

Tanya Leighton

# MoMA

## Sky Hopinka: Film Is the Body

**“You’ll remember what you need to know, when the time comes.”<sup>1</sup>**

You’ll forget all you’ve been taught and you’ll abandon everything that hasn’t worked for you or your family. I’m tired again and it’s starting to be a bit warmer outside. I’m tired of the words and the voices that never relent, and I’m tired of my own thoughts and sounds of my ahs and ums that punctuate those spaces when I can hear myself thinking through answers of the questions that no one is asking. Sometimes it’s easier than others, yet still I’m caught in those moments at the end of the day when I’ve got nothing left to say and all kinds of silences to fill. Fill them with sounds of the television or words on a phone, or if I’m feeling happy then I’ll fill them with old recordings of friends and family—alive, or gone. It hasn’t been too long since I thought about the middle of nowhere being the center of somewhere, yet that still feels aspirational.

Being decentered from a land and a home burdens many of us, and I’m not entirely sure where the salve can be found that soothes those aches and that hurt that punctures deep into the body of what we remember and what our ancestors experienced. It’s hard to parse out the pain of the elders and pain that’s your own. It’s all our own, though. There’s no theirs and ours, or then and now. I think of my mother and my father, and their pain and their joy. I think of my grandmothers—maternal and paternal. Grandma and Grandmother, and the love they gave and the love they held onto for themselves. I don’t know my maternal grandfather or my paternal grandfather, and neither did my mother nor my father. Intergenerational suffering becomes a transgenerational reckoning.



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## **You are the grandchild of great love, and you're the grandchild of great violence.**

Someone said this to me a year or so ago and it's stuck with me, a prayer I've said to myself many times as I've tried to understand the implications of what it means to have a mother who never knew who her father was, and a father who never knew who his father was, and to have grandmothers who felt too much weight to share those answers. Those lives and those deaths and those secrets can define so much of how our parents view themselves, how their children understand themselves, and how we and our siblings and our cousins and our kin navigate the questions posed by centuries of love, violence, and resistance. "Survival" as a word never felt like enough to encompass the fortitude needed, that was passed on intergenerationally to flourish. We're an aggregate of those traumas and resiliencies. Elastic in movement and lines and trails and trials on the road of life and death. Flourishing in mind and bodies that are our own.

**"To survive is not to escape death or to go on living after death but to die alive. We die alive. In fact, everything, every trace dies alive and what dies alive survives."<sup>2</sup>**

That quote above comes from Kas Saghafi writing about Jacques Derrida's definition of survivance, which feels not that different from Gerald Vizenor's, and the ways in which merely survival or to survive is ever enough. As Saghafi describes, "survivance" grammatically exists suspended between the active and the passive voice, and so do we. Somewhere between an active and passive presence, we're all contending with intergenerational and transgenerational effects of pain, resistance, stress, love, and joy. Forgetting and remembering the impermanence of our existence on planes of being that are both in and out of our body and our control.



The space between home and land

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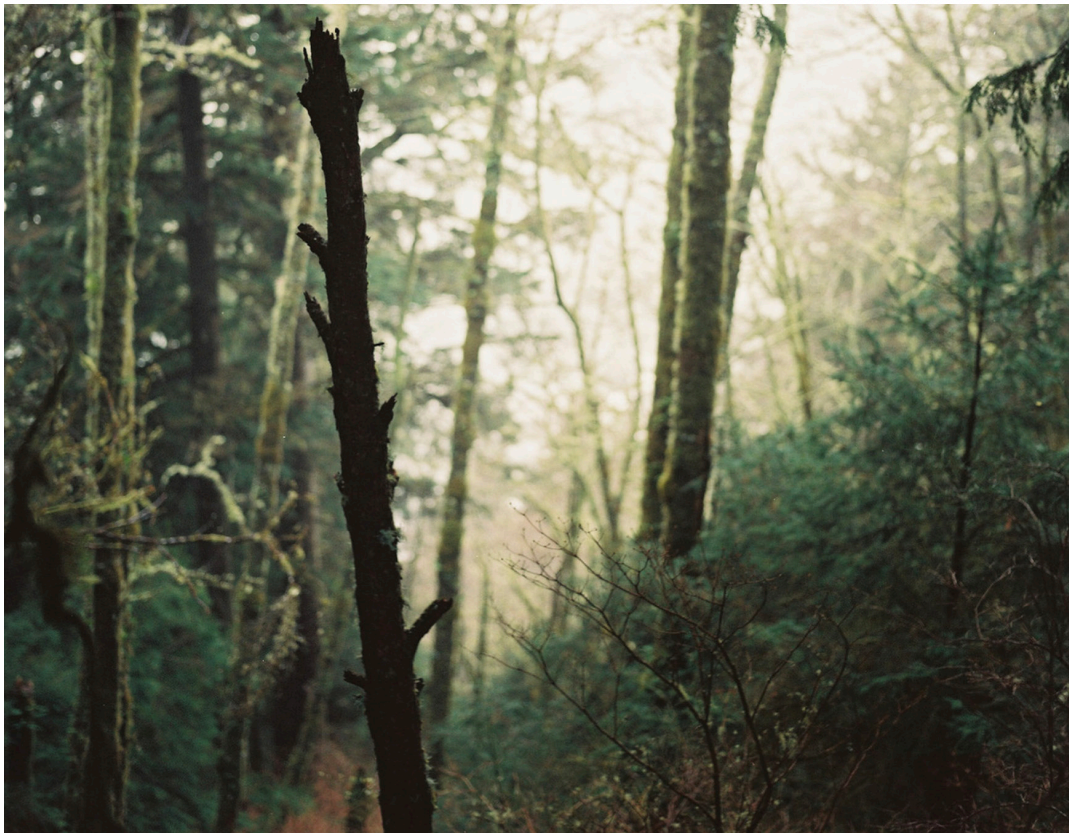
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## **“I’m tired of being temporary”<sup>3</sup>**

Soma is the body and what we have apart from our soul and our vagaries. I hold a camera and I hold a pen and I type on this keyboard thinking of mind-pictures and stories I don’t have the words for. Film is the body and photographs are the body and words are the body and as Crystal says the body is the body; in English, in Ho-Chunk, in Chinuk, on celluloid or in pixels or on paper and I hope they mean everything I can make them mean. Indigenous cinema is a cinema of the ineffable dreams suppressed for so long. Indigenous art is the art of the indescribable things that you can’t think of in English. The meaning isn’t in the shape of words, but rather it’s found in those crevices between the facts and the information that we’ve been taught to understand of ourselves, those slick spaces where the spirit slips through that I don’t have the words for, that you don’t have the words for. All the things that surprise us—by not only our humanity, but the humanity of others.

## **I’ve exhausted a place called home.<sup>4</sup>**

The body is still the body and it needs these other elements and factors to give its shape and its form and its memory meaning. I feel myself in my body everyday and I look to my chosen Elders to guide me in understanding it as a child does, for we’re all children learning and trying to become more than what our appearances are prescribed to us by the histories in place. I see my mother in her space and her life, now and today, growing and becoming and loving and making things with her hands and her heart. I saw my father, tired in his own way before his death, finally at peace next to his feather and his children. We return to the land and return to our homes and we exhaust our minds and our spirits, seeing and being in the grass and the water and the dirt. Exhausted and free to remember what we need to know, as now the time has come.



My mother's walk, in the winter

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Sky Hopinka's film *I'll Remember You As You Were, not as You'll Become* is on view in gallery 213 through fall 2022.

1. From Lee Maracle's book *I Am Woman* (Vancouver, British Columbia: Press Gang Publishers; 1996) ↑
2. From *Dying Alive* by Kas Saghafi ↑
3. Julie Niemi said this one day last summer. ↑
4. Not unlike George Perec ↑