

Interview with Klee Benally

Aragorn!

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Klee Benally is originally from Black Mesa and has worked most of his life at the front lines in struggles to protect Indigenous sacred lands. Klee doesn't believe the current dominant social order (read "colonial system") can be fixed but should (and will be) smashed to pieces. When asked about his politics he says, "I maintain Diné traditionalism as my way of being in this world. I have affinity with Anarchism and identify myself as an Indigenous Anarchist." Klee performed with the rock group Blackfire for 20 years and performs solo today. <http://kleebenally.com/>

Aragorn! - What would it look like for someone who has no spiritual practice to develop one?

Klee -That's a very personal question and I think what ends up happening is that people start these centers like the ones in Sedona, or start these new age centers. They are seeking that answer from other people (as opposed to within or from within their own roots or asking the land what developing a spiritual practice means). To me that is what it looks like when people start appropriating from all these other sources. Or they go to the usual suspects who are exploiting their own cultures or just selling them or—even if it's not for sale, even if there is no monetary exchange—sometimes these people have been kicked out of their own communities and are pimping out their own culture for their own gratification. People are seeking from other sources, and forget that mother earth is THE source. Ya know there is this sort of this cliché that mother earth is not a resource it is THE source. It's actually very true though. I think it is part of like, almost all indigenous cultures that I know, they don't fucking missionize; they don't go out and try to convert people. When people start asking that question, it's like... Is that an answer we can give? Because then we assume some kind of responsibility in that relationship. I think where people expect it, you know just different expectations about that. I can maybe speak from experience to people I have known who have come to some kind of spiritual understanding but again that's deeply personal on some levels. Of course we have culture, it's a social cohesion; how we understand our relationship to each other and relationship to the land. There's an anthropological definition of "culture" and there's our own definition or understanding of that, what that term means and how we again understand our relationship to each other and the land. The discussion about spirituality can't happen without a discussion about culture and what that means and there is context to that. I think there is a violent context that we have to come terms with when we start talking about those things. There is a lot of trauma that we have to address through that discussion as well. In the past when I would answer that question, when I think I was in a different place than today, for Diné people we have Hózhó'ji which is "beauty-way" or more well defined Hózhó'ji is a way of health and harmony. Beauty is this sort of fetish as well, that anthropologists

are like “here is a great definition.” They sort of latched on to but it’s deeper than that. You know when we as Diné people understand that foundation and philosophy, for our identity and our relation to each other through K’é or through our clan system, our relationship systems that extend not just to people but to our natural environment, to other beings. It’s not something that you can just say “here’s what this spirituality means and I’ll give it you.” There is this whole deeper understanding of what our ceremonial practices are, for us to restore health and harmony with our mind, our body, our spirit, and our soul, even within that. So the problem that we face a lot is when we say that to people, it seems rather convenient just to take it, and just to do what they want and that’s exploitation. To me it just an abuse, the process that we carried forward. There’s a lot of indigenous people who don’t want to share their cultural knowledge of course, for good reason, ‘cause it has just been exploited and abused and people just misuse it or they just distort it, and they take different parts that are rather convenient for them when they have an answer that resonates for them at the time. And then they...

A! – “picking and choosing”

K- ... I think through my experience (this is why I picked on Sedona really quickly) we have people like James Arthur Ray who was selling Sun Dances for like \$10,000 and you know people who were ultimately killed by his hand through his application, interpretation of sweat lodge, who were there for the “Spiritual Warrior Retreat” in very clear quotation marks and that’s an extreme but that is what we see. This exploitation continues, so, yeah maybe sometime along the way he asked those questions and people gave him answers. I don’t know but that is his application.

A- What I identify with that (I guess I want to talk through why it’s impossible) is that basically you are saying that anyone who wants to take this project seriously basically has to commit to multi-generations. In other words, indigeneity, whatever that means, will require that kind of time span. It’s not going to happen in your lifetime. So of course why that’s impossible is the american consumer is not going to accept that this is something they can’t buy. Even if the consumption we’re talking about is of an ideology.

K – For some reason what you are saying reminds of this discussion around the apocalypse that I have been having with friends (you know because things seem very apocalyptic and so forth). Through my research it became clear, and this is even Christians saying this, that Christianity is linear, with this Genesis, with the Christ sacrifice or whatever, coming of Christ’s sacrifice and then judgment day. Ultimately the logical conclusion of Christianity is apocalypse, or judgment day ya know, as opposed to looking at it from an indigenous perspective—which is cyclical, you know; we are part of an ongoing process. So I don’t see a beginning and end to it, I see it as an ongoing process.. I don’t see it like, “oh here’s victory over here, here’s a goal, I can see a way to achieve something that we want to accomplish which is liberation of our lands, the thriving, the cultural vitality of our people and hopefully abolishing these systems of oppression that are built up and reinforced through colonization.” But at this point, and I don’t want it to be interpreted as being abstract, ‘cause it’s not, it’s anything but abstract, it’s very clear in relation to the system, it’s is an ongoing process. To some degree I think that is part of the western mentality; it’s like linear thought, how change is gonna come about. When we look at the multi-generational projects, with the seven generation concepts (even from other indigenous nations, certainly it’s pan-indigenous right now that it can be interpreted very easily with other indigenous nations) in relation to the core of our practices is to ensure that cultural knowledge is transmitted and maintains its relevance or vitality. So for me that’s part of it, thinking in that way that we are part of a cyclical way of being. It’s not saying we are going to sit on our hands and wait for shit to change, it’s about doing the best we can now.

A! - Did you see that article on indigenous egoism?

K - Yeah yeah, I read that.

A! - Fascinating!

K - Yeah, I, well, it's not fresh in my mind but part of the issue I had with it was, just this sort of like over focus on individualism and which to me is again is this extremely western concept, which is interesting I think because in Diné culture we have a very strong sense of the individual. Children are taught or treated as individuals when they are young, but in relation to each other, there is this sort of like separation of the sense of "community". That's what I wanted to ask the author, what was her upbringing, what was her experience. How can I take what they said about egoism and apply it to my community? I don't think it connects. It is part of the reason I am guarded with my words or I am fairly choosy sometimes. I don't want to speak in these generalities, because that is what people expect. It's just like when talking to indigenous people, oh you speak for everybody. And people want some pan-indigenous solution. Even part of the whole Zapatismo fed into that to some degree; they were very smart about using that to their tactical advantage to some degree. But it's, I'm at the point right now where I am still playing with all of these concepts ideologically and trying to reconcile how they work from a cultural perspective and then apply them, 'cause I don't want to ever get caught in that trap of the theory and shit. It's always on the ground for me. .. I would like to talk to the author more just to get a sense of what their experiences have been. And I need to read it again. Like I said it's not fresh in my mind. But that was like the first thing. It was just like oh great, another voice that's like, for the egoists and reinforcing the hyper-individualism and wait there is like this stretch and connection to indigeneity and I am just like, I've never seen that. In every community I have visited and traveled to and

A! - Well you have given me a couple of things to think about. I think that this decolonize, anti-decolonization differentiation... I think there is something interesting there. First of all it is a fantastic way to break away from the decolonization, the way it is being framed right now is not quite toxic, but...

K - I think it's highly toxic, cause from what I see from a non-indigenous perspective to these areas, patently white-for the most part-perspective. It becomes a personal project and we don't need more people just running around with these...

A! - By which you mean a process of personal self-revelation?

K - Yes. And ultimate gratification.

A! - My question for you, and I will frame it in the form of advice. So this new project: my goal is to be the editor emeritus of this project. In other words, I make it happen from the perspective of resources and I open my rolodex to make sure good writers and people find the project, but I am very serious about this. I really want a transformation along lines that we have already discussed, specifically along the line of talking about Native stuff in a different way, in a not fetishizing way and having voices, varied voices...

K - Beyond the usual suspects..?

A! - Yeah, so my suspicion is that what that is going to have to look like is me doing a lot of interviews. We are talking about a green anarchist publication, but I really would like it to look like the Green Anarchism that I would like to create... I think you and I have a bit of a sense as to what that would look like, so how to do this correctly? Because first of all, I have to say, if you look at today vs. ten years ago there's a hell of a lot more people to talk to. I mean it's unbelievable. It's really unbelievable how many more people there are that have come into anarchism. How would you do it if you were me?

K – I know how I wouldn't do it, unfortunately that is a lot of my initial response. I think part of it is just being on the ground with folks and connecting with folks who are on the front lines and being open to a sense that not everybody's gonna have the articulate academic voice and just making sure that people feel comfortable engaging and that it's not just gonna be some type of hostile place for them. When I started doing media work it was partly out of just the frustration with folks just sticking this lens and exoticizing, essentializing, and picking off the things they felt were sexy for other people to pay attention to without dealing with the full range of who we are in all our contradictions and conflicts as indigenous folks. Maybe establishing this sense doesn't have to be that explicit but trying to develop that relationship. You want to dissuade the cultural pimps to some degree and you want to get the heart of this discourse/discussion cause it sounds like part of the objective is to amplify indigenous voices in to the larger anarchist milieu, to assert another direction or ya know just another option for folks to embrace their fights. I guess that's like my initial reaction when I heard. What is indigeneity mean for other folks who are not indigenous to this area. There might be some people who want to engage in that discussion. Like I said before, I don't know how interested I am in focusing on that as much as just drawing some boundaries, and saying "hey maybe this is a good place for you all to focus your fight" and making sure people aren't just (for lack of better terms) Zapatista-fying all these external struggles without saying "oh wait, right, here we are on Tongvan (Indigenous folks of LA area) land, maybe we should build a relationship with them and maybe it is going to take a lot longer than we want and maybe they don't have the articulated position that's convenient for us to just transpose their politics and our politics interchangeably."

A! - But I guess, that's talking about fighting a fight with people on the ground. You're answering that question already with what you're doing here. It's not exactly what I am asking. How many people do you know are confident to say something challenging, how many of those people could say it in print vs face to face, how many of those people would it take days to develop a relationship before they would say it? Cause if that is the only option then if you point me to the right person I am willing to do it.

K – Yeah, so how it could be done is establishing a network. But folks need to have a demonstrated sense that it's not just some exploitative work or something that's hostile. 'Cause like I said. We have a lot of shit lessons. It's part of the reason a lot of native folks don't go to the Bay Area Anarchist Book Fair. We have a lot of shit lessons. It's part of the reason why a lot of O'odham folks outside of Phoenix don't engage with radical folks. I know some communities where people have only gotten hostility. So there is not a good relationship. Starting in the Southwest, like you said there is this strong cultural base, and part of the history of that unfortunately is because a lot of the colonizers, I mean we fought off the Spanish for 350 years but a lot of the colonizers rushed past us for the gold in California. Honestly, looking at some of the sacred sites areas... Like I said, part of the reason people are so aggressively fighting for sacred sites and a lot of young people is because one, they are in areas where there is still an intact relationship so it meets some of the criteria that you established before. And those folks understand the risk and they are engaging on multiple fronts. I think maybe hitting some of those places or just reaching out to people... Just focusing on the project first, your audience, again. Just to hear it a little more clearly.

A! -.. That's a great question. I assume that the audience is the audience of the last magazine but perhaps that's sloppy. So the provocation is how to make it better, how to reach a different set of people, and I would say in general that I have not done a particularly good job of... the term we use is marketing. This is a marketing problem. How do you find, especially since I am, like most anarchists, by and large isolated from the rest of the world, by the wall of them not caring about

the way we put things and us being fine with that. So if I break out of that for a second and think, the problem with green discourse is that it's, to use a loaded word, apocalyptic, and the influence of anthropology, green capitalism, and christianity.

K – I guess when I ask that question, part of it is about when you were talking about wanting to reach out to different contributors, find a range of voices. Part of that question is, what relevance is this to my community. It's a question of distribution and dissemination and "Indian Country" too, maybe just looking at how that will work out and how that could look. There has been a range of different projects, the good ones being in Canada, the more a-political and more arts-focused ones here in the US and even them being somewhat limited and being a question. I don't feel as well versed in bridging indigeneity (which to me feels still more like an academic term) and anarchism; you have a lot of interesting writings that explore that. More just your perspectives and what you have come to understand. Last time we talked you said you were an anarchist without adjectives. I don't feel uneasy about saying I am an indigenous anarchist but indigenous always comes first; this is what I have to preface the discussion with. And my affinity with anarchism is through direct action, acting without mediation in the range of values, like mutual aid. Which sometimes reinforces that sense of community. To me it doesn't have to be beyond the mutual here, but to me it connotes that to some degree. The range of other basic qualifications for anarchism. But I'm curious 'cause you obviously dig deep, very deep. What's your expression? I read something a while back, that I am pretty sure was written by you that was about Locating An Indigenous Anarchism and I went back and read that some time ago. It was more or less, it almost felt like it was a longing for something as opposed to identifying as much. Which I appreciated.

A! - It is also the nature of being an urban, mixed Indian. It's a very different experience than yours. But, I think that where I begin, is probably in this space of having a suspicion that my own internal conflict is... on the one hand, I think that using the word "anarchist" has magic powers. That's on the one hand. On the other hand I think that the anarchistic instincts are generalizable. The interesting part is in the specifics, but that many of the 500 had anarchistic sensibilities. So I'm not excited about the Iroquois (which some anarchists have become excited about cause they model after them their idealized organizational configuration or whatever). For me I am much more interested in the small stories of how one's elders communicate ideas of how to behave and I think somewhere in those stories is something really different. I feel like I am not even a good enough storyteller; the older people in my life have been fantastic storytellers. It took me years to figure out what they were driving at. So for me the challenge to anarchists is, what does anarchism look like if it doesn't use the word? The other part of this is that I have more influence than many people in the anarchist space. If I want to do a green anarchist publication I can and people are going to read it. So the political motivation here is that I want this story to be what the future of anarchism looks like. And the story is going to be a long one. It is going to be drawn out, and it's not gonna be question then answer. I'm enough of a strategy person, up to now I have been able to fit pieces out, thinking a couple years out. This is more like a ten year fitting things together. And it involves a lot of strangers and a lot of suspicions but I'm not sure. ..The flip side in terms of the audience question is what do the people I am talking to get out of it. And that's important. It's not just important it's a problem I don't have an answer to. What I'm talking about would benefit anarchists, because they need it. So what is it that anarchists have that could actually benefit strangers? And the answer is the same that it always is. Ridiculous enthusiasm, a lot of laughter, but then, danger. So yeah I am going to have to think about that some more.

K – Yeah, that’s where we like Drew and Brian’s statements about wanting accomplices not allies. They’ve done a great job of deconstructing ally-ship. Cause that’s part of what I hope gets sorted up front. It’s interesting with this current wave of liberal disillusionment, with the Obama administration, and Idle No more, the Keystone XL pipeline, that people are paying attention to native struggles and that there is a bit of a spotlight. And of course the non-profits are flocking, like the moths that they are, rather blind. Fitting the metaphor very well unfortunately. Yeah it will be interesting to see how that plays. ‘Cause there have been other times when indigenous struggles have been sexy, and then people just move on to the next interesting spectacle. And that’s what I would hope this base has some aversion to. So one question I had for you, I guess I’m still trying to extract some of your politics. So what is your reaction to the statement, we belong to the earth? Do you have an affinity for that?

A! - I do but it doesn’t have the sort of specificity that it does for you. A little bit about my story; so while my mother’s family is all registered Native people, my maternal grandfather was actually a Canadian, therefore his quantum did not count. So I’m not registered myself. But my father, a white man, loved Indians. Like he really really like Indians like he read all of Carlos Castañeda, he knows all the pipe ceremonies. I mean there is nothing about the western plains indians that he doesn’t know. That’s why he found my mother. So while I was raised by my mom, I spent plenty of time with this guy who very much fetishized this whole aspect of my life. So my mother’s spirituality was very quiet and not specific. And her mother was a catholic and pretty much everyone else was a catholic. I have one traditional relative, and she is still alive. She is actually why I am going to michigan, and she was raised by Catholics, so all this is very different from your experience. So it is much more on the level of platitudes than places.[?] Even though I can go to this Indian village, which is this shanty town outside of Traverse City, where generations of my people were. But that was a village of timber houses. Not what was there before. So my experience is post genocide. This is my language of course. You might not accept it but to me, my struggle, what does life look like, what does spirituality look like, my language is a couple words and my great great grandfather who died when I was six, who was the last fluent non english speaker that anyone in my family knows. So to me, the question is what does life look like in these sort of ruins. Which is kind of why I don’t talk about it so much, ‘cause that is what life in the ruins is like. But I know that something in here is very important and I know that something is missing. And I was raised with all the urban indian problems. Alcoholism, violence, etc. But those are the problems of urban people of color. Obviously natives have got a spin. But this isn’t a triumphant story. I don’t have a good to reflect against the bad. So while I am willing to go out and say spirituality is possible and I can even say there was a place where I spent a lot of my youth that was particularly important, I can’t bridge this sort of existential gap. I point to that gap as being the genocide gap. My language is harsh but that is the way that I would put it.

K – Yeah, that makes sense. It’s a lot to think about for sure. Thanks for sharing, appreciate it. Yeah I guess that part of it is what’s worth fighting for. When you talk about fatalism, that is part of the question for me.

A! - Of course, right. At certain points in my life, I absolutely thought there were things worth fighting for and over time I saw how thin and shadowy they were. So I fought against nazi-skinheads when I was a kid. I did a whole variety of irresponsible things in the belief that it had this certain resonance that it didn’t actually have or that it had for me only at that time . I’m not trying to demean my own experiences but what you’re talking about is different. Because of the three things or whatever.

K - I know you have challenged me with that question, of how unique intact indigenous cultures who meet those three criteria are. So you are engaging in this project and you put out some analyses sometime or just stories you share regarding indigeneity. I want to see what the chance is, 'cause you put in my face a little bit about what can be done on a practical level. What are we asking or urging people to do or move towards, what are we inspiring. I guess that's maybe in some way, shape, or form to just put that ball in your court and maybe hear your thoughts about that. Cause if we talk about how few indigenous nations maintain, that keep that fire burning...

A! - Have the capacity to.

K - Cause we look at some of the indigenous nations in California who have gotten just disturbingly rich off of casinos, completely removed from their language, spiritual practice, and so forth, not necessarily their land base, and so there are a couple of tribes that we met, or indigenous nations that we met that are just traveling to other indigenous nations and through a process that they just sort of developed, basically sharing and learning from other neighboring tribes but other tribes from other areas. And it was quite interesting cause they were just collecting to establish a culture, which is being done in a way, because they were up front with other nations people were sharing. And they're doing in a way that wasn't just constructing something false necessarily, because they are doing with a sense of—not necessarily restoring their connection but—restoring a connection to the land. I'm sure that from an anthropological perspective there is some kind of name for it or whatever. You know that's just what they are doing to heal.

A! - That's what they got. But the complication of course is that by and large this is part of the process they have to go through to get government recognition. Which in some occasions has been connected to casinos and other commercial enterprise... In Michigan it is about fishing rights. Fishing rights is big.

K - Yeah, it's like, I guess you were asking, Where do you see things in 100 years or ten years or whatever. That's part of it too I guess, just putting part of that discussion back in the mix.

A! - The way I approach this problem is somewhat different, and perhaps it is because I have read too much philosophy. Western philosophers have done a lot of good thinking about their enemies. I'm sure that there is someone who is waiting in the shadows against every argument that I could possibly have against them. But I basically desire the dismantling of the western project in all of its sundry forms and so specifically in this case what I am about to talk about, my language, is the causal chain that people create between action and spirit.

K- Causal alluding to causality?

A! - Right, cause and effect is one part of it, but also this idea that ethics is why I chose to sit here and talk to you rather than walk over to you and punch you in the face. I feel like all of this is... wrong is too simple, but there's something in the way that all of these are constructed that I have a visceral revulsion to, and I'm not just going to pull it out and say that there is something just spiritual, but I could. But what I'll say is that, a lot of questions that the western mind thinks are answered, for me are mysteries, and they are only satisfying and I can only be satisfied by them as long as they stay mysteries. And the extent to which one wants to answer them, I usually consider that person to be someone I am hostile towards. That make sense?

K - Absolutely.

A! - So, by and large when someone asks me the question, why are you doing what you are doing, my answer is fuck you. So I am a deep pessimist who puts out a book a month. Many of these books are about actions that happen on the street. Like one of our newest books is about street tactics. But I don't believe in fighting on the street. But I put out a book a month. So there isn't an answer

to your question other than this mystery that is definitely my preferred mode. Yesterday I was talking with someone about the difference between social and anti-social activities and I more or less identified as being for anti-social activities. I was basically asked, “How can you be for infrastructure and anti-social activities?” And the answer that I gave them, different context, but whatever, spun my little story in a different way, but basically I said, I believe in the power of seduction. [both laugh] So. Yeah. [pause]

K – I wasn’t trying to ask you why you are doing what you are doing at all. I questioned earlier “what’s worth fighting for.” Is it in relation to just looking at some of the core values behind your thought. Sometimes that question about belonging to the earth irritates egoists. I don’t think they like to belong to anything, which is quite interesting. I like to concern myself with not just outputting or making lots of things but thinking about what the outcomes are. It’s like the strategic or tactical thing that’s been ingrained in me. Just like doing lots of ineffective things for so long, you just gotta try to consider other options. So sometimes you just gotta think about the project that you are working on and how I can put energy into that too, apply it to these areas and move my agenda, my project along, which I identify as essentially indigenous liberation, ya know, reinforcing resistance and ultimately liberation.

A! - I just don’t put things like that at all. There is something in that kind of triumphalism. I recognize how it’s a good communication skill to be able to talk like that. [laughs] I prefer to not be understood as far as that goes.

K – Yea, it’s interesting. I guess that’s why I keep revisiting some stuff cause it’s interesting and I’m trying to elicit a bit more understanding for myself and I appreciate your response of seduction and I appreciate reading stuff from the folks in Italy who are torching shit and talking about desire. I don’t like to fall into the trope traps and sometimes feel myself, like I said earlier, feeding into them. And I do need to have more discussions and read more about some of these things to some degree because I feel...

A! - Let me, I will maybe say what you are trying to get at from a very different place, maybe from a perspective you won’t appreciate. There is a reason why people are turning to you to talk as a spokesperson, and it’s because you know how to talk as a spokesperson.

K – Thanks for the insult, but yes, point taken... I think that it is really interesting to see the tendencies in radical circles in relation to the anti-politic, and privilege theory, and identity politics stuff.

A! - When you refer to privilege theory what do you mean?

K – Well, primarily I am referring to folks addressing identity politics in relation to saying “we need to deconstruct this discourse around privilege” and just go beyond that and just focus on collective liberation. Essentially that, like Andrea Smith just wrote an essay that was talking about... essentially just arguing for collective liberation to occur, we need to stop having these discussions that turn into confessionals about each other’s privileges and people sort of atoning for their sins of privilege and just move beyond that. Part of what other folks have discussed too is just ensuring that folks are taking initiative and not just objectifying indigenous people or just objectifying even their senses of what the oppression is. ... I think the bottom line is that this theory based around “if we all come to terms with and own our own privilege and deconstruct it then we are going to get to wherever we need to be,” and ultimately that just turns in on itself and neutralizes people and ultimately the result is that whoever are the oppressed group are still objectified. We are just trying to move beyond that. That is my understanding, I think there is more to it.

A! - Yeah, I guess I am curious as to why you care about this?

K – I guess a lot of other people care about it and it seems like the terms to engage in allyship and support... The bottom line is that we can't do this alone. Collective liberation means something else when I talk to other Diné people or other indigenous people and certainly when I talk about resistance and liberation struggles with the white folks we interface with here, or other folks of color, especially in the migrants rights struggle, the so-called migrant rights struggle. Especially in Phoenix, I think we see the problematic dynamics even worse with organizations like Puente perpetuating this invisibilization of O'odham folks whose lands they are occupying but also asserting this sort of indigeneity as well, recolonization as some people call it. This example should be built out more: Large budget non-profit migrant rights organizations like Puente are working for comprehensive immigration reform. Comprehensive immigration reform means increased militarism and "border security" in the form of drone flights, increased checkpoints, armed troops, the border wall, and more. Indigenous Peoples lands such as the Tohono'odham are bisected by the so-called US and so-called Mexican border. Some O'odham resist immigration reform as it means destroying Indigenous communities. Migrant rights organization and their "allies" invisibilize Tohono'odham and continue to rally for immigration reform perpetuating the destruction of their communities. Part of the basis of this intersectionality of oppression is tackling these issues and finding ways to make sure we are engaging people who can provide material support, cause our folks usually don't have it at all... With the infoshop for example, from the get go we knew that the folks who have the time to volunteer are white folks with "privileged backgrounds"—they have a lot of resources and a sense of volunteerism as part of their social understandings. But for indigenous people it is just like, usually with families with young ages, and school and work and all these other things, it is a hard thing, to find a way to engage on a sustained level. That's part of it; we have been forced to interface with folks who just show up. Then we assert our anti-colonial politic and then they don't know how to navigate, so then we end up going through a bit of a process of orientation. Sometimes there's static, sometimes there's problematic dynamics, especially if there's more white folks that are getting involved. So we have had a lot of growing pains with trying to process all this shit. And people have done it other places where it's like everybody grew out of the identity oppression olympic games and shit, where the challenge has been to find a way to have each other's backs.

A! - But you see, for me, that's simple. And what you are talking about, you are willing to use a whole ton of jargon or discourses, and I know where those things come from... personally I would refer to it as "who I am willing to negotiate with, and on what terms" and that's a pretty different conceptual space than kind of accepting the premise.

K – Yeah, and I think I have to give it more thought. Part of my initial response is that I'm not sure how much negotiation—as far as it is affirming and asserting like who we are and ensuring that other folks understand—and that's establishing the terms and just proceeding, ya know? And certainly there has to be communication. We are not just gonna impose. I don't think it has ever been the nature of the relationship, even though we have been imposed upon for so long... but I mean if we are going to have a discussion about indigeneity and what that means, there are certain terms that can't be negotiated. That's why I talked about the natural law before, there are things that... I guess it's something I have to think about a little bit more. But yeah, I agree. I do get sucked in o the academic establishment sometimes. I get sucked into at least the periphery of the non-profit industry even though I try to dismantle it at every turn and part of it is just navigating to survive. I am trying to find a way to be as effective as possible and sometimes that means asserting myself in a different way. When I first got involved in the peaks issue I had no idea what the National Environmental Policy Act process was or what an environmental impact study was or anything about The Forest Service decision-making

framework, but I had to learn, to be able to navigate and understand. I always really deeply respect my brothers and sisters in the Native Youth movement when that was a really fiery movement, because they were fierce, no fucking question. And they wouldn't have this conversation with white "allies", there's no point and I'm not gonna have this conversation with my elders cause there's no point, and I say that not to dismiss their intellect, 'cause their intellect is beyond this., I would offer them the respect to have a better conversation that's direct on that level. I think part of it is a survival mechanism to some degree. Maybe I'll grow out of it.

A! - I mean you're not gonna be able to keep this space unless you are willing to do it and there is something there that is a real politic, that is something that I don't accept but I get it... [laughs] Usually when I hear people say these things I don't like them very much.

K - No, no it's interesting. It's part of a discussion I have had with other Native folks, 'cause one, everyone on the outside presumes that Native people have all the same politics, which is the first fucked up assumption. Two, we do the same thing; we presume we are all on the same page too and I had this... I mean I've had tons of horrible experiences that have led people to either decide not to work with me or whatever, just because I can be really critical sometimes. And people are like "let's start a campaign to get out the vote" and I'm just like "you're presuming we are all on the same page politically and you just told me we didn't have to have a discussion about politics before we talked about tactics that we wanted to use in a campaign." There is definitely some deep things that we need to tackle. Yeah, sometimes I find myself dislocating myself from what I feel should be authenticity, who I am and the expression of who I want to be and honestly I think that's part of the expression... Out of frustration is the differentiation between de-colonization and anti-colonial... I don't think people are gonna get it otherwise. Unless there is a strong enough differentiation where people understand how to engage and how to not. I've told people through music, through work over the years, if they ask, things they can do to engage or not. I am just tired of doing that, I AM tired of sitting in those circles and trying to hold hands. And basically just getting frustrated with people who need that time to figure things out. Sometimes it's easy to subscribe to that, what is it? It's not a treadmill, it's a hamster wheel or... (Sorry hamsters) of discourse and the jargon that goes along with it.

A! - Yeah. Ok let's talk about some anarchist stuff. Weasel words, consensus, accountability.

K - Yeah 'cause I do want to ask you more things.. Early on I had some issues with collective process; the quick response is just noting how people fetishize things easily. It's just like the term "community." What does that mean?

A! - Right. It's a weasel word.

K - I mean we could have a long discussion about it. Yeah, people focus more on the process than the outcome sometimes and that's the issue. Just like you can sit for fucking hours in a meeting or you can try to focus on getting shit done and doing the work, and sometimes that is the process. There's that zine Fetishizing Process, which I think does a great job of sharing some anecdotes about how badly and how easily consensus process can be manipulated. We've had some great discussions... It's the same thing with the word "accountability." It's still somewhat prevalent to fetishize accountability processes in communities and sometimes it is just as easily manipulated as consensus. To the point where we have seen people attacked through accountability processes. So here we have adopted a pairing of accountability and responsibility. There has always gotta be an element of that through whatever process. I think it's great just anytime to throw out words sometimes, but there is also a danger in just deconstructing everything. Where do we stop? For me I have this point of reference, or points of reference which are always culturally based, which is sort of grounding for lack of a better term. Right now, you know like keh being our familial clan-based relationships, which to me I see, I

use that interpretation of collective interchangeably, to varying degrees. One of the lessons I learned early on with the big mountain resistance was that everybody was just frustrated after the late 80s and early 90s. The fragmentation of some of the families in the resistance was just like, "Whoa, if we just had unity we would be effective and successful and have victory." And I had some of my elders, some of my relatives, say, "Well if we were unified it might be easier for them to break us and sometimes we just need to be in our own camps, doing our things."

A! - Forcing them to negotiate separate deals.

K- Yeah, and so I always took that with me and used it as a frame of reference when I thought about any joint or collaborative or collective effort. Just thinking about what are the terms of unity and what are the terms for working together, 'cause sometimes people focus too much on the process and we forget about the outcomes that can be achieved in different ways. I really like having discussions like that... We just like the sense of experimentation and we like to take risks here sometimes, see what we can do based upon shitty experiences we have had everywhere else. Just having discussions with other people, looking at some of the methods that they have used and just being like, "yeah, fuck that, let's try something else because it's not working." For years, every time I would get involved in any type of collective, one of the first things we talked about was modifying consensus if it's necessary. There's something to be said about over-focusing on the process and forgetting about what the actual desired outcomes are. So I agree with you on that. Obviously we've come to some conclusions from different perspectives. I would like to hear more from you about that though. I'm sure you have different experiences.

A! - Well I think I stopped... I mean, I was pretty into the process around consensus for a great number of years. I feel like every group I came into that had people less-experienced in these topics, I really walked people down the country road. Oh and partially that's because I was in the Che Cafe (in San Diego), for a couple years and part of the process of becoming a core member was being educated... The Che Cafe is actually at the UC San Diego, and there were four other worker cooperatives at UC San Diego. One of them was a bookstore, they were the smart ones, and they actually, you had to go through a class where they taught you how to think about consensus and there's a book called the "Red Doc", it was a very thick binder and you had to go through the whole thing. I learned afterwards that those people were Maoists, but they were definitely teaching the Anarchists how to do consensus. So that was actually why, I mean I got the hard lesson, [Klee laughs] I got the full nine yards; they had very clear flow charts and the whole thing. They had created it out of a process of decades of big fighting. They did one thing that we actually replicated through my entire time in collectives, which was crit, self-crit. Do you know about this, from the 70s? It actually comes from China. I mean crit, self-crit is basically, we are in a collective together and you do something that is politically inappropriate, crit, self-crit is the process of you being thrashed over it, in public, within the group, within the central committee. To the point to you having to confess your mistake. This was seen as a way to even out power relationships. So in the context of the Che Cafe, every three months the fifteen of us would sit together and block out the whole day—with no one coming in or going out—to criticize each other. It was, I mean especially for me, this really was my, like, becoming an adult sort of thing. Prior to that happening, I threw temper tantrums. A part of my personality and my rage issues and all the rest. I threw temper tantrums. And boy after like two crit, self-crits I was cured. But of course, as you can imagine, there were maybe one or two other people who came from like a poor background. Everyone else... these were the children of rich people. I wasn't a student, they were all UC San Diego students. It was a crazy thing for me to do, but that was... Whatever, that was part of my

process; it was part of how I came to understand this stuff. And five years later I never worked with another group that did that because, actually that's not fair. I have become increasingly critical of this over time. And especially what I feel is the sloppy use of language. Every anarchist group is not a collective. Anytime an anarchist decides to do something with another anarchist is not an example of consensus. But that's, it's kind of like a pet peeve, like when people say "very unique", another pet peeve, but um... So I guess what it comes to is this point where there has become an obsession with process because anarchists don't have particularly good answers to the questions "what does that mean?" Americans, by and large, are Protestants and the Protestants, they care about work a lot. It is part of their religion that they're gonna work. As a matter of fact I grew up in Western Michigan; the neighborhoods in western Michigan were Black people, Poles (as the poorest of the white people they got their own ghetto), Indians, the Dutch. And the Dutch brought their type of Lutheranism to western Michigan, and they believe in pre-destination, so they work hard because they aren't sure which way it is going to go [heaven or hell] but it's already been decided. Anyways, big long story. The point is that...

K - I'm always interested in the long parts of the short stories.

A! - Yeah, of course. That's where the flavor is! So the point is Americans by and large think very functionally. Anytime you share your crazy idea, the first question is always "How you gonna do it?" So the response that has really come through the peace movement of the 70s, but really of the 80s and the—not clamshell alliance but whatever it was called [the abalone alliance]—that was in the bay area. They are the people who brought consensus into the anarchist discourse. It wasn't part of it at all before then. So that happened in the 80s and we have been burdened with it ever since. Basically I would like to have you join me in the resistance to it, but really it is joining the resistance to weasel words, 'cause what has happened is that we just use these words to describe everything even if they aren't necessarily particularly accurate.

K - Yeah absolutely.

A! - 'Cause a group of people sitting around a table and more or less agreeing on doing something together, that still feels like a pretty good way to do things.

K - Yeah. Certainly the will of the majority or impositions are very challenging, but I think that is part of... at least the approach needs to be mindful of... I mean, indigenous organizing with the NGO non-profit world on an international level is focused on free prior informed consent, which I think makes sense to people. And it's applicable I think. Right now there's a bit of a monopoly on that term, in the international indigenous organizing spheres, but I think there's different ways we can apply it beyond so-called human-rights struggles. There is something to be said about free, prior, and informed consent.

A! - **The free part is the deception.**

K - Yeah, right. Especially when defined by international institutions.

A! - **...and the violence all over the place there. Just because violence doesn't look like violence any more.**

K - That's the thing. More recently I have been really fascinated with talking about legitimacy too, and just thinking about what that means in relation to... and I think it came out of one of the Rolling Thunders, there was a really good essay about legitimacy and I just took the word out of context. I don't even remember what they were talking about but it was interesting. I think that sometimes if you have these terms and then you apply them you are legitimate, within these circles. And if you don't have them, "What are you doing here?"

A! - Actually I was going to mention this earlier, I was always struck by the land bridge discussion.

K - Yeah, the Bering Strait.

A! - Specifically the idea of how, like I have challenged people a couple different times on the idea that... perhaps I accept that there were people who came out of the heart of Africa, the Euphrates and Tigris, the Euphrates Basin? I'm willing to accept that "POP!" People came. But you're not willing to accept any other point of origin? In other words most people who are scientifically-minded and believe in evolution are very clear that everyone walked from there. It blows my mind.

K - Yeah. We did a tour with our traditional dance group and took our music up into those areas 'cause there is an Athabaskan dialect, as it's called, has always fascinated anthropologists and we were talking to them, and... You would have a much better conversation with my dad to some degree 'cause he doesn't... Like, he gets straight to the point. So it's what we asked them up there, my dad was talking to them too and we were just asking them what they thought about this and my dad was saying, "Hey we're relatives, in some way, shape, or form we know that in our history this is what we say. That there was a time of conflict here and some of our folks migrated up north and some folks came down and we have words or names for them," and one of the things that folks up there, Dine said was that, if there's a bridge, traffic goes both ways. And we were just laughing about it, because of their interpretation. I think the important thing for me, the main point I mentioned earlier, we have our origin story, our traditional history which is, that's how we know ourselves in this world. It's a challenging discussion when you have people dislocating that and taking that from us and calling it myths.

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