IIF Symposium Toronto - Julie Nagam

info@obxlabs.net

[pause]

00:18 Julie: Hi, everybody. I just wanna say two things. One, acknowledge the Mississauga Territory and thank you for being our host today, and obviously to these two wonderful people who have worked very hard in putting all of this together. My name is Julie, I am one of the... What am I called? The co-investigator? In this awesome project, I'm gonna kind of speak about, or speak around two different things, so I will talk a little bit about being an artist, and then I'm gonna talk a little bit about being a scholar. Which are always the two things that converge for me.

00:54 Julie: So I wanna talk a little bit about ideas or concepts of using technology as de-colonial tools, and how that, in the future, and I can even say right now, is that they can be these tools that can put forward different ideas, and we can use them to unearth lost knowledges, or understandings, or concealed geographies, thinking about them through traditional ways and futuristic ways, and merging them to do what you need them to do. And that's where I think some of the magic happens, in terms of using technology.

01:33 Julie: So this piece that I'm gonna talk about is Where White Pines Lean Over the Water. Cheryl's here, she was so sweet to curate this, and so it actually just... I think it's again, here, at YYZ, I got a check in the mail, so I'm assuming [laughter] that it's there.

01:51 Speaker 2: I enjoyed that show, so...

01:53 Julie: Oh, okay, cool. I haven't seen it yet, so... It actually just got to show at Nuit Blanche, and so there was 200,000 people that got to see it over at OCAD, which is very cool. And so part of the, I guess, the, "How I use technology in this project", was I used 360 bi-neural mics, and I found that it's interesting that Jason obviously spoke before me, and thinking about the virtual of the 360, but I love the 360 bi-neural mics, because it did exactly that. So you could close your eyes and you could imagine yourself in that space. And it was an indigenous remapping of a specific area in Badby Point, in the Humber River Valley. And so, this is a still from a large scale painting, I think it was about 10 feet tall, maybe seven feet wide. I was very pregnant when I painted it on the wall, and Cheryl got very nervous when I did this, and so... [laughter]

02:47 Julie: Anyways, so it was projected over the top of an archival map that I had painted, and then when you sat and watched the piece, you would listen to this 50 minute sound piece of this, I guess a retelling of a history that sometimes gets buried, or sometimes gets lost in large urban spaces like Toronto. And partly this came from, because I had moved here from Manitoba and I felt a little bit lost, and I was in a new territory, so I had to think about that relationship to space and place. And being a visitor here, I wanted to think about how these histories needed to get unearthed or acknowledged in some aspect.

03:27 Julie: Yeah, I'm just trying to think if there's anything else I wanna say, specifically. Okay, we'll move to the next project then. Okay, so the next piece that I did, which was called Singing Our

Bones Home, was also using 360 bi-neural mics, but I had created a wigwam. And the idea of the project was to actually have a 360 projection, which wasn't entirely possible because of the constraints, sometimes, of technology. So it was, I think about 280 or it was close to 300. And so the idea was that your presence, your body in that space, triggered through motion, triggered different sounds and different songs; honor songs to a buried ashuwary, that was actually moved in, in Markham. And so this piece was called Singing Our Bones Home, because the idea was that it was a homage to indigenous people, who their bodies had actually been moved and relocated. And that they would have some peace moving, or being stuck, in this weird spot of not getting to go to the spirit world, because their bodies had been moved. And so, this is the same piece that got transplanted. I got to go back to the colonial motherland in London, and got to rebuild the piece in London, England, and get very different reactions to the piece.

04:55 Julie: So, there's a few things that I think that are interesting about it, in terms of that one, that your body interacted with the piece and that you actually got to determine the composition of the sound. And so those sounds were sometimes ambient, sometimes they were honor songs, sometimes they were just little pieces of nature that you could hear if you put yourself into the space to wanna hear it. And then the projection pieces were considered to be uninhibited landscape, which basically, there were some shot in Manitoba, and then some shot in Markham. And it was to sort of play with these ideas of terra nilis, that the land was open for taking and that there was nobody actually living in it. And that's... Because the piece originally showed in Markham, that was some of the concepts I was thinking about in terms that it was this vast landscape, that then became farmland, and then became I think the fastest growing city in Canada, in terms of and just a rapid development.

06:06 Julie: So yeah, those were some of the terms that I was thinking about. The next project that I'm thinking about now that I'm back at home, I get to think a lot about Manitoba Hydro and hydro electric development. And so right now I'm currently building seven turbines that will actually work I think, that's the goal anyways, and so that the turbines pieces will work. And that you will trigger different stories of different people who have been affected by hydro, whether that be positive, negative, ambivalence, whatever it is, and there might be a visual component, I just haven't decided. See this thing works too fast, okay. So, here's my other half. This is a website that we worked on called Transactive Memory Keepers. This was a assured-funded project that we basically developed performance new media database or in the process of developing it. We worked as a collective team, there was myself, Heather Bullearte, Carla Tantan. We were the three principle faculty that were involved with the project. And then we were lucky to get Cheryl Lowe Randell as one of our graduate students, not really. [chuckle] More like keeper of a lot of knowledge herself. And so we also got Susan Morsette who was also a graduate student at that time. Dana Danger who was also a graduate student at Concordia.

07:39 Julie: We also had Erin Sutherland who was a graduate student at Queen's University and Katie Meyer who was a graduate student at OCAD. And so parts of this project... Let's see if we can get to some of the words part. So from our perspective in terms of... It was the first kind of major research, theoretical engagement with ideas that new media performance have emerged within the Canadian context. So, this was a collaborative effort, I've just mentioned Carla and Heather, and the principle was to trace indigenous practices and methodologies in the area of performance digital and new media art by sort of documenting what had happened or what was there. Let's see what we got

here. Yeah, this is a lot of text. Anyways you guys can read it, but basically the objectives were to make this content visible, to create some type of a database or an archive of information. One out of necessity, just being a scholar and a professor not having access to this knowledge and trying to teach new generations of students information and scrambling and contacting people and asking, "Oh, do you have this? Do you have an image of this? How do we find that?" And also too, just creating a genealogy. Thinking about what happened at a particular moment of time and why that happened at this time and not another time and what impacted those things, and obviously just to apply a critical discourse.

09:11 Julie: Thinking about indigenous critical theory and what that has to offer in terms of how we look at methods and methodologies. So part of the challenge was working, as I said, I think technology can be a de-colonial tool but at the same time you are bound to particular codes and methods of doing things that are actually very rigid, and actually have in one case, when I... We worked on a show and one was called the master and one was called the slave. So, in order for those two codes to talk to each other it's very interesting to think about those kinds of relationships that happen within technology and coding, in order to try and tease out or tell one to be subservient to the other. And so thinking critically, obviously it was like, "Could we just call it server one, server two?" Just thinking about those concepts and was it challenged? The other thing that was interesting is that we worked together as a team, and so there were lots of work shopping thinking about what we wanted to call it and why... What the format of the website would look like? And a lot of time and effort went into that. And so the one person who was more technically, savvy was our only non-aboriginal person in our team and so she was never used to working collectively.

10:41 Julie: So she would basically be instructed to do something and she would build it and it would have an end result and you would either approve it or you didn't, and so she really like the process of us brainstorming different concepts and different ideas. And so we came up with Transactive Memory Keepers because it was based off of a mechanism that Daniel Wagner thought about in terms to collectively encode, store, and retrieve knowledge. And we felt like performance and new media artists were doing just that. Whether that was literally, through their body or through their media. And the other impetus, that we wanted to think about what the website would look like is, we looked at the concept of winter counts, so that these were pieces of history, that recounted particular stories of that knowledge of community that wanted to preserve those stories. And so we thought a lot about the database as being a thing that could actually preserve that knowledge. And let's see, I just got a little picture here but let's go on, we can pull up the website. So anyways, the website is still under construction. Our goals are to continue to have students curate it.

12:01 Julie: And what Cheryl pointed out from the backend is that you could see how different people collected information, differently. And maybe, I don't know if you feel like it Cheryl or not but, you can talk a little bit about how long it took you guys to put all those categories. To be able to basically put together... To dump the data into the backend and how difficult it was, what to choose and what not to choose, and how things were linked to each other right?

12:31 Cheryl: Yeah, I mean there were so many different categories and we wanted to try to be as comprehensive as possible like: Who wrote a curatorial essay around it? Is there an artist statement? Are there several artists statements? Where has it been shown? Are there different versions of it? What are the the different versions? What are they named?

12:46 Cheryl: So, as you can imagine the database was quite crazy and what I was commenting to Julie about is that, because curators care they're always in this process of just really meticulously collecting that information, that that actually would be really an interesting feature of the project. Where you're actually asking curators to help populate that and fill in some of that information. Plus you're then able to kind of see how curators are collecting the information and what themes. And what different artists even did they look at as they were coming up with something comprehensive. So, it almost becomes a way to analyze or to understand how curators also consider the work.

13:36 Julie: Yeah. And so the concept behind the website was basically you could click on a work, we'll look at maybe KC, I don't know how quick this is gonna go, but... The idea would be to eventually, to have more bits of information that are on the website. And so this is, it's a slow-moving train and it's also time consuming and exciting. So, basically the idea was, that you could be able to click on that person's photo or you could click on the person artwork, you could also go into their actual... There's home and then there's just a list of artists that you can pick. So, basically that you would have access to some of that information. And in most cases when we have an artist, there's a direct link to their website where you can go and look at more of their work and some artists websites are more interactive than others. And so it was really just a tool for people to be able to use. And so yeah, I think that's definitely please check it out it s transactivememorykeepers.org. Yeah, I think that's where I'm gonna end so.

[applause]

15:00 Speaker 4: So, we have a little bit of time if there's any immediate questions people might have. Are there any questions, are there any questions?

[laughter]

15:09 Speaker 5: Julie, thank you for this project and for doing that important archival work. As I was watching, it suddenly struck me that the question that I wanted to ask Steven and this relates to what you're doing as well is, Steven are you guys considering an API that for example so, Julie could tap into the backend database of your project to pull data? Or that others like myself for example, could access the backend database to populate other projects that we're doing online? Have you considered that?

15:43 Steven: Yeah, I think we're looking at different kind of database options right now. But one of the things we wanna have it to be as open as possible, so you could search in a variety of ways and find information and in a variety of ways to make those connections. 'Cause I think that's the component that's often missed in these kind of exercises. You have the work, you have the title, and basic information but, how they inter-relate to each other, and hopefully through people using it they'll also create that history by their moving through the database.

16:20 S7: Yeah, and I think that it's one of the things that I'm hoping that comes out of the archival thing for INF. Is actually one of things we talked about with Julie and Heather, Julie about this and Heather about the project that she's on. Is 'cause of the length of time of this project and also because of the technical expertise that's within my lab, to find ways to get these different efforts to

talk to each other in a fluid manner. So, we're not replicating work, we're expanding work but, we're making it so that you can enter from anyone of them and be able to reach over into the other ones. And that's done all the time in the database world but, it just takes time and development effort to make it happen. So...