

## RE'AL CHRISTIAN

### ALL VISIBLE DIRECTIONS: MARIA HUPFIELD AND NATALIE DIAZ

Weaving through movement, sound, text, and touch, *All Visible Directions Between Sky and Water* mediates a gap between the body and the land. In an experimental dialogue-as-performance, Maria Hupfield and Natalie Diaz consider the liminal space of the horizon, which Diaz defines as “a place of perceptual exchange ... a width of a line ... a wilderness.... Its immeasurability, the largeness of its perspective and sensuality have been things non-Indigenous people have felt the need and fear to try and contain with a boundary, a line marking up and down, light and day, eventually all meaning good or bad.”<sup>1</sup> Together, Hupfield and Diaz expand their thinking on this non-dualistic space, a site of coexistence between endings and beginnings, sky and land, land and body.

The performance took place in The New School’s historic Orozco Room, the home of Mexican artist José Clemente Orozco’s five-part fresco murals, including *Table of Universal Brotherhood*. Commissioned in 1931, the murals touch on themes of labor, enslavement, immigration, family, community, political action, and progress, a fitting backdrop for the performance. Diaz and Hupfield begin with a simple call and response:

“What’s this?” “Is this sky? I am sky.” “I am sky.”  
“I am water.” “I am water.” “I am water.” “I am  
water.” “I am sky.” “I am sky.” “I am sky.” “I am  
sky.” “I am water.” “I am sky.” “I am water.” “I  
am sky ... I am water.” “I am sky.” “I am sky.” “I  
am water.” “You are water.” “Am I water?” “You are  
water.” “You are sky.” “I am sky.” “If we are touch-  
ing, what am I? ... Are we still touching?”

Their speech is punctuated by rhythmic pauses; each interval is accompanied by a physical gesture—with each movement, their arms and hands periodically touch as they echo one another’s gestures, creating a

<sup>1</sup> Vera List Center for Art and Politics, “All Visible Directions Between Sky and Water with Natalie Diaz and Maria Hupfield,” December 12, 2022. <https://www.veralist-center.org/events/all-visible-directions-between-sky-and-water-with-natalie-diaz-and-maria-hupfield>.

chorus of verbal and nonverbal exchanges. Their string of questions and assertions slowly forge an abstract dialogue into being. "If sky touches water, what is it?" "What's between?" "Is what's between also what's outside?" "Yes." "Are we both inside?" "Yes." "Am I also inside?" "Yes." "Is there a middle?" "Yes." Here, the horizon emerges as the answer to a riddle, one that underscores the inseparability of the space where land and sky meet. Intertwining language and limbs, their individual bodies, like the horizon itself, become entangled and fluid.

They then shift their attention to the audience, opening their call and response to those in attendance, beginning with several people they know. Hupfield weaves around the room, asking individuals if they have stories about the sky. One such exchange was with her husband, artist Jason Lujan: "Do you have a story about sky that comes from the desert that you want to share?" "No." "No?" "No." "You don't have a story about the sky that comes from the desert?" "No." "You have a story but you don't want to tell me the story, is this correct?" "Yes." "Who is the story for?" "Us." "Who is *us*?" "Nde." "Am I nde?" "No." "If I'm not nde, is your story about sky from the desert for me?" "No." "Thank you."

In the third part of the performance, Hupfield introduces a pair of jingle-covered felt boots. Jingles, as she has pointed out, are distinct from bells as they have no internal mechanism with which they can make a sound—they are silent until struck by other jingles, they can only make sound collectively. As Hupfield moves fluidly with the jingles, striking, shaking, waving them with varying degrees of strength and rigidity, Diaz speaks to their shared thinking on the notion of the horizon, place, space, language, and image.

How do we think of space and place in the context of a body? The horizon has been a question for us, the idea that the earth meets the sky—naturally,

you think of a meeting as two separate things coming together. What if those things have never been separate? What if instead, we are thinking about a singular energy, or an entanglement, or a single body? How do you create space with the body if you take away the idea of place? Not place itself, but all the things place has been. And how does language work in that new place of body. How does touch work. How do we think about a word like "horizon," like "meeting," like "border." The idea of a border only exists because there are bodies that can cross it. There is touch that makes that border possible. Therefore, a border is impossible.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Partially paraphrased by author.

The horizon, or rather the impossibility of it, becomes a metaphor for a body that exists beyond the limits or context of space. As Diaz notes, the horizon exemplifies the myriad ways in which the Indigenous body has had to become place in and of itself because of the colonization and continued occupation of native land. Through their performance, Hupfield and Diaz form an alliance through mutual recognition of one another as Indigenous women from across cultures, geographies, and language to share the same space. Their encounter with one another and with the audience signals the ability of the Indigenous body to see from more than one point of view, a version of what W. E. B. Du Bois called a "double consciousness,"<sup>3</sup> or the multiplicity of understanding oneself from the perspective of another. As Hupfield and Diaz embody the horizon, it manifests not as a border, but a borderland. In the words of Chicana scholar Gloria Anzaldúa, "A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition."<sup>4</sup> Thinking through borderlands in this context, we

<sup>3</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co., 1903).

<sup>4</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999), 3.

must ask: What happens when you take away place as a symbol of Indigeneity and erasure? What happens when an Indigenous body has to become place when the land is occupied and compromised?

Writing about a performance five years after it took place puts many things into context. First, the conversation between Maria Hupfield and Natalie Diaz at the Vera List Center—with one another and with those in attendance—was one of the seeds that generated the Borderlands Fellowship, which launched two years later. Secondly, in extending this conversation to the audience, Hupfield and Diaz open new possibilities of mishearing and misrecognition, and thus opportunities for learning from one another. Their performance might be seen as a rehearsal for a different mode of addressing a familiar topic, and in navigating difference, one can uncover the intricacies, subtleties, mishearings, and misunderstandings inherent in language as a singular form of communication.

Lastly, the performance embodies the ways in which Indigenous protocols of close listening, of sharing and holding space, of respecting one's separation from an "us," and of recognizing the other can allow us to better understand our own relation to the world. Thinking alongside these protocols, we can consider the body in the context of land, connected through a shared energy. With this, we return to the horizon, where earth meets sky as a singular entity, unbordered, like two hands gesturing toward one another in space.