idea that if you are able to hunt or fish a being it's because it's giving itself to you. We need some sort of way of mediating the more violent Euro-western understanding of fish as unable to consent so I'm not sure if I have a full answer but I think yeah, sitting with them and tending to their worlds is probably a good place to start showing them that they have reasons to trust us is probably a good beginning for developing that relationality that's been so heavily damaged.

**1:12:18 JL:** Lindsey.

**1:12:21 S?:** In preparing dossier of your work, I was so surprised to find that you've done so much writing about art and I feel like when we talk about Zoe Todd, we always talk about anthropology or biology, but we never really talk about art. Then also learning about your father's practice about writing and your relationship with Edmonton through him and through his art. I also noticed that you used sort of non-linear visual forms, so it like explore your relationship with fish futures, I was wondering if you wanted to talk about that.

**1:12:45 ZT:** Sure. So, I wanted to be an artist but I was sort of born in a time when there was a big pressure on women to go into the sciences, which is important. I think STEM is still massively underrepresented, so I was kind of steered out of that by lots of people with good reason I'm sure but it's always stuck with me that I really wanted to still keep drawing and trying and then I realized I didn't need a BFA to draw my fish. [chuckle] So, I take a lot of inspiration from my Dad. He upgraded when I was little and then he got into a BFA and he, in 1994 he graduated. So, I owe a lot to both him and my Mom for both showing me that I could be in the academy. My Dad used to bring us to studio when he was studying at the U of A, so for me, the University of Alberta campus was a familiar space. That bridged an inter-generational kind of divide, he made it a space where we, he would take us to round dances and things that the aboriginal student council put on, so for me art and academia kind of come together in kind of an interesting way because of that, because he made that for space for us. He used to take us to galleries and openings and things like that. But I do find, and I've written about it, the Alberta art world is pretty hostile. It has a lot of work to do on dismantling white supremacy within it.

**1:14:11 ZT:** For a long time, I didn't make art and I didn't write about art 'cause I didn't feel that I was allowed in those spaces. I saw my dad pretty heavily pushed aside because he wasn't the right kind of artist at the time. He wasn't white, he wasn't speaking in ways that were welcome in the '90s in settler Alberta. I've always kind of carried quite a bit of grief for him because I think he's an amazing painter but he just, the art world is a pretty hard place for some people to navigate and so, for me writing and making art is kind of like a reclamation of the space that he was afforded in white Edmonton. It's a way of saying, "You don't have to agree with me and you might actually actively hate me, but I'm gonna make art on my own terms and I'm gonna write about it, I'm gonna critique it and I wanna make space for other people who aren't seen as sort of being in those spaces." I really hope that, and there's a lot of amazing people, like Dawn Marie Marchand, my friend Tashina Makokis and Cody [1:15:16]            are doing amazing work in Edmonton to make that space and they're doing amazing labor to make that community one where anyone can make art.

**1:15:27 ZT:** I think that needs to be celebrated and so I'm also conscious that I have a platform as an academic and I can push back if people are gate-keeping or being violent towards women and

friends that I love. So, yeah but I also wanna celebrate people like my aunt and my Dad and all of the makers in my family that are really brilliant and I just have... I hope we can bring that loving kindness to Prairie art worlds. I think there's a lot there that is possible but I do think it is a weird sort of space in terms of just Prairie racism and Prairie sort of social spaces can be quite violent and it upsets me. I've actually had to take a break for a while, like my Mom was like "Please stop thinking about Edmonton". I was like "But I can't". Now I can. I've moved on to the fish, for the better of probably lots of people. Yeah, I think for me I want people to be able to see that there should be joy in making and I think like Skawennati your work is really joyful and so there's a lot of people who are doing that and I think it models for others that like we can make joyful, exciting, creative and ah, expansive work and yeah, I think for me that's kinda why I do it.

**1:16:51 ZT:** I don't have the training, I don't have the accreditation but and for some reason some of my first writing was taken up by sort of art folks in Europe and that's always fascinated me that that was where it found a hold and so, I'm grateful. I'm indebted to them for taking my words in and sitting with them and celebrating them when they could have easily just been like, we don't wanna listen to this angry Métis woman who's shouting about the Scottish Academy. Instead was a very loving response and I think that's shown me that there's maybe lots of different ways to come at problems. So, I don't know if that answers your question but yeah.

**1:17:34 S?:** Okay. Thanks very much for the great talk. I was wondering, you know a lot of the emphasis in settler legal systems is on dealing with conflicts, obviously primarily through finding one party a victor over the other in a court but I'm wondering what fish might have to say about resolving conflicts and then related to that you spoke a lot about the sturgeon but you characterized a lot of fish as having a very similar outlook which makes some sense but I'm wondering whether there's divergence...

**1:18:14 ZT:** Oh yeah.

**1:18:14 S?:** Between fish.

**1:18:15 ZT:** Oh, I wish I had all my fish drawings 'cause I have stories for all of them. There's Eric the walleye, and he's just trying to make a go of things and he's got a real go getter attitude and I work with this amazing Tlingit student Sonya Gray who's writing beautiful work about her community, Hoonah, Alaska and she was like, "all your fish have male names." And I was like "Oh, you're right." [chuckle] And so I was like I have to... Actually I do a haddock. Immediately the next week I drew a haddock, and I was like, "Her name is Harriet." And she's very delightful. But I think... Well these are good questions, I haven't really sat with that and thought about it but for some fish it's eat or be eaten. Like, northern pike eat small frogs and sometimes baby loons and they hang out in the shallows, they hang out in the weeds.

**1:19:08 ZT:** Oh and I wish I had... There's a drawing I have of a minnow and my friend was like, "I really like how you drew that paranoid little minnow." And I was like, "Oh of course he's paranoid 'cause he's..." I hadn't thought of it but of course you're a minnow and you have to think about everybody's out to get you. [laughter] Really, he's not wrong and so I think there's a lot... And this is the de-colonial stickleback, so in that story that I gave you the snapshot of, the full chapter, the sticklebacks are the ones who are like, "No. Dismantle the system, everything..." Whereas some of the other animals, like the butterflies they're like, "Well, maybe there's some hope." And the stickleback is like "No, smash it." So and you can see it in his face, he's like "aah." So again, that's

me imposing my narrative on the fish and I think that there's room for us to challenge that for sure but...

**1:19:57 ZT:** So it's not scientific but I think legal reasoning, indigenous law is also law, we need law because there's conflict everywhere. All humans are messy and so we need law but Western law, British common law it's drawn around property and ownership, but there's other ways for us to come at conflict, like co-existence or treaties. Peace and friendship treaties are actually enforced here if we cared to honor them. So I think... I like the idea of disrupting property 'cause it's a fiction, I like disrupting... I say that fish don't believe in borders, they disrupt them cause they're a fiction. I think that's important for us to maybe bring some of those sensibilities, but like the Ness Namweyo, she's special. She is particularly someone I like to tell stories alongside or through, but there's tons of... And there's Larry the lamprey who's an invasive species but he doesn't know it, and he's going around and he's trying to eat all the wrong things and I do this special voice for him where they're like, "Larry, that's not how to be a good kin." And he's like, "Oh no I'm trying so hard." [laughter]

**1:21:09 ZT:** And so clearly there's a future for me in children's books [laughter] that hasn't been realized but I think that actually there's a lot we can do with these kind of stories that can help us think through how to approach time and space in different ways. And I'm just so tired of British ownership and property, I lived it in the UK when I did my PhD there. And it's so heavy there, the stone enclosures and these castles where the wealth concretizes in these ruins, and it was so stifling and it was such a relief to come home and even though there's quite a bit of violence that's been done to the land here, it's just not the same... The land there felt so heavy and enclosed and it just wanted to be freed of this history that these things have been done in it's name. And so I'm grateful to be here where I think there's still capacity for us to engage with the world in a slightly different way and think about relationality in different ways and...

**1:22:06 ZT:** But even the mackerel, I have hope for the mackerel to... They'll join the sturgeon, Nicola Sturgeon [laughter] in refusing... I've been waiting for months to make that joke, so... [laughter] But yeah in all seriousness those are good questions. How do we do this differently and do fish have different approaches? We could maybe think of them as fish nations and so they'll have different ways of being in the world and relating to one another and so they do have to negotiate across their realities and who they are. And sometimes they can be invasive, sometimes they can be good kin, sometimes they're interlopers. But at the end of the day, all of them are in trouble if we don't shift how we're relating to lands and waters and capital.

**1:22:51 S?:** Don't forget Alex Salmond.

**1:22:53 ZT:** Yes, it was a fish [1:22:55]        conspiracy. [laughter] I didn't make that joke, someone else did.

[laughter]

**1:23:01 JL:** Okay, it's almost 8 o'clock, so I think we need to give you a break.

**1:23:05 ZT:** Thank you. [laughter]

**1:23:06 JL:** Thank you very much, Zoe for a fantastic...

**1:23:08 ZT:** Thank you.

[applause]

[pause]