

# Decentralized Experiences: Queer, Trans and Two Spirit Moving-Image Practices in Rural Contexts

A recorded and transcribed discussion with filmmaker Kennlin Barlow and multidisciplinary artist Gil Goletski hosted by B.G-Osborne for the 2021 TQFF Symposium and a companion piece to the film screening STILL(,)HERE curated for CFMDC.

Various topics are explored including: creative processes, growing up in rural environments, existing on the Autism Spectrum, identity formation, labels, Halloween, cross dressing, collaboration and support networks.

Recorded on March 3, 2021  
Duration: 01:30:08

## Content preface: mentions of physical and sexual abuse (p.3 and 4) and attempted suicide (p.12)

[Beck]: I'm really grateful that both of you agreed to be a part of this. I admire both of your work very deeply.

I kind of introduced myself, my name is Beck, I use they/them pronouns, and I'm currently living and working in Montreal, specifically Verdun, so it's very quiet, which I like.

I'm originally from the Kawartha Lakes and...this whole project and everything I do stems from wanting to meet other people with similar interests... as people on the spectrum, as trans people, as queer... I just want to meet more people, that's what energizes me lately. It's the only thing lately that's getting me through this pandemic.

[Kennlin]: I'm Kennlin Lake Barlow. I'm an Indigenous filmmaker from Indian Island First Nations which is located in New Brunswick, Canada. I am Two Spirited and Transfeminine. This is very new to me, because I just came out a trans last year during the pandemic. It kind of forced me to confront my own identity and it's still something I'm kind of wrestling around with because I've always been used to going back into a closet in my life. I still try to obtain non-binary pronouns because I still feel like I'm not in this feminine aspect yet...I feel I can't pass as a female, and that's where a lot of insecurities come in... I feel that *Transfeminine* is this really nice umbrella over who I am as a person, but there are so many other terms and I feel they are always the same. When I look at *Two Spirited*, I look at *Transfeminine*, and a more recent term is *Androgyne*...I think that would represent my gender identity more, with how I present myself. It's quite a new journey for me, and still a very bumpy path, because I feel like I need to be in a more private environment for me to flourish. I guess right now, I'm in the midst of making my feature film and moving into a new house possibly, all of this stuff and I can't exactly go full-forward with my identity.

I'm sorry if I'm talking too much, I'm very new to talking about this on camera.

[Beck]: No, no. [gives thumbs up]

[Gil]: Not at all.

[Kennlin]: But I should probably talk more about my work too. I'm a filmmaker, I would say my visual work is arthouse, experimental, non-narrative. I've been filming since I was thirteen, but I've wanted to become a writer and filmmaker since I was five years old.

I grew up on the Autistic Spectrum. My whole life, I've been obsessed with movies and writing, and I never knew why. I just knew a lot about films and even found myself as a child...I think when I was eight or nine years old...I was already watching foreign films and foreign horror films such as Lucio Fulci...oh my god, there's just so many... then getting into french new wave horror films...it was a very interesting journey. The more I started growing up the more I realized that I wasn't like other people... I was this downright obsessed every minute type of deal with my work.

I did grow up a little bit in poverty some years, so I wasn't able to get cameras or anything like that...and I was thirteen when I finally got it and ever since then I've been filming. A lot of my work has developed into visual work and I think at the age of eighteen or nineteen, I went full throttle into that area in cinema.

I was originally supposed to make my feature film when I was nineteen and unfortunately the production company that was funding my film collapsed inward due to personal reasons. I found myself dropping out of film school which I had a lot of conflict with. It set me on a better and more right path... I guess that's where I am now.

I've had my work shown at Cannes Film Festival at Short Film Corner with my short film **Mancanti (or the violence of man)**, I've had my work shown in Halifax, here in New Brunswick, and I've been mainly putting of my work online because I don't like interacting with audiences too much. I'm not a person who likes going to big events. It's horrifying for me, but sometimes it's good and sometimes I feel if I'm very...confident...or if I'm not going through a bad episode, I'll be able to go through that and push myself towards that.

I hope that wasn't too long of an intro...

[Gil]: No, not at all.

[Beck]: No! I love hearing people talk about themselves. I know it's hard...this is coincidental that we are all somewhere on the spectrum...that wasn't planned but I feel like we find each other sometimes. That was a great introduction. You covered a few things we might hit on at a later point.

[Gil]: Thanks for sharing Kennlin. Hi, I'm Gil, I use they/them pronouns. I live in Vancouver at the moment, in East Vancouver, but I grew up originally on North Vancouver Island in Comox...and the first ten years of my life I grew up in Maple Ridge on Kwantlen and Stó:lō land.

I drew a lot as a kid and that...okay I'm not very good at being autobiographical...I like to draw and I like movies and I usually work as an animator with an animation collective called **Flavourcel**, which I am a founding member of.

**I have a background in music as well.** I originally tried to go to school for music --I'm a drummer as well-- but I went when I was eighteen right out of high school and it really didn't agree with me. I've never been strong at music theory so that ended pretty poorly...that was kind of a dark [laughs] period where I was living alone...but then I later went to school for animation and that was...complicated...but it ended a lot better. I do a range of different hats - I wear many different hats.

I like to learn new skills a lot, so I have trouble just staying in a medium. I started out drawing, and then I used the tools that I used as a kid (a lot of pen and pencil and paper, I was fortunate enough to have access to a lot of that because my mom was a high school teacher). Those tools have stayed with me throughout my life. I usually just use a small range of tools for one medium, like I work with pen and ink with drawing, and that kind of simple method also translates to how I work in film and animation. I actually just recently started learning how to screen print which is fun in a very DIY sense. It's cool because I feel I don't work with my hands enough, even though I like doing that.

I have one animated film that has been distributed around called **HOLE**, I made it in 2018 when I was graduating from university. It's made its rounds to a few festivals.

And yeah, that's about it!

[Beck]: Including for this project; that's the work that caught my eye at CFMDC!

[Gil]: Right yes!

[Beck]: We can talk more about that piece, it's wonderful.

[Gil]: Thank you.

[Beck]: You both spoke about *when* you started making work, and it seems that art has always been a big part of your lives, whether it's viewed as a special interest or just it's just something that's always been around...but I want to get a little bit more into *why* you make work. Why has art been something that has been a stable or constant thing in your lives? What does it do for you? Does it open up room for communication and meeting new people?

I know for me personally, with my work --I do mostly video, some photography and some installation work-- it's always in order to try to open up room for conversations with people. I'm really bad at approaching people and getting to know people... and I feel my art acts as a buffering zone.

[Kennlin]: I'll let Gil go. [laughs]

[Gil]: Ok sure. [laughs]

[Beck also laughs]

[Gil]: What you said Beck, [art] being a buffering zone, that's definitely true for me. I spent a lot of time by myself as a kid because I grew up as an only child, and I had a pretty small family. Most of my extended family on my dad's side lives in the prairies, and most of them I haven't seen since I...wasn't trans [laughs]...so I don't even know if they know about me...

I grew up pretty alone, so a lot of art was to entertain myself I guess. I would build stuff out of whatever I had, and I would organize things in weird ways, and that was sort of more...making art was a compulsive thing that I would do... because I wasn't communicating with a lot of people. I find it definitely easier to connect with people through music in a live sense, rather than with animation or visual art, at least in the way I perform. I do it in a way that is safer for me. I wear a mask so people can't see my face. Somehow that's important to me, but for some reason I think it actually makes people connect with you easier if they can't see your face. I've made a lot of acquaintances and met really interesting people that I probably would have never met from approaching it that way.

[Beck]: Cool.

[Kennlin]: It's very hard for me to lay a hand on that because...film has been a part of my life since I can remember. I have no idea why...I have no idea why I latched onto it so heavily. I think it has to do a lot with loneliness; I was bullied as a child...and hopefully you can put a trigger warning on this too because I'll be talking about abuse. I was sexually abused growing up, and I'm a survivor of assault. I guess a lot of that trauma isolated me away from everything, and a lot of people...because no matter where I went there was some sort of abuse, whether it was physical or sexual. I was trying to hang out with people my age when I was a kid at the playground and I would be bullied, and I would be beaten up, I would be humiliated. And then trying to hang out with friends who were older than me... that's where I was taken advantage of. No matter where I went there was danger. But the only danger that wasn't there, was my own home. I found myself very comforted watching movies. That was the only thing that kept me away from a lot of that...You know I didn't have much to do, but there was a video store where I could rent movies and I would rent them every weekend. My father would take me there every weekend and I would rent at least five or six movies, and they were VHS tapes, and I would get like *Friday the 13th*, *Halloween*...

[Kennlin gestures to their *Halloween* movie t shirt]

[Beck]: I know! I saw your shirt and it made me SO happy, I love *Halloween*.

[Gil]: It's a great shirt.

[Kennlin]: This is not the only one either! There are like five other Michael Meyers t shirts I have. [laughs]

But yeah, *Friday the 13th*, *Halloween*, just all of these horror films, and I was like five or six years old when I started watching *Scream*, *Halloween* and waiting for *Halloween Resurrection* to come out.



It was very funny because the only person that was there for me besides my parents and my close family was my older cousin. Her name is Savannah and she always protected me from the bullies and the abusers. She beat the living shit out of everybody that tried to pick on me [laughs]. I grew up with her as an idol and I think that's probably where a lot of my trans identity comes from: wanting to be like her. When I became a teenager and labeled myself as gay; I thought I looked up to woman because I'm a flaming homosexual, but I started feeling not at home... like not in the right area in terms of labels and who I'm with. I didn't like being treated like a man, I didn't like being rough housed...there are a lot of differences especially even in terms of queer dating, like a man dating another man...I never really liked to look at it like that. When I was in my first relationship, I think I really liked that one because I wasn't sexualized and I didn't really fit into any gay label in that sense. I think that's where it began to kind of click in, probably around 2014/2015.

...It probably should have clicked in longer ago because I was doing cross-dressing and doing all of these characters. I like to film with a lot of people but some times nobody would be able to help me, so I'd be like, *well...I guess I'm going to have to play all of these roles!* And I would grab my moms wigs [laughs], and grab her clothes too and think...*alright I guess i'm the only one that has to do this...*

[all three laugh]

[Kennlin]: I was doing that for a few years and it was so fun. I did gather quite a cult following in my area with my home-made videos...because they were gruesome. I recreated *SAW* but with all female characters, and I had these humongous boobs and I was just screaming for my life... there's a picture of me somewhere, I'm just drenched in blood...

[Gil]: Oh my god!

[Beck]: I saw that picture on your Instagram and said *WHAT is this from I love this!* I was so excited. I want to watch it!

[Gil]: That sounds so awesome.

[Kennlin]: Nobody is ever going to see it, it's not going to reach the light of day. I'm going to make sure of that.

[Gil and Beck laughing]

[Kennlin]: It's going to be like the ending of *Indiana Jones* where they're putting away that box and it pans up to the warehouse...just thousands, millions of boxes. That's going to be me hiding my short films.

[Beck]: I feel that.

[Gil]: Me too.

[Beck]: Speaking of the cross dressing stuff though, when you said you should have known earlier, I feel like we all, to a degree, were thinking...*why didn't I think of that sooner?* I did the same stuff as a kid. I stole my brother's clothes and tried to dress him up in mine...*like maybe we could just switch...I can be the boy now, you could be the girl...*that did not work.

[Kennlin and Gil laughing]

[Beck]: Just a little anecdote. But you know...it takes the time it takes, and then you arrive at a point in the journey and...what else is it about? We're just trying to figure shit out as we go.

[Kennlin]: You know, once I saw more trans people coming out... I think it began to open up the flower inside me, and have the flower start growing. I think along with my trans identity, it started to really grow a lot more with my work and there was a certain period where a lot of my work became less humorous. I had stopped doing the dressing and I started working by myself --beforehand I was mainly working with other people-- and I noticed a lot of my work started to get darker because I stopped doing all those dress-ups. I stopped doing all of that and I kind of went into this...what you would say a very dark closet and I was very lost for a while. Even going into college and still discovering my own work... year-by-year there was always a new piece being discovered about myself and...it's hard for me to really put it into words because there's so much battle...

I never experienced a lot of hate, but my past trauma really secluded me away from the world and a lot of my work started being more indoors and taken through windows. I think you would see a lot of that in my older work; you never really see me outside of my house or in a city, or any other environment other than my reservation because...I really hid myself away for many years, and I think that it's come to a point where I finally was able to start --when I came out as trans last year-- I was able to start flying again. That really started opening up my work more and more and more...

I'm sorry if I'm talking a lot again I just really lose track of the questions...

[Gil]: It's ok!

[Beck]: No no, it's fine! I do the exact same thing all the time, but I love what you're saying. You're honestly hitting on questions that I wanted to ask you anyways, so I'm listening and I love what I'm hearing.

[Gil]: And I'm not waiting to answer. I'm not a big talker really, so that's totally fine, don't worry about it.

[Beck]: Kennlin, film has always been there for you it seems. Film is what has been saving you... it's just so important and...you know I started following you on Instagram at the beginning of this project, and just...the amount of films you watch, and how you engage with film, it's such a huge part of your life. It's really cool to see that. You're really knowledgeable.

If you have anything else to add that's fine, if you want me to move onto another question we can.

How are you feeling right now?

[Kennlin]: I'll just add one more note. How film is very important...I have to at least watch two movies a day.

[Gil]: Whoah.

[Kennlin]: Every day of my life. Watch two movies a day. A lot of people, when I tell them that, they're like *Jesus..Christ are you okay?* And i'm like *no, no i'm not* [laughs].

I will force myself to watch films that I don't even want to watch. Not bad films, but the films that nobody would dare to watch. I would go really hard into those documentaries. A film I watched a few years ago that changed my life was by Allan King. He was a Canadian documentary director, passed away in 2009, but he did a documentary called *Dying at Grace*. He got permission from five people with cancer to film them dying. That was one of the most difficult films I've ever watched. Every film he has made in his life is very difficult, but it's my obligation as a filmmaker and a cinema lover to watch that film, and to watch any film, no matter what the difficulty is. It's my duty to watch every film, every day until I die [laughs].

[Beck]: It's impressive though, honestly. Two films a day...I like that, it's something to work towards. I want to start watching *one* movie a day...

[Gil]: I've been trying.

[Beck]: I always say *oh I'll watch it eventually*...I just put things off and I don't know why. This is the year I'll stop putting things off.

[Gil]: I always have trouble keeping up with new films because I want to watch... I want to understand newer ones better by watching...not necessarily "the canon", but the films that people don't talk about in order to understand newer stuff coming out. There's just so much stuff [laughs] and so much of it is hard to find. I find it really overwhelming...and I love film too, I'm definitely not...I think my attention span is not very good... I've been trying to watch a film every day. I almost did last March but yeah... I love that though. I feel really similarly, I wish I could see every movie, even if they're bad, because I think there is something... maybe not... who knows, there's so many films I'll never see... but I think you could probably learn something from any of them, even if it's what *not* to do. There's probably something to learn in every movie. So that's pretty cool.

[Beck agreeing]

[Kennlin]: Sometimes I would re-watch films like...*don't worry I'm watching a new film every day*...[laughs]. I'll rewatch the same French three-hour film every day sometimes, if I'm in a bad area with my life. I'll go through depression episodes where I'm too exhausted to invest myself in a new movie, so you know maybe I'll just watch that three-hour French feminist film from 1975 and I'll feel really good [laughs].

[Beck]: Do you want to hear what my depression hole movie is?

[Gil]: Oh yeah, I would I would love to hear everybody's depression hole picks. [laughs]

[Beck]: I don't know why, it just comforts me, it must be a childhood nostalgia thing. When I'm having a really bad time (which in the past year has been a lot) I watch *Hocus Pocus* from 1993.

[Gil laughs] I just recently watched that!

[Kennlin]: Ohh, I love *Hocus Pocus*!

[Beck]: I love me some Bette Midler, young Thora Birch is so funny.

[Gil]: They're great.

[Kennlin]: I love Halloween-themed films...

[Beck]: Yeah!

[Kennlin]: Literally...even if it's half a year before Halloween I'm like *oh my God*...[gestures to shirt]

[Gil]: *Time to break it out!*

[Beck]: It's time. It's always time.

[Kennlin]: *Get out the Halloween lights and everything.* [laughs]

I was literally watching *Hocus Pocus* last month...and..oh my god...

[Gil]: I watched *Hocus Pocus* for the first time last Halloween, so it has a place in everybody's heart.

[Beck]: Well good because it's amazing. [laughs]

[Gil]: I always liked Halloween growing up because it gave me an excuse to dress up like a man, and I did that sort of unconsciously.

[Beck]: True, I did that too. I wasn't thinking of it as "dressing as a man", I was just dressing as this person who happens to be a man...

[Gil]: Yeah, same. Like, obviously I'm going to be Harry Potter this year when I'm six years old. [laughs]

[Kennlin laughs]

[Beck]: I think I was Eminem one year?

[Kennlin]: That triggered a memory...like *what were my Halloween costumes?* It always had to do with me having a big ass wig...

[Gil]: Yes!

[Kennlin]: And boobs, sometimes I traded up just to put on the *Scream* mask or Michael Myers mask. I was either Jason, Michael or Ghost Face, but with... boobs and a wig.

[Beck]: That's amazing.

[Gil]: Perfect. [laughs]

[Kennlin]: That just came all rushing back! [laughs]

[Gil]: I was always drawing beards on myself and being like *what would it be like if I had a big moustache?* My last year of high school, me and my best friend Madison were *The Dude* and *Walter* from *The Big Lebowski*...and I was *Walter*... but I'm tiny! I'm five foot five! [laughs] I looked like a little tiny baby...you could blow me over with a stiff wind. I had a big baggy shirt and I tried to look like a big man, and I had a coffee tin.

[Kennlin laughs]

[Gil]: Nobody understood what we were doing; we were two teen girls dressed as Jeff Bridges and John Goodman, probably all of our teachers were like...*what's up with these two?* [laughs]



[Beck]: So Gil, you're originally from a more rural-based city, Comox. I don't know the population there, but it's fairly small right?

[Gil]: Yeah it's next to Courtenay, they're two small cities. Comox is semi-rural...the part of Maple Ridge I was living in from when I was born until about ten years old was across the street from farm land.

[Beck]: I'd like to know how relocating to Vancouver, and your work with Flavourcel has...just your general experiences with that. Has it had a positive impact on your work, and how you relate to others?

I'm interested because, Kennlin, you were born and raised on Indian Island, and you're remaining there to work and it seems really important to your work --where you're from, your connection with your surroundings-- at least that's how I interpret it.

And Gil, from what I know of your work, there's a different type of interaction you have. It's not as based on *where* you are, it's more based on your experiences and interactions with other people directly. That's just a brief interpretation, but I'm just curious about your access to resources in order to make work. Is it easier producing work and living in a city for you Gil, versus living more rurally?

Kennlin, I know you are working on your first feature film through a Telefilm Canada grant, but I'm curious to know what your access to equipment and support was like beforehand/when you were starting out.

So yeah...where do you find support in your communities to make work, if you want to speak about that, if any of that made sense [laughs]. That took a while to come out of my brain.

[Kennlin]: I understand what you mean. For me... Indian Island is far away from everything...like every single thing that is awesome... we are far away from it [laughs]. So... for the main film industry area which is Fredericton, where everybody goes to film and where the film coop is, that's about two hours away from me. To rent from the new place I discovered a few years ago, *Equifilm*, they are about an hour away.

[Beck]: Ok.

[Kennlin]: Any film person that I know is at least one to two hours away. Any film person that I'm very close to is mainly two to three hours away, if not longer because they're either in Nova Scotia, Quebec or Ontario, or somewhere else in the world. I am far away from everything; that makes it very difficult. With my first big short film *Mancanti*, I got a grant of \$1,500 and it was really difficult to find people to come onto the film because I was told they had to volunteer. Whenever I'd ask anybody to volunteer, they would confront me on it..like *oh you expect people to work for free on your film?...and I'm like I only have 15 goddamn hundred dollars you expect me to pay you all of that? I have no money whatsoever and I have no access to...*

Back then, it was really hard to get a big grant, and even to find money for Indigenous artists was very rare. If it was there, it was very difficult to get, and you didn't have the necessities, you didn't have the people to help you out, and there's a lot of hoops you have to jump through. It made my life a lot more difficult trying to make films, and especially since my reservation is only a hundred people. I think that's why, for a while, it was only me doing my work and when I stopped acting and I started doing more visual work, that's how I was able to slowly make a name for myself. I was able to still get these very beautiful images for my film without having to bug anybody to help me out. I think that's how I learned, and that's what made me learn more. It kind of made me a bit stronger in my own work and less dependent.

But being here on Indian Island, it really made me love it a lot more, like how you [Beck] mentioned a lot of my films are love letters to Indian Island: the landscape, the beauty of being by the water. I get to sit here right now and watch...well right now there's no more water everything's frozen because it's the frozen hell down here [laughs]... but I get to see this beautiful view everyday.

I want to translate this beauty onto screen...and you know, my life really inspired a lot of my more narrative work. I have **The Green Waterways** I'm prepped to shoot this summer. *The Green Waterways* is pretty much the biggest love letter I can ever make to my land, this land that I'm on. I guess it's because it's the only thing that I've ever been connected to, and I always felt connected to. I've been trying to get closer to my heritage, what my ancestors practiced: praying to the Creator and praying to...you know, it doesn't necessarily have to be *the man in the sky*, you know, *a giant floating head* or anything like...

The Creator can also be the earth, the ground, the sand. It can be the the water, the wind going through your hair. I think I am really connected to that through my work because... I always analyze a lot of that stuff and I think that's what really created more of a unique vision for me, through that...not only the isolation, but I'm not really connected with a lot of human beings, so I've always felt like I'm an observer more than I am included in anything. I find myself observing more than interacting. I think that's my approach to film; less narrative/less being involved with the characters. I'm more just... a person that happens to be there watching this happen. I really wanted to create that with my audience; as much as you're watching a film, you know they want to be invested in the characters... but they're merely spectators. The viewer is not supposed to feel like they are the characters or feel like they are in the film. I want to separate that bond between my audience and the screen and let them know that they're just people watching through a window...kind of like how I've been my whole life, you know? Watching through this window right now [gestures out their window at home]...Yeah, I think that's how I'd sum up a lot of my work and how my brain is feeling.

[Beck]: That resonates very deeply with me...the whole observing thing... I feel like I can relate to that as a quiet kid. Gil I know you mentioned that as well... I never felt like I was a part of things in the right way growing up and I feel that has translated...that observatory impulse I would have... that continued through when I started making work. I didn't pick up a video camera until I was seventeen. You know, growing up in Kawartha lakes, Southern Ontario...no one I knew was making video or film. It was never talked about. I hardly saw anyone walking around with a camera. Art was mostly *drawing* and *painting*, that's how I started...

One of the big reasons I was so interested in your work, Kennlin --and bringing it into this screening for CFMDC and TQFF-- was the fact that it was a *gentle disruption* as I previously put it, to the more narrative-based works. I feel like there needs to be more room for work like that. When we're talking about trans representation and Two Spirit representation in moving image production [and distribution], it doesn't have to focus on transition narratives. I'm happy it's getting beyond that point, because we are multifaceted people, and there is a lot of stuff going on in our lives.

Gil, I'd like for you to speak a bit more on this if you want to: with your work *HOLE*, I know it's received a lot of attention, and I feel that it's very well deserved attention because it's a piece that's so...finding words for it is hard...the first time I watched it I was like *holy shit, ok...so...* finally we're starting to talk about the connections between trans and being on the Spectrum and just how...it's really fucked up the way we have to navigate certain systems. I feel like your animation was a really beautiful way of trying to portray what it's like for you to be on the Spectrum and deal with the psychiatric industrial complex, I guess that's as simple as I can put it...both your work hit home in very different ways.

Do you want to speak to that Gil? Whatever you want to say.

[Gil]: Oh, thank you. I'm trying to think...the window...the observer thing...it's usually how I approach a lot of my work as well. I think I did that with *HOLE* because it is a retelling of something that happened to me, but in a way that felt safe to me. I created the character, a little proxy, kind of like me in some ways and then maybe not like me in other ways. I guess the narrative in *HOLE* is inherently cyclical; there's a sense at the end that maybe the same thing will happen again to the character...even if it is hopeful or not.

Making that film was a way of separating myself from things that happened to me and to look at it through the lens of an observer...and after I made that...I was like *ok, I don't want to do anything that narrative based ever again* [laughs]. First of all, because it was very stressful. Second of all, I realized how...I mean that was the product of four years of an Undergrad, which I think I learned a lot of stuff that was valuable. I think the overall intensity of that for me made me a person that was very insular in a way that was for self-preservation. I was in a pretty hostile environment for Autism. You know, you're under fluorescent lights all day, and there's a bunch of people that you don't really know that you have to be around all the time. I was diagnosed with Autism when I was twenty years old, so I didn't have that knowledge before...of *why* I interacted with the world the way I did. I'm still learning it now.

I'm meandering a lot.

[Beck]: That's fine! I do the same thing.

[Gil]: Yeah, who cares. [laughs]

So, I was really in my head, and once I graduated University the whole experience made me...I mean I don't think I was a selfish person but I think I was making...I made a film that was about my own experiences and I felt like I wanted more of a connection with community or at least a connection with *where* I was, a more nuanced connection with where I am physically, because it is inherently political no matter what I do because I am a settler here. I wanted to think about...not just what was happening in my head, but what was happening in my communities and how that related to where I am in space.

Since then I don't know if I've been successful but I have been thinking about that observation angle...but less internally. It's definitely hard right now because I don't talk to a lot of people and I'm inside my house a lot [laughs].

I get in that tape-loop-head a lot.

[Beck]: Oh it's real...

Something you said about being at university reminded me of my undergrad how incredibly burnt out I was when I came out of that. I didn't realize at the time, and it took me up until maybe two years ago to realize it...A lot of what I was dealing with...and you can probably relate in some way...it felt like I was doing a lot of masking of my Autistic traits...camouflaging them... I was so burnt out from trying to hide/avoid that certain things did bother me: fluorescent lights, being around a lot of people, performing, due dates, deadlines...all of this stuff. I feel like I'm still putting the pieces together...

I don't know if there's a point so what I'm saying. It's just... it's interesting to finally be talking to other artists on the Spectrum. I have no "professional" diagnosis because I was socialized as a girl for twenty years, and I don't have access to a doctor here [or desire to spend thousands of dollars] to get that assessment. It's mostly been community diagnosis... most of my friends are on the Spectrum and they're like *yeah you don't realize that we kind of find each other, and we like hanging out with each other?*

[Gil]:Yup! [laughs]

[Beck]: Maybe my point is that...yeah there was a lot of shame in that for a long time... a lot of shame...and I wonder if you want to talk more about it, I'm all here for it.You know, I feel art is a vehicle we all use to express ourselves...for me it's healing. I don't know what else to do besides making art. I don't know if there is anything else that would help me in the same way.

[Kennlin]: I know what you mean, I wasn't diagnosed with Autism until last year I think... it could have been 2020. I was 26 years old. I didn't know...but there was something different. I was different than others. I didn't like crowds, I didn't like interacting with people, I didn't like extremely loud noises or anything like that. If pots and pans fall together or anything falls... even if it's a fan that's not supposed to be on... It has to be controlled noise, that I'm controlling, or it'll ruin my day and it'll ruin the moment I'm in.

There's another thing too. Everyday I have to walk around. One of the controlled noises that I like is music. I like listening to music no matter what... It makes me daydream. I have to walk back and forth in my room for about two hours...not even sitting down... walking back and forth back and forth back and forth...about one-two hours a day for my whole life. The most that I ever walked was probably about eight hours straight... and it got really bad that year.

I came from a family that was really scared of mental health treatment because a lot of my family members got treatment in the 80s and 90s...like psychotic, being threatened to be put in an insane asylum type-of-deal. Mental health help wasn't that good back then...so they were always scared. When I started showing signs of mental health issues, they always scared me away from [getting help]...because they had experienced those systems too. But when I started finally getting help when I was eighteen years old... by that time a lot of damage was already done. It was nothing like what my family told me... and it was really good and it started helping me out. The only thing that stopped me from getting the actual help I needed was psychologists and psychiatrists. There is a waitlist here in New Brunswick and I was on the waitlist for about eight years...

[Beck]:Yup... [solemnly agreeing]



[Kennlin]: Eight years... and in between that eight years, I tried to take my life about a dozen times. It wasn't until finally that...with these attempts, I wouldn't even contact hospitals. Family members would help me, and it wouldn't be bad to the point where I was severely injured. I would be able to heal by myself whether it was self-harm like cutting or anything like that... but the past three years it's been bad to the point where I've been hospitalized several times. Then finally when I was in the hospital, I was able to get the psychiatrist I needed after eight years. All it took was me trying to take my own life and be hospitalized in order for me to get the help I needed, and not everybody ends up like that. There are people who will end up losing their lives and not get that help...

I was diagnosed with Autism, Borderline Personality Disorder, ADHD, Complex PTSD...and I was also diagnosed with...I think that's it [laughs]. I'm pretty sure that's it.

[Beck]: I love how I have to do the same thing, like *ok...whats the list...*

[Kennlin]: Yeah, *alright let me just take a look at my scroll...*

[Gil]: *Look at your hand* [laughs]

[Kennlin]: [laughs] Yeah, I was diagnosed with a lot of stuff...and to get the help I need has been healing me really good. One other thing that also has been helping...with Autism and Borderline Personality Disorder...there are no medications or treatments that can cure either...but can stop the side effects or the really bad episodes. One of the things that they did treat me for was ADHD and that started helping me with concentration. I was able to start working again and start working in the industry, and talking with people, taking panels like these. I would have never done this two years ago. If someone asked me to do a panel, I would have an anxiety attack...Anxiety! That's what I have also! [laughs]

[Beck]: Oh yeah, I've got that too!

[Kennlin]: That's one more thing [laughs]...yeah...all of that... it's very overwhelming, but one of the things that I really don't like as much is labels. That even goes with my identity, so that's why I'm always hesitant to talk about who I am as a person because... in a more positive way I don't feel like I'm anything. I really don't feel like I fit into any label, but those are the labels that if I was to go forward with them, the three I feel most comfortable with are *Two Spirited*, *Transfeminine* and *Androgyn*. I think *Androgyn* is something very new that I discovered...I wouldn't really put it out there a lot, even though I've talked about it on social media. It's very complicated because it's a very outdated term; it can be used for intersex people, for people describing their gender identity, or their clothing. But I wanted to claim it back because it's an umbrella term for gender neutral/nonbinary/gender fluid. I still feel that there is this back and forth with my fashion and my identity where...I put myself out as a feminine person, as a woman, but I can never stick to those labels, but I'd rather be presenting myself as a female person, but still kind of stick with like...*what's the mystery there...* I'd just rather be more mysterious than anything. I'll just let them guess, you know?

[Gil]: Yeah [laughs]

[Beck]: It's fun, honestly.

[Gil]: Keep 'em guessing!

[Beck]: That comes up a lot. I'm at a point with my practice too...and just with my life, where labels are becoming...very tiresome. I don't want to care...but other people make me care about it. The whole thing about trying to describe what being trans is to me, to cis people...it's just like...you guys make *everything* so complicated. It could be simple...but you make it complicated and now I have to unpack this and process this through my art. Which is fine, I love that I have that outlet...



It just becomes so...you just want to focus on yourself, create work and be happy, and not have to focus on just the language around it all of the time. I don't know if that resonates with you two.

[Kennlin]: You don't see cis straight people saying like *oh I'm a straight person...* they don't have to explain themselves all the time. I kind of wish that was my life, but when people come see me, they know what I am right away. Like, a non binary person, you know? It's something I don't want to bring up all the time. I don't want that to overtake a lot of my work. Even though I still respect talking about it...I want to create an identity around my work and not about what's under my clothing.

[Beck and Gil nodding in agreement]

[Kennlin]: Sometimes, it's still good, because we're in this era right now we're we're finally able to talk about...*this...* you know ten years ago nobody wanted to talk about this, but now we're in a...slightly safer environment to talk about it. We're not going to get fired from our jobs, we're not going to lose family or anything like that...I can't speak for everybody and I'm sorry if that is an experience for some people...but you still have those people out there attacking us, killing us, discriminating against us. That's why it's still important to talk about my identity because I can't exactly speak for where I am right now because I'm not in a very violent area.

I'm surrounded by family that are accepting of me, and I think that's why sometimes I do feel obligated to talk about my story because maybe there might be someone out there that is in a very dark area and they don't think they can continue any longer and maybe, hopefully, whoever it reaches...they'll be able to have that strength to keep going and to fight. You know...times change and we're in a very progressive era where we're really fighting for our rights and we're winning a lot, and we're losing a lot. Homophobia, transphobia, very hateful people: they're on their last breath, and when you're on your last breath you're trying to fight because...that kind of hate is dying finally. Even though it's still there it's a good sign to see that...

They're still trying to attack us, but I always look at it as someone trying to fight when they're about to lose...and they're doing everything they can to win this battle and you know that they're not going to win this. Because love wins everything and no matter who you are, what you dress up as, what is under your clothing, who you identify as: you deserve to be loved and you deserve all the happiness in the world. You don't deserve to be targeted or hated because of who you are as a person. That's why I always feel like I need to speak out about it.

Sorry if I'm talking a lot...

[Gil]: No not at all!

[Beck]: No, again, I could listen to you talk --both of you-- for hours. I'm just like..yes!

Kennlin, you brought up your cousin I believe who was a role model to you growing up?

And Gil, you mentioned your mom always brought drawing materials and stuff home for you...I always want to know this about other queer and trans artists: who did you have growing up as your support network, or who are your support networks now? Do you have physical support from people, or are your communities mostly online at this point? I know the pandemic has forced things into more of a virtual realm.

Maybe a second part to that question is...although we are in a pretty terrible time in the world, I feel very grateful that we can have these sort of conversations across Turtle Island. We're not in the same geographic place but because of the pandemic, everything has become so decentralized. I try to see the good in horrible situations...I feel like it's a really exciting way to figure out how to meet new people, who maybe I wouldn't meet before.

How are you both dealing with the pandemic? We can talk more about creativity, or...just your support. I love hearing the good stuff too. Who loves you, who's supporting you, whose in your corner?

[Kennlin]: I'll let Gil talk, because I was talking my mouth off...

[Beck laughs]

[Gil]: Don't worry about it! No problem at all.

[Kennlin laughs]

[Gil]: I grew up as an only child but I was very fortunate to have two good parents. I have a good relationship with my parents. It hasn't been perfect all the time, but yeah I'm very fortunate to have two parents that have accepted me as an artistic person, and they supported me through my transition...which has taken several different forms.

I think one of the benefits for me... I found it really difficult to move to Vancouver. I don't like to move and when I moved when I was ten to Vancouver Island, that was very difficult for me. I had maybe one friend in Maple Ridge and then I left, and then I had to make new friends. That was very difficult going into the first puberty [laughs]... kids at school already have their friends from when they were super young and that was very difficult for me to understand.

I feel like the two places I grew up in were very insular communities. I think there was one gay kid at my high school, there were no trans kids, there weren't any --I didn't know what *nonbinary* meant until I graduated high school. So one of the benefits of living in a city is...I *can* meet other trans people, which is crazy to me, and even now I have been able to share my own resources with other trans people who want to know how to transition medically, or have questions about transitioning socially. It's so important for trans people to share with each other, and that was really helpful for me moving to a city...but it's still problematic for me [laughs]. I still feel like I'm always hitting my head against a wall when it comes to living in a city...being physically close to other people...so yeah it's a mixed bag.

But I think also with the pandemic and things coming online...you [Beck] were saying the small silver lining being that because information can be disseminated so easily, I feel like now more than ever it's the easiest way for trans people to share resources with other trans people that ever before. Which is great! But it's still pretty scary...

[Beck]: Yeah city living...you know I live in Montreal, but I'm always going to be a country kid at heart. It is often hard to reconcile. Living in a city has so many benefits as a trans person with mental health issues; the access to things is important. But now that we are in a pandemic, I just want to go back to the country. I want that quiet, I want to hear coyotes in my backyard again....

[Gil]: Yeah.

[Beck]: I want long dirt roads. I want less people around, that's the main thing [laughs]. It's this constant...I don't know...there's never a right answer really. I can't have everything I want right now, you know?

[Gil]: Yeah, I felt like an animal in a cage for a bit recently, because I know I can't... I mean if I found a way... I'm not going to go to a remote area because I'm living in a city and I'm more at risk than anybody else. But at the same time it's just like *AHHHH, I can't do it!* [laughs]... it's difficult... I don't have a car... you can get to a forest in Vancouver if you really put your mind to it, but it's so difficult. That's really something that I think I took for granted as a kid: being that close to nature... it's definitely something I regret... because I was definitely an indoor kid.

[Kennlin]: Would you be able to repeat the question again for me too?

[Beck]: Yeah I'm trying to remember what I asked originally, like *where did this question start?*

[all laugh]

[Beck]: Who supports you? What are your support networks like? You mentioned most people are one, two, three hours away... but do you have some sort of close community where you are physically?

[Kennlin]: [yawns] I'm sorry for yawning!

[Beck]: It's ok!

[Kennlin]: I'm always a tired person... but yeah. Indian Island... a hundred people... not everybody gets along here so we always keep to ourselves. My family are very accepting people; they love me no matter what. They really helped me through a lot of things. Sometimes they do have difficulties with pronouns.

[Beck]: Yeah [in an annoyed and understanding tone]

[Kennlin]: But we're not far away from *everybody*. Ten minutes away there are a couple towns near us: Rexton and Richibucto, Saint-Louis de Kent, Saint-Anne. Twenty minutes away is Bouchtouche, and then its Moncton about an hour away. But in a more rural area like this, it is definitely hard to dress up and to shop around. I started buying women's clothing and trying to get jackets and all that is definitely the hardest thing in my life because you do get looks. They're not as deadly... but it's not as common in this area and I think that's where a lot of paranoia comes in. I have a tendency to retract back into a closet... but the past few years I've been letting my hair grow... I haven't cut my hair for two or three years now.

[Beck]: It takes so long to get it! [gestures to their own long hair] Such a waiting game, and now mine's all split at the ends...

[Gil]: My hair was really long a couple of months ago.

[Kennlin]: It took me this [growing it out] to make me realize *oh, it's not going to grow down to my chest...* it took me this long to realize that I have curly hair. It's curly as fuck, and messy. I was like *ok this is kind of cool, I kind of like it.*

[Beck]: The last couple things I think we haven't touched on yet: What do you both kind of envisioned for your practices "post-pandemic"... you know, what are you looking forward to in the next year or two or five years. What do you see yourself doing, what do you want to do....

The last thing, and I'll revisit the question because we'll probably all forget it [laughs] As trans artists who live or have lived rurally, what would you like to see happen in the future, and how we could better-support other artists [like us] ?

[Kennlin]: How I envisioned myself the next two years is probably...hopefully trying to find an audience for *The Green Waterways* because we're filming with most likely an NC-17 rating. That's definitely not getting into any theatres whatsoever. We're filming with unsimulated sex in the film, so we're filming with queer real sex in the film, and definitely that's not going to find a huge audience but...hopefully it'll find some peewee arthouse cinema. That's very normal for arthouse films, you know, love making. I would have dived more into *The Green Waterways* if I didn't get too distracted about myself... and I'm usually never talking about myself but...

[Beck and Gil laugh]

[Kennlin]: Anyway, that's another story... I guess I'm just so focussed on that film and doing my best to pull out all the punches that I have for this work and praying to God that it won't be left on the shelf for five years.

On top of that, I hope to start an equipment rental system here in New Brunswick. There are two others... we haven't really gotten far into it, but I want to do connections with the other rental services and people and create a business partnership. Again, it's something that I haven't gotten into just yet, this is really new...but there are a lot of filmmakers that don't have access here in New Brunswick to really good cameras. I recently acquired a really good camera: an Arri Alexa XTW, which is the same camera they used to shoot *Aladdin*, *Fast and Furious*, *Hobbs & Shaw*, Jordan Peele's *Us*, *Bohemian Rhapsody*...like it's a really good camera.

This is not a camera that I feel I want to keep around... like I don't want to hog it.

[Beck and Gil in agreement]

[Kennlin]: I want to give filmmakers the opportunity to use it for even a cheaper value...hell even with no price at all as long as I'm there helping with that camera. I want to give Indigenous artists, trans artists, arthouse filmmakers the chance to use professional equipment that they deserve to use. Because, you know, our industry is really...dragging itself with one hand and the rest of it is chewed away by whatever metaphorical monster there is out there in our industry. We're really on our last finger, hanging there, and I want to help our industry to get back on its feet and breathe life into it again. There are so many discouraged artists out there that have the potential to really shine and create a successful future for themselves but they don't have the tools, they don't have the environment to be in...and I really want to open that opportunity with a lot more people.

I just met a nineteen-year-old Indigenous artist who made his first short film in college and it was such a minimalist masterpiece. I offered to buy that film and distribute it for him, to help him through festivals and that's still going on. There are so many great artists, hidden artists out there, and growing up I was one of them. I hid myself away or I didn't have the equipment, the connections, and I wish I could have had that growing up because I was mainly self-taught...that's not a bragging right like *oh im a self-taught filmmaker la la la*...it's just...I had nobody else to teach me about this, and because of my alienation towards everybody here, and my Autism, my identity... I think that's why I had to be self-taught in the sense that nobody else was going to teach me and I was too weird...too awkward to people. But yeah that's what I view for the next few years.

Hopefully, the film will be able to run its course and I can start my next project...

I really hope to at least make a small stable career for myself. I don't expect to make...I don't like big budget films. I like making Indie films. I like having a small crew, and I really hope to obtain at least a little bit of that for however long it takes.



The next question for like trans artists out there and Indigenous, Two Spirited...the question was what advice I would give them?

[Beck]: Yeah it could be advice or...you kind of already touched on it, how we could better support each other and the generation coming after us...you want to have access to equipment and offer distribution if no one else is going to, to get these films viewed. To be a person who believes in someones work...you can talk more about that...I love that.

[Kennlin]: Ava DuVernay! That's her name [shows image to Gil and Beck]. **She created a production company**...she's distributing films by people of colour, and giving them wide distribution...giving them the support that they would have never had before. I really hope to create a platform like that, where filmmakers are able to at least get a platform to express their work...or at least let them get connections to others that they can grow and learn from. I think that's everything.

[Beck]: Good answers.

[Gil]: I guess for me...I don't even know what I'm doing next week [laughs]. The pandemic definitely made me...at least right now... I'm sort of like, *well I think I will just...wait and see how things develop a little bit before doing anything large*. I keep myself busy with freelance work. I hope to keep working with my animation collective that I'm a part of, **Flavourcel**, because I think that has been a really important step for me: learning to collaborate with other people and then helping foster community through that. All of us in Flavourcel...a lot of us are queer, some of us have disabilities, some of us are people of colour... there are a lot of intersections in a lot of our experiences, and when we come together, that's when things start happening. We've gotten a lot of interest from different Artist Run Centres, and people that want to fund projects, people who want to do music videos with us. That has been really exciting because I feel like it would have been really difficult to do that on our own... just as individual animators. It's also been really helpful in a labour sense to divide the labour up so making an animated music video. Animation is a very labor-intensive process; there are ten of us, and when you have a three-minute song and you divide it up among ten people, it becomes a lot easier for everybody if we can depend on each other. I think that's been... I mean the collective hasn't been perfect, it's been a bumpy road and a learning process to figure out how to govern ourselves without a structure.

[Beck]: For sure, yeah.

[Gil]: Because we're not a business, you know, we're not an official entity technically. We looked into that; we were thinking about becoming a co-op, but we decided against it. We did learn a lot about different systems of governance and it was...yeah it's interesting, but I think going forward we want to do something similar to what Kennlin was talking about. We want to give people who want to get into animation better access to animation equipment, or software, general knowledge... because anybody can do animation, it can be done very cheaply too, if you want.

For me personally, I don't have any projects that are big that I have ongoing, just for various reasons. I think at some point I would love to make a video game, because I think video games have everything I love about art: they can be cinematic, they can be like comics, they can be like animation, they can be like a novel. I think at some point I'd love to at least help make a video game.



And for the people out there...I don't know if I'm the best advice giver, but it really helped me a lot to collaborate with other people, and help each other whenever you can, to organize with other people... that's a support system, whether that's with art or interpersonally. I grew up without a lot of friends and...after going through University and being where I am now, I can actually say that I have a support group of friends which is very...foreign to me [laughs]. It's been immensely healing for me as a person that has trouble communicating with people. It's hard to do, to organize people, but it's very...it's good for the spirit.

It's good for everybody.

That's a very vague way of putting it, but yeah. That's all I have to say [laughs].

[Beck]: Well thank you...I really enjoy talking with you both. I wish we could hang out in person and get coffee; maybe when vaccines are rolled out. I'd love to come visit the both of you in opposite directions.

[Gil]: Same here.

[Beck]: Is there anything else either of you want to add before we close this up?

[Gil]: Thanks for moderating this, it was great. Thanks for all the questions, they were very insightful.

[Beck]: You're welcome!

[Kennlin]: Thank you for letting me join the panel, it's such a weird coincidence that we have so much in common, I think it really helped me deal with this today. I am not usually a social person.

[Beck]: Oh I'm sweating...

[Gil]: I had to take one of my emergency pills...

[Kennlin and Gil laugh]

[Beck]: I'm happy this is virtual, because I'm so smelly and sweaty right now.

[Gil]: Yeah, me too. [laughs]

[Beck] Kennlin, I know what you mean. It's just hard to talk about yourself...but this has been really great. We do have a lot in common I think, and it's been very helpful for conversation.

**Gil Goletski** (b. 1995) is a multi-disciplinary artist living as a settler on the unceded traditional territories of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh people. They make animation, illustration, comics, print media, and music. They are currently a key member of the vancouver based animation collective, *Flavourcel*.

**Kennlin Lake Barlow** is an Indigenous filmmaker from Indian Island First Nations. They identify as Two-Spirited/Trans. Their work has been showcased at Cannes Film Festival 2017 in Short Film Corner. Right now they are in pre-production on their first feature film called *The Green Waterways*. Being a survivor of trauma and growing up with borderline autism, Kennlin has had a lifelong obsession with film since they were 5 years old. Even though it causes many difficulties in their life, Kennlin has managed to find a way to take out their vision of pain and love through moving imagery.

**B.G-Osborne** is a gender variant settler of Scottish and British descent originally hosted on Treaty 20 territory (Southern Ontario), currently working in Tio'tia:ke (Montréal). Osborne's ongoing projects seek to address the complexities and revisionary potential of gender-variant representation/embodiment, and unpack/share their experiences with mental illness, neurodivergence and familial bonds. They place great importance in showcasing their work in artist run centres and non-commercial galleries across Turtle Island.



Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre