

Alessandra Naccarato 0:10

Hello and welcome to Imminent Domains, Conversations at the Crossroads of Art, Ecology and the Body. This is the Imminent Domains Podcast, a companion to Imminent Domains: Reckoning with the Anthropocene, an essay collection by myself, Alessandra Naccarato, out with Book*hug Press. And today, my guest is Moe Clark, welcome Moe.

Moe Clark 0:45

tânisi, hello.

Alessandra Naccarato 0:48

It is such a joy to have you here. And I want to just start by locating myself, where I am in this moment, I am on land that has been a meeting place since time immemorial, a place known as Toronto, Tkaronto. This is the traditional territory of many people, including the Anishinaabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat peoples, the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishinaabe, and it is part of the Dish with One Spoon Wampum Treaty. And as we're meeting here today, in this moment, I'm thinking about the spirit of friendship and connection and relationship that's been held by that treaty, and by the people who have been here, since time immemorial, for so long. I'm holding a lot of humility and gratitude, and thinking about the complexity of relationship. And hoping to bring myself to this moment, to this conversation, in the spirit of so many people who have been here for so long. And I'm so grateful to be here with you. So welcome. Thank you for joining me.

Moe Clark 2:20

Ah, it's such a such a great moment to come together. And I'm just thinking about where I am as well. On the unceded ancestral lands of the Kanien'kehá:ka people of the Eastern door, the Mohawk people in Tiohtià:ke, otherwise known as Montreal, or Mooniyang by the Anishinaabe. And thinking about this beautiful kind of sunlight that we have today, we've had almost a full week of snow kind of non stop that beautiful, cold white blanket that covers the land at this time of year. And just feeling grateful for fresh air, for the sound of birds and for different ways of moving through and on and in the snow in this time of year. Yeah, what it takes us to arrive these days is an interesting kind of piece. Lots of layers and lots of fur.

Moe Clark 3:31

Yes. That's so true. It brings to mind. I live very close to a ravine where the coyotes have recently returned to, even though I'm in really central, Tkaronto, Toronto, and it's currently their mating season. And so they've really been leaving that ravine, and their coats are so thick and huge right now. And just the other day, a coyote just walked straight down my street, right in front of my house, just headed to this little parkette down the street. I grew up in this neighborhood, and was born in a house just down the street. So I have a sense of like, the change and the shift and the rewilding that indicates. And

just your mention of that fur made me think of these like thick furred coyotes that are seeking out further and further into this city, and mating and finding each other in these tiny parks nearby.

Moe Clark 4:39

Gorgeous. Wow, I love that. Yeah, we don't we don't see many coyotes in Tiohtià:ke. But where I'm from originally in Treaty Seven, coyotes, deer, Eagle, geese, all sorts of other birds, waterfowl, wood ducks, frequent the urban parks and all along the the waterway the, the river, river way. And so it's interesting to maybe see an occasional raccoon or massive chubby grey squirrel in Montreal. Those are like our, our urban kin of the four legged variety. But it's it's still beautiful, when I do you know, every now and then on the mountain, maybe see like a hawk or an owl or Fox. Yeah, we've got some Fox. Yeah.

Alessandra Naccarato 5:44

Beautiful. I wanted to speak a little bit to your work as we arrived here as well. I'm also going to invite you to speak to it, but just so people who are listening and watching can know a little bit about the depth and wealth of experience that you bring to this moment. Moe Clark is a 2Spirit singing thunderbird. She works across diverse disciplines of vocal improvisation spoken word poetry, sound design, and performance creation to create meaning that is rooted in personal legacy, ancestral memory and embodied knowledge. Moe has seven albums of music both solo and collaborative, and multiple performance videos. Co-Founder of Weather Beings with Māori dancer, choreographer Victoria Hunt. Their collaboration examines intersections of Métis and Māori cosmology, and indigenous futurism through performance experimentation. You also have extensive experience that goes far beyond that and share your work across the world. And I want to open the space welcome you into this moment.

Moe Clark 7:30

(Speaking nêhiyawêwin)

Hay hay, I just want to bring to bring to perspective this, the water I have here, a candle that's been lit, these beautiful feathers. Just, you know, what energies in this current moment are also, I guess bearing witness to this conversation to this gathering of hearts and words and voices and spirits, to celebrate and to acknowledge the good work that you're doing. And to really just, you know, I think of the Thanksgiving Address, like to bring our hearts and minds together as one and maybe I'll just introduce myself a little in the language and then we can roll with the convo. So in this moment, I'd love to just you know, speak in the language that I have within my heart.

So that basically says I'm Moe, singing thunderbird. I'm Métis. I'm one who owns themselves or otipēmisiw. That's what the Cree always called the Métis: those who their own bosses. I'm tastawayihk-iyiniw,

which is an in-between person, which comes from Métis Elder Marjorie Beaucage, which speaks to this kind of re-centering of 2Spirit kin, LGBTQ, as an in-between person, but what we hold in that in-between space. And I'm also Norwegian, French-British, in addition to being Métis-Cree. And I'm from Treaty 7, which is otherwise known as "At the Elbow," otoskwanihk, which is the meeting place of the Elbow and the Bow rivers, those glacial waters, and land of the prairie rose. I'm also living here in Montreal, and I'm a vocalist, and I haven't yet memorized how to say poet, it's like... so it's like, the one who brings good voice to language. So some of these these concepts in the language to to describe them and to to introduce them, because they're so relational, and because they're so verb, and kind of action based, it can be really complicated to describe that. In English, it's like, I'm a poet, but in Cree, it's like, I'm someone who uses good language to describe relationships to the world around me, you know, and that'll be one word to kind of encompass that whole way or state of being, but even the word... is to try really hard to produce great feeling. And that is to be a singer. And that is to use one's voice in song.

And I'm speaking nêhiyawêwin, which is Plains Cree. And I started learning that language as a tool to connect with Michif, which is the language of the Métis. And Michif is really a hybrid almost like patois, or you know, a Creole, which is a merging of French, mostly French nouns, and often nêhiyawêwin verbs and it was kind of considered like our code as Métis people, that we could use to communicate with one another, but also gave us access to knowing and understanding cree for anything that was really related to like land base and traditional practices, but then also having French language for trade, and, you know, diplomacy with European kin and relatives. So I've been on that path of learning, nêhiyawêwin now for for 10 years. And I just want to credit Joseph Naytowhow, and Cheryl L'Hirondelle, two Cree half-breed kin, Auntie, Uncles, who really have supported me in that journey.

Alessandra Naccarato 12:28

Thank you for that meaningful and beautiful introduction to you and your work, and your place in the world. I know that you've also shared and said that song is your first language. And as we enter into this conversation about art and ecology and possibility and the body, I would love if you would share more about that in any way that feels right in this moment. I know that could be through story, that could be through song, whatever feels like the way into that conversation, which really opened up for me my way of thinking about language itself.

Moe Clark 13:34

Beautiful. Yeah, I just want to preface by saying that like, for all the shy ones, timid ones, maybe out there who maybe don't have like such a facility with language. I was very shy and very timid as a

young one. And so I really feel like my way of building relationship with the world around me and within me was really through songs, through humming through vibrating my body as a way I think of like self soothing, and I think of, oh my gosh, what's his name in my grandmother's hands Resmaa Menakem and some of his somatic practices. And, you know, one of the chapters of his book, which basically speaks about his grandmother who grew up in the cotton fields, and, you know, when, as a grandmother, he remembers her rocking him on her lap and, and the humming and the singing. And I think for me, song in that way, it's both a way to kind of ease through and move through whatever I carry in my body that feels unsettled, that feels uneasy or uncomfortable, it's sort of a way to kind of move through and breathe through and even resonate through those moments. But I think more and more these days from a perspective that is very much in relationship with askiy, with kikâwînow-askiy, with, with Earth, how we also need to sing to the land with the land, and with all of wâhkôhtowin, like the kinship that lives grows, swims, flies, climbs, crawls, you know, flowers in these lands that we are inhabiting as relatives and in relationship to. And it, it's funny because they're, they're street cleaning outside. So there's like, this like chaotic siren happening, as I'm talking about this notion of, you know, vibrating and resonating with the land. I think of a moment when I was up in Chisasibi, at the site of the hydro dam of LG-2 , which is in James Bay, in northern Quebec, on the Cree, the James Bay Cree land. And you know that the history of that process is really intense, and really lacks justice, cultural, environmental, political justice, for the Cree people. But I will say that, you know, the dam has been there now for many, many years. And it flooded a lot of land. And everything's changed because of that. But that's how the majority of Quebec gets our electricity. So I even like to acknowledge, you know, that as we're plugged into these computers, and in these digital spheres that like this is actually very land based, this is water based, because that currency that's coming to, you know, give us this capacity is coming from those those hydro dams. But I was up there teaching a few years ago in 2017. And it was winter. And we were at the dam because I wanted to go visit and wanted to sing to those frozen waters, and to that land in that space. And so I had my drum. And as I was singing, group of caribou, little small herd of caribou started walking across the frozen land, the frozen hydro dam, that water and it was just a moment for me of deep resonance and deep call and response. I think that through song, it's a different way of connection, and a different way of calling in and calling on those energies and those spirits and those ways of righting our relationships. And a similar occurrence happened when I was in Chile and Atacama, in the Altiplano, like up in the high kind of elevations. And we were at the edge of an oasis, a beautiful oasis, and we were there with the Likanantaí, Atacameño Indigenous people, and we had just finished doing some water testing water samples to check the the waters and the biological you know, kind of aliveness of these waters to also prevent the lithium extraction and the mining and, and we finished and I just had this

urge to grab my rattle and to sing a song. And it was just very gentle. And it wasn't like hey, everybody be quiet. I'm going to sing now. It was just like, This is the moment that is coming into my presence. And I started rattling in I started singing this song. And it's a song that is an offering and its song as offering to the land. And basically, you know, says in its essence, I'm not here to disturb. I know I'm a guest I'm here to just kind of tie things together for love of this good life and to sing a song for the land. And as I started singing this two Vicuñas, which are like a type of llama or alpaca started walking in the distance on the other side of the oasis. And as the song finished, they just kind of scurried off. And they went on their way.

But to me, the kind of, the, I don't know that the resonance or the kind of the signature of that moment, felt like it was part of this larger kind of cyclical, kind of cycle, returning to singing and making these offerings of song to these lands that are being impacted by industry, by ignorance, by overtaking, capitalism by whatever else, and they're in this very vulnerable place. But the way that the animals and the lands will still receive, and are open to receiving, when we are open to receiving what that land also is singing to and through us, as visitors, as guests. So I guess I say that as a way of just kind of returning to this idea of song as my first language that, to me song is such an embodied practice, that how could it not be everyone's first language, in a way? And depending how we actually look at what song is, you know, crying, preening, what's the word when you're like, you're weeping, you're ... keening, you know, cleaning like that, as like, you know, as a practice of song, wailing as a practice of song. Like any of these, you know, practices that I think are kind of resurgent right now, but have been in our cultural lineages, and been in our processes, processes for, you know, so many generations, that they are land based practices, because they require the vibration of the body, in order for them to be activated.

Alessandra Naccarato 21:25

Thank you so much for sharing that. Every piece of that. When you first started speaking, I felt my small self, my child self just come so alive and be so seen. I was silent as a child for many years, I didn't speak in public. For years and years, I was, I was almost silent and couldn't really read and was was fairly nonverbal. And it's interesting to come from this place of silence and become people whose work in the world is language and voice and word. So thank you so much for sharing that and for sharing a story of landscape that is so striking. So moving. Some of the work in writing Imminent Domains was to do some research, as much research as I could, on it was difficult research, because it's information that, I think people don't want you to easily find on extraction that's taking place in what's called the Lithium Triangle that you mentioned in Atacama, and also, things like Debers diamond mining that took place in the north, which has really poisoned the water there, and there's lawsuits under way. So just

hearing as well, the stories of resilience and the way the land continues to answer back is deeply moving. And I'm so grateful for this opportunity to hear those stories.

Moe Clark 23:37

Yeah, I mean, it makes me think of the honorable harvest. You know, Robin Wall Kimmerer talks about this, I mean, any Indigenous Elders who work with any form of harvesting of plant medicines, of gathering of stones for sweats, of, you know, trees for a lodge building. You know, we never take the first and we never take the last. And there's a communication and a reciprocity that comes through that giving and taking, that we either make an offering of tobacco or whatever the sort of, you know, medicine or, or kind of currency is. And so for us as plains people, you know, they always say tobacco moves first, as prayer, as offering, as gift. But when we don't have that, what do we have to offer? A song, words, maybe something we've carried in our pocket, piece of fabric or material, even water, you know, or I know in the south, they give some wine, flower, maize. So it's interesting to think that in these extractivist processes, and you talk about mining, it's like what is being given to these lands in return for that taking. And that process is not integrated, and it's not part of it. So instead, you know, and you speak about it in your book, it's like the mountain eats men. The mountain is kind of taking back, and in almost a vicious sort of, you know, way, we could see it as that. But it could also be, no, like I am taking because you're not giving me what I need to sustain.

Moe Clark 25:32

Yeah.

Alessandra Naccarato 25:34

Thank you so much for articulating that. And, you know, in my own way, as a white settler, and someone who has traveled to different places, and looking back on those times, and contemplating those moments of, you know, entering the mines in Potosi and Cerro Rico, without knowing what I was entering, the complexity of that mountain, the instability of that mine and to discover, afterwards, to be continuing to discover now, the legacy of silver mining in that mountain, that continues five hundred years of extraction, and how it transforms now not only as a natural resource, but also as a narrative. Which feels like it's part of what you're speaking to, the way in which narrative is also part of what becomes extraction. And when I think of the Lithium Triangle, and lithium in particular, it is being extracted for so called "Sustainable Energy Development" right. So this is something that becomes really spoken about, and like green energy and sustainable resource, but it's not a sustainable resource. It's a finite material in one of the driest places on Earth, which is where primarily Indigenous communities live, and where their way of life is being dramatically impacted. Until the only way of life left is to go mine in a mountain, like Cerro Rico, which is highly, highly dangerous. And

our narrative continues to be, oh, "sustainable mining," "sustainable energy." And so it's really on my mind, everything you're sharing is really deepening my thinking on that. Is there anything else you would like to say to that, as someone who is just there, really?

Moe Clark 27:57

Well,

Moe Clark 27:58

It's interesting, because it's like sustainability, I think needs to be. I just keep thinking of slowing down and slowness and the deep healing that is required in order for us to trust and to feel safe in slowing down. I mean, I think of... I'm not saying this quite right, but it's it's perseverance, and...which is patience. But ... is river. And so there's there's a fluidity and aliveness to these practices. In Atacama, we got to meet with an incredible water protector, Karen Lusa, who is Atacameña, Likanantaí, and her work has really been about pushing back and resisting a lot of the industry, and a lot of the really brutal extractivism and the processes that really pull from the underground aquifers and the very little water that they have in those deserts. But the violence that is enacted upon her upon her, her territory, the animals that she takes care of. And the kind of threat that she is under as someone with a voice in those lands, is, it's really reflective of a lot of the lack of policies and safety and protection of land and water defenders in the south. Which I'd say it's a little bit different than here in the North. But there's still a lot of blatant and brutal violence and arrests and charging and, you know, just getting through the legalities of protecting that which is your ancestral land, ancestral waters. You know, I think of wet'suwet'en, kanehsatà:ke. I bring up these people because it's like when we can actually move into a place of interacting in relationship with the people who are being impacted, the animals, the traditions, the practices that are being impacted, that human connection, it's like it, it sparks something that causes us to slow down. And it makes me think of the Elder who we also connected with Doña Sonya, who's a beautiful Likanantaí Elder, and her, her wish was to go and to record the heartbeat of El Tatio. And El Tatio is the like the thermal geyser that flows from under the land and out onto the land and it spills across the land. And, you know, that's why there's so much lithium, because there's such like salt and sulfuric, you know, quantities of minerals and deposits in these lands. But these lands are so alive too, like all of Chile is basically part of that Ring of Fire, like it's all volcanic. And I just remember the day that we went there. And there was a tour group parked right over the geyser. And they had their table out. They had their music blaring, and they were eating lunch. And it was such a moment they had moved these stones that were protecting that area, they've moved the stones so that they could pull in. And instantly you could feel the pain, the rage, the anger that Doña Sonya was experiencing and seeing this van parked in this space that was not theirs to park in. And we went over to them with Doña

Sonya and she expressed you know, these are my traditional lands. These are my relatives, El Tatio is my grandfather, these waters are my grandfather's tears. This isn't just a resource. This isn't just a tourist site. This is an ancestor. This is a relative, and you're sitting on his body. You're sitting on his face, basically. And they just said, well, we'll finish our lunch and yeah, we'll move on. But they didn't say oh, we'll leave right away. Thank you for sharing with us. We're sorry, like not acknowledging that, like the pain that brought her to have to express this to them. And so she was really distraught. I offered some smudge, because I had my medicines. I pulled out my drum and I offered a song. And it was incredible how just the energy was able to dissipate and soften and kind of slow down. And we went over to the edge of the geyser once the van had left. And we were just standing there and I started singing the water song. And as we were standing there, a vicuña again, one of these beautiful four-leggeds, just like literally like a few feet in front of us, jumped over the geyser and ran up the hill. And Doña Sonya took this as a sign that Pachamama, that Mother Earth is communicating is happy where there is responding. And it was like, that fracture and that rupture, was able to kind of feel a sense of mending in that moment of being on the land, with the pain and feeling that discomfort, but then moving through that pain through the expression through the songs through the togetherness through the ritual, and through the prayer. So it's, it's interesting to me to think of the brutality and the violence that can be inflicted on bodies of land, and how that infliction can impact us in our bodies, and the bodies of Indigenous Nations primarily, on these lands, but how important ceremony and ritual and those deep ancestral processes are for mending and for softening some of that violence. So I feel like in a large part of my work, that's, that's kind of what I'm trying to do. And she gifted us these beautiful condor feathers, because these prophecies and you know, the time that we're living in has been prophesized as it's going to be a really difficult time. The earth is going to tremble and shake like never before. The waters are going to eat away at the shoreline, tsunamis, cyclones, hurricanes, earthquakes, fires are going to burn of the land and of the trees, forest fires like we've never seen before, drought like we've never seen before. But we're going to need to come together. And that prophecy of the condor and the eagle, of these nation to nation connections, of the need for us to share our knowledges, to support one another in rekindling these resurgent practices of song, of prayer, of ritual, and of togetherness. And just how important those things are as signposts for perseverance, for resilience, reaffirming that we do have the capacity to heal.

Alessandra Naccarato 36:25

I find your work deeply moving and meaningful. And one of the ways in which I find it so meaningful is the ways in which it speaks to the in-between, to the seen and unseen to the space between worlds to the tangible and intangible. I'm speaking somewhat in binary language, and

I do not believe it's a binary that your work speaks to. I feel and know in it a circle or cycle of kinship. And something that is beyond what might be called a manufactured world or the ways we've constructed this world in to dichotomies and binaries. And, you know, in Imminent Domains, the subtitle being Reckoning with the Anthropocene, I'm really navigating, challenging, thinking about the language we're giving to this world. The term Anthropocene is what's being used to characterize this moment in time as a geological moment or era where the earth is mostly shaped by human impact on the planet. I am engaging with that term, because it is the language we're using collectively. I really feel like we are not just like, you know, solo impacting this planet without a response from the earth, you know, we are in relationship and not the ones with ultimate agency, or...you know, we're really the smaller players. And even as I say that, I would also contradict my own use of "we." Because there's a real difference between people living throughout the world in the ways we're impacting ecological change, and the earth and the way we're impacted by it. And someone like me, as a white settler, is having a very different impact and a very different experience of the climate crisis already and likely well as time goes on. So often, how I think about it and how I've spoken about it in this book, is that I understand this to be a time of increasing interconnection. That if anything, we we have designed systems that are increasingly integrating and interconnecting us together. And that is one way, you know, that I am sitting with it. I am curious to hear from you if there's language, if there's a felt-sense, if there's a way you would speak to this moment in time, in your own way. Yeah.

Moe Clark 40:05

Yeah, beautiful. I just also want to acknowledge and just express my gratitude for all of the different, you know, framings. And I would almost say, like, you know, bundles that you propose throughout Imminent Domains, throughout the book, as sort of like access points and entryways, for reflection, for integration, and for really exploring that interdependence, and the kind of contradictory and challenging sort of nature of relationships and being in relationship to anything that is living these days. But I do see it as bundles. And I think when, I when I, when I look at what we're going through right now, as sort of a series of bundles, it's like each of those bundles has caretakers, has healers, has guardians or protectors, has new life and life that is passing on. And so you could see that as like communities, but that aren't just human communities, that are you know, tree and plant beings that are stone and like listening beings that are water beings that are you know, fungal beings, animal, all of it, even weather beings and the sky world beings, cosmological and star beings. I mean, I think there's, there's always a prayer or a hope, for me, that the more I'm decolonizing my view and perspective and relationship to the world around me, the more that I'm entering into a state of deep listening. And that deep listening, can bring about more of an acknowledgement of wâhkôhtowin. And wâhkôhtowin, is a

Cree term that speaks about kinship. And it is kinship beyond just our nuclear family beyond just our two legged existence, beyond just like, you know, the kind of hetero patriarchal, you know, Judeo Christian kind of notion of like, there's the Mother, the Father and the child. And that's who you have to rely on and depend on for everything that you need. And so it's that sort of scarcity of care that creates the need for these really intense extractivist processes that are often mindless, careless, because there isn't that notion of taking care of one another. And of reciprocity and of right relation. So wâhkôhtowin is sort of a way to say interdependence. And wâhkôhtowin, I think, is also the sort of antidote for the great unraveling that we're experienced right now, experiencing, that, you know, again, from an Indigenous perspective, the old ones from many generations ago, prophesized. So we could we could say that we're living in a prophetic time as well. In a time of, you know, the visioning from the before us, into the now us. But as I say that, I'm also thinking of a non-linearity, you know, and we often think of our ancestors as being these things that exist in the behind, you know, like, we look back at them or we feel them kind of, you know, supporting us from that space, but I see it as a circle. And when I can start to kind of consider that seven generations, you know, seven generations of future descendants, seven generations of ancestors, you know, but as a circular thing, my great great, great, great great grandmother can be holding hands with my great, great, great, great, great, great grandchild. And that circle is complete. And so when I think about that notion of wâhkôhtowin, and interdependence, and maybe, I'm maybe I'm just like, I'm just a very, like, I'm someone who has a lot of belief that, you know, our rituals and our ceremonies, and our practices and our traditions, and our languages and our land based knowledges actually will save us, and even if they don't save the world, or the like natural world, how can those processes at least make these cellular atomic existences that much more balanced, and that much more grounded. But from like a real perspective of grounding, that, that through this notion of wâhkôhtowin, that that wâhkôhtowin is, is through my like human form, but that wâhkôhtowin is also through like all the tree ancestral bodies, and all the water ancestral bodies, and all the stone ancestral bodies. And the adaptations that we're making, I hope that those adaptations are coming from a place of not wanting to re-purpose, the harm, and the violence that has been enacted on us through us. And that we can actually stop those patterns and create new ones. And through the creation of those new patterns, we're extending that care across that circle and through that circle, so that those generations can actually communicate with one another, and support one another. And feel that there's a connection, because as soon as we start to have those connections, then the scarcity and the lack and the not-enoughness, kind of starts to fall away. And the priorities and the perspectives of, you know, what we're actually living for and living towards and living in, becomes, I don't, I don't want to say more bearable, but that's the first word that comes through, like, what is this notion of

having to bear something versus being in an embodied space that can actually filter and transform and resonate through discomfort from a place that is awake, from a place that is capable. And so those those tools of song, those tools of storytelling, those practices of connection of intergenerational transmission of land based work, to me are our ways of rebalancing these territories and this land so that what's happening in the external to this body, I'm better able to negotiate and adapt and support and offer that care as those ruptures are taking place. I don't know if that made any sense. But there's, there's so many I think there's so many layers there. There's so much I can say. Anthropocene. I mean, whatever. Like when I first heard the word, I just thought it sounded like plasticine. And I was like, alright, let's re-mold. Let's throw it against the wall. Let's step on it, let's squish it. I mean, these these Western concepts and notions, they're so self centered, and they're so human centered. And just the very fact that people can talk about this moment as "anthro" like that it's all human. I'm just like, get out of here. Like (laughs), yes, we're making a shitty impact. But like, there's so much, I don't know, it's just so much bigger than that. But we also have to feel empowered to make a change. So it's like how to explore humility from a place of like, we are pitiful little two leggeds, you know, who are messing with the world, but we also have the resources, the collective care, the tools, the prayers and the rituals to do better.

Alessandra Naccarato 49:05

One thing at the heart of this book, this question, and so I'll bring it to you because I think this question may have a different answer for each person may mean something different to each person is this idea of turning toward the fire. And in the culture I grew up in, many of us, all we've really been taught is to turn away from a fire, a burning fire, unless we're trained, unless we have these special skills, this special equipment that we leave emergencies for someone else, that we leave a burning fire for someone else. And fire itself is a different cultural experience, meaning, for many different people. And I wanted to ask you, this phrase "turning toward the fire," what that brings to you, what does it mean to you to turn towards the fire?

Moe Clark 50:24

It's so funny, because iskotêw is how we say fire, iskotêw and ... as a sound, it's represented by like an upward moving triangle in our syllabics in our spirit markers, in the first visual depiction of the language. And ... is like it's an activation, and it's that which activates life, breath, creativity, inspiration. So iskotêw as like a word is an activator. I think for us fire as a metaphor to is such a sacred concept. So it's interesting to consider fire as a metaphor for catastrophe or chaos or whatever, like the fire that is uncontrolled becomes that. But you know, for us, it's like, oh, well, we always have fire at ceremony and the fire is that which nourishes and heats up the grandfather stones that we bring into the lodge and the fire is

that which brings the light and supports the sort of ongoing fasting and keeps us safe and protects us from you know, negative energies or spirits or, you know, and there's sort of there's Fire Keepers and there's tending to the fire and there's feasting, and there's feeding the fire with tobacco and medicines and prayers and the lighting of the fire with a match and not with gasoline because it's more earth based and you never blow out a candle because you don't want to blow out that fire's life force, you gently put that candle out. So I think it kind of makes me think of what gives us the capacity to receive the heat of fire. And what tools do we have to differentiate or to discern what is safe, and what is too much, and to know what to do when it is too much. And to have community and to have collectivity and to have those frames of abundant care and support systems in place that helps us to contain or that help us to, like your reference, the digging of a, you know, trench or digging, like get the shovel and dig around that fire to prevent that fire from from moving too far. So how do we isolate catastrophe and how do we come together to kind of, again, that holding of the hands, the connecting of the circle, around that fire. That we can't just face it from one side, that we have to understand, and we really have to kind of encompass the wholeness of the fire, the wholeness of the flame, we have to block the wind, that it's not just about what we're putting onto the fire, it's what we're preventing, from entering that space. And from getting closer to that fire. For me, it just, it always comes back to ceremony, because I feel like ceremonies are some of our most powerful technologies that came out of the deepest, most creative form of survival. And I feel like with our mâmitonêyihtamowin, and like our imaginations with our wicihitowin, with like our togetherness, and our collaboration, with that sense of wâhkôhtowin and sâkihitowin, with that, like love for one another and for the land, it's like, it's those ceremonial ways. And that notion of we are pitiful and powerful when we are together, that is going to help us circle those fires, and have the tools to be able to deal with to be able to calm to be able to maintain the fire, because I think that like there is a maintenance of the fire too. Like it can't get too big, but it also can't get too small. And it makes me think of a Yupik storyteller, who shared this teaching from one of his elders way back in the day at a at a storytelling gathering that I was at. And basically, his prophecy was, you know, our fires always existed on the earth and on the ground. And they were our points of gathering, of exchange, of education, of policymaking, of, you know, sharing all the gifts and all the tools and all the knowledge that we were going to need to then go out, hunt, do what we needed to do. And then we would always come back. So that the fire was that returning place, that that home. And now our fires are up here, suggesting electricity, suggesting all these other, you know, creative means. But one day, our fires are going to return to being down here. And that is why we need to keep our stories alive. And that is why we need to keep exchanging and keep sharing those knowledges and those teachings. Because when that fire returns to down here, it's going to be the next moment of like deep survival. And that has always stuck with me. It

scares the shit out of me to think of what that time will be or is becoming. And I just, you know, I just hope that we're not, that we have one another and that we can work together in those moments. Because it's not going to be easy. And so in a way, you know, I just think of what are our daily practices. Like for me, I try my best to smudge every day, to go outside, to listen, to just be in better relationship day to day, in and outside of the work and the obligations and the responsibilities to try to maintain as much as I can those relationships that uphold that sense of wâhkôhtowin and collective care. And to be as available as I can be to those relationships. Because those are the relationships that are going to help dig that trench and help maintain a healthy fire.

Alessandra Naccarato 58:09

Thank you. I feel that so deeply. And I feel pieces of that being here with you. We're celebrating fourteen years of deep friendship and collaboration, creative collaboration, and being just in close family, chosen family, friendship. And it matters so much to have people who you connect with, who you care for, who care for you as you are, who you can grow with. And I'm so grateful for your presence in my life. For all of the wisdom and kindness and creativity you share with me and for being here to have this conversation, for being a mentor to this podcast and to this project. I feel great inspiration from this conversation and a sense of contemplation that will continue on from here as this sinks into my bones. And before we close, I have one more question for you that I'm going to ask every person. And that's to ask, What do you think is possible? What world do you think is possible to exist between us?

Moe Clark 1:00:07

The image that first arrives, is a moment of being inside a sweat lodge this last summer, just outside of Winnipeg with a group of tastawayihk-iyiniw, with the group of Two-Spirit kin, youth and Elders, and we're starting a Two-Spirit Sundance and Two-Spirit land based project that is really about uplifting, supporting, holding, carrying for and bridging teachings intergenerationally. Inter-nationally with Two-Spirit kin, and in this image, we were, we were inside the lodge, in a circle and the stones, the grandfathers, the grandmothers, are in in the middle of us. And you know, they're, they're really guiding us, they're guiding the prayers and the songs. And there was this, this vision of us being surrounded outside the lodge, but also up in Star World up in Sky World, being carried, being held by all of our ancestors, yet to be and who have been. And this, this, this relationship of acknowledging that we are stars, we are we are from the stars and we will return. And that those stones that have been heated by that burning wood by the tree by the flame that have been wetted by the water by the blood of the Earth, those stones are also of Star World and that larger relationship that is cosmological, that is like deep space time, deep listening, is constantly activated. And it's just up to us to sort of go inside the lodge and to tap into

that, and to feel that, and to connect with that. And to know that those relationships are always holding and always supporting. And you know, that vision I shared in the lodge and later that night the Northern Lights came to visit. We closed that fourth round of the sweat with a Northern Light song...the Dancing Northern Relatives and they came to visit us in August, you know in the summer and in the prairies. And so, my hope is that it is possible for us to gain and to cultivate stronger abilities for deep listening, deep sensing and deep connecting in whatever territories you find yourself. And that, that, that, that sense of depth is always in relationship to the land, and is always an embodied practice. That's my hope, and that everybody will be included in that, nobody will be left out. I know that in a lot of prayers, you know, especially here in in Mohawk Territory, you know, if there is anyone, I have forgotten, if there is anything I have not named, please welcome and please include and please make sure that they get noticed, fed, prayed for, loved, cared. Even in our practices of you know, when we lower that pipe before we separate the stem in the stone, you know, we think about those who are homeless, those who are without shelter, we think of those who are in prisons and those who, you know, are seeking justice, we think of those who are in the hospital and those who are ill and physically need support. And we think of those who are just coming into the world and those who are just moving into spirit. And we always make sure that we have a prayer and, and a consciousness to hold those beings in our prayers, in, in, next to us, you know, so that's my, that's my wish.

Alessandra Naccarato 1:05:15

That is deeply beautiful. And I am holding deep love and prayers. And I think this is a meaningful place to end our conversation for now. Thank you so much for being here, for sharing your vision, your knowing, your wisdom, your spirit with us in this moment. And I'm just really grateful. Thank you for being here Moe.

Moe Clark 1:05:51

I'm so grateful for this, this opportunity to connect and share, and to be invited into this type of, this type of presence and conversation and relationship. I always find it deeply moving to be invited, and to also kind of see what emerges from those those flames you know. What becomes present today might not be as present tomorrow. So it's it's a marking of this particular moment in time. And I'm grateful to be able to have shared it with you and that it might live on and and grow.

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