

IIF Symposium Toronto - Stephen Foster

info@obxlabs.net

[pause]

00:17 Speaker 1: Yeah, so part of the overall project is this indigenous new media archive that we're building. It focuses mostly on digital media but also has outliers into more larger media arts world. As part of this project we're very focused on future of course, imagining a future, but in part we have to kind of think about our past and our present simultaneously as we project forward. So that's kind of what prompted this. It's been a long discussion, some of you probably know this piece here. You kinda see it as a kind of pivotal piece, a moment that brings a lot of things into focus. It kinda typifies some of the gaps that are out there. This is a piece, of course it's still out there. You can still witness this piece, it's by Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun. And this is just a screenshot. And you can see it's kind of fuzzy and a little bit hard to read but... And this is the version that most people see out there on websites. They don't see the virtuality piece, they don't get to experience it. So that's one aspect that I'll have you keep in mind while we talk about some other things here.

01:31 S1: So the objectives of the project, of this sub-project I guess, documenting digital media artworks. That's kind of the main objective. We wanna look back over the last say 20 years or so and pick up on some of the early works, some of the contemporary works, everything in between. And we wanna document them. We wanna, where we can, maybe bring them back to life. So that's a component of this. Documenting events of significance; gallery exhibition, conferences, performance events, things that have come and gone which were feminal at some point, but still played a significant role in changing the way we thought about digital media as a whole. Not just as indigenous digital media, but also Canadian digital media as a whole. So we wanna think about those things as well. Documenting individuals and organizations. There have been key organizations that have played really important roles in providing infrastructure, building capacity, those kinds of things. There's also important individuals that have been attached to those organizations, that really have been pioneers that have led the way. Even though they may not have been artists themselves, they're still significant in the development of that contexting approach. So these are things we wanna look at as well. Did I miss something? Nope. Okay. Sorry.

03:14 S1: A big part of this project is building a timeline, a kind of historical timeline. Looking at all those different elements as they occur, looking at the events and actions in relationship to each other. Those things are important things we wanna look at and hopefully things are revealed to us as we're going. The significance of works, the significance of particular changes and policy, those kinds of things. Artisan key individuals. Once again, thinking about those people in a timeline. People have careers, they're at certain organizations for certain periods of time, they may have achieved certain things, created certain opportunities. Artists who had key works. Going back to the Lawrence Paul work, maybe he's not the most prolific digital media artist, but he was an artist that did a significant digital media work at a particular time which became important. So those things are things that we wanna look at. Major works fairs, I just mentioned that one. But we'll talk a bit more about that, we're going a little fast.

04:24 Speaker 2: Yeah, you know what? I also got really rushed really and I talk really fast, but we're actually fine.

04:29 S1: Okay, we're fine for time...

04:31 S2: So everyone can take a breath and it's fine. [chuckle]

04:35 S1: Okay, throughout this timeframe that we're looking at, there are important digital interactive works, constellations in form of exhibitions that are major works by artists that need to be documented properly. Not just in terms of, "Here it is, here's when it happened," but the significance of the works. So part of a text building exercise that we wanna do around that as well, contextualizing those works in relationship to now, and how they've impacted now, how they imports now. And how they had an impact back then too. It seems kind of weird to talk about 1990s, that's ancient history but... In media world. [laughter]

05:19 S1: Organizations of course, some organizations are no longer here, or they transformed themselves, or whatever, but at certain times they've had major impact on what was capable, provided capacity and infrastructure that allowed artists to do new things. Some cases it's been a reaction to, there's been festivals that have really driven digital media. There's been also media... How do I say this? The more larger media arts world that kind of circles the digital media arts world, that also provides context and creates capacity for other kinds of art to happen. So, those things we wanna kinda bring to light as well.

06:08 S1: Significant policy and strategic initiatives by some of these organizations... I'm thinking, staffing agencies, funding agencies, that have changed policies, made efforts in certain directions, and have created new funds, new grants that have allowed work to happen. So, these kinds of things. This is all part of a massive, massive timeline we wanna create with a whole bunch of little sub-timelines. And even when you think about individual artists' careers, and things like that. That can form multiple, little timelines that are kinda subset to the bigger one. So, these kinds of things. Sounds very arts historical doesn't it? [laughter]

06:49 S2: Yes.

06:49 Speaker 3: Yes.

06:51 S1: Regionalism, is something that I've been thinking about a lot. Just more recently, it kinda had this kinda national scope. And indeed there's digital media, indigenous arts across the country. There is a broad scope. There is a breadth there. But there's also impact regionally. And it's a little bit different. Gives a little bit different flavor in different parts whether it's West Coast, or whether it's Montreal, or Toronto... These kinds of places. Or the prairies, or the north... These kinds of things. Very slightly, and these works, and people, vary.

07:31 S1: Big thing, the end result, an online database that's searchable. One of the things that we wanna do is not just have this timeline, but we wanna have, which has about, right now... We just started, keep in mind we just started... 450 entries already that we've pulled together. And we've got way more to do, but that's a significant chunk. We're looking at categorizing that, building details around that, contextualizing it, working... We've got a sub-group that we've organized today, that

are gonna start looking at the criteria by which we evaluate this stuff. That kinda thing.

08:10 S1: Another big part of this is video interviews. We really wanna do this with significant artists, key individuals, these kinds of things. We want to document their knowledge orally. We are an oral culture right? These are important activities. We want to be able to use that as a research tool, but also to make those interviews available within the database itself for other researchers down the road. Texts, a big part of this is developing texts to help contextualize the work and it's significance, it's impact... These kinds of things. That's an important element that we wanna bring into this too.

08:55 S1: Maybe it is a question of going out and finding people that want to write about it or can write about it, or have written about it. And including that into the database is really important. Actual works... Talked about documenting the actual works, where possible. Bringing them back to life, where possible, would be an intriguing part of this project.

09:21 S1: Moving forward. Big part of the project now... Fleshing out the existing entries with more detail... Developing networks and collaborating with other projects. There are a number of projects out there that are doing similar things with different focuses. We want to attach and work with them to bring them into this larger project as well, where we can.

09:48 S1: Doing interviews. We have a lot more interviews we can do. And that's something that we can do really well and we're really well-placed to do. We have facilities that you can see longing to do this, we can go out... We have travel budgets to go and get them those kinds of things. We have students that are willing to do the documentary work, transcribing, those kinds of things. So it's text and video and making it available. Identifying key texts for web and reissue. So, these things too are part of what I see happening with our sub-group. Looking at doing literature reviews, these kinds of more academic things to see what's available there. And, I think I have one more. No, that's it. That's it. So, I did that in... Did it quickly. Thank you. [laughter]

10:40 S3: Do you have an example of the entry?

10:42 S1: I do have... I can just throw up... We'll throw it up really briefly, just 'cause it's very rough... I had a graduate student do some stuff. So, if it opens... Nope that's not it.

[background conversation]

11:22 S2: I wanna know why every time I open any Microsoft product, it opens all the things I was looking at the last week.

11:27 S1: So, there's a whole listing around [11:30] and stuff like that. It's several... Breaking it down...

11:42 S2: Good question, Ryan. I want to see this.

11:44 S1: I can't see. [laughter]

[background conversation]

11:58 S1: Okay, so we're not handcuffed to display anyway but... I've worked with a couple of the students over the last little while, and just kind of doing some fact searching. I've got Bumpy Sangria in there as one of the top ones, right. But, you know...

12:14 S3: Sheryl.

12:16 S1: It's a whole bunch of stuff...

12:18 S3: Sheryl. Three for Sheryl.

12:24 S1: Right now I think I've done it by name-organized here but you're looking at curators, collaborators, roles, more condensed groups, media, where in the medium is kind of following the map here. Publications, if there's publications attached. These kinds of things we're looking at. Trying to sort out those little elements. If you have... You know there's an exhibition. Okay, where are the reviews on that exhibition? Let's go grab those. That's important. If there's visual documentation, let's grab that. If there's actual catalogue essays, those kinds of things, we should grab that as well. At the very beginning of this stage is what we wanna do, is we wanna just document it.

13:07 S2: Yes.

13:07 S1: Get where they are, and then we'll sort out rights issues later. Not necessarily gonna put it up on the web right away, but if can start building it, at least we know where it is and we can go from there. It's, like you said, there's 450 things...

13:27 Speaker 4: Wow.

13:28 S1: And it just goes on.

13:29 S4: What kind of personnel does it take to make... Source this and then maintain it? Is it just you or...

13:38 S1: Well, at UBC... That's a good question. At UBC Copenhagen, we're not in Vancouver, just in case you thought we were in Vancouver. [chuckle] We have a Center for Indigenous Media Arts. So we have servers, we have technology there in place, we have places to put grad students, much like Ab Tech. And then we have funding in place that we can hire students to work on these, hopefully we can put postdocs involved, get postdocs involved in it. These kinds of things as well, so that there's someone with a scholarship background.

14:15 S1: The other thing, element here is try to encourage too, future scholarship around these things, right? So, when we do have master's students and we do have PhD students coming into our university systems, they can use this material as research to develop their own thesis. So that's part

of it as well.

14:38 S2: Any other questions?

14:39 S1: Oh, you have a question Archer? You're in there too, by about ten. [laughter]

14:45 Speaker 5: I have a number of linked things I would like to... First, I want to thank you for undertaking this initiative, Steven. It's really, really badly needed. What's been happening is I think a lot of us have been doing these ad hoc, often emergency preservation exercises informally. I know Sheryl and I have been busy grabbing all of the old native websites that we know about or have taken part in and downloaded them to our personal machines, put them on our personal servers as, just as a way of maintaining that codebase and those artworks. Of course, what we've discovered, and I'm sure everyone's had the same experience, websites have turned out to be the most robust platform for digital media because a website from 1992 still works. Yay.

15:33 S3: Unless it's Flash. [laughter]

15:36 S5: Well, we've all made that mistake.

15:38 S2: I never did.

15:39 S5: Shut up. It's my turn, okay? We fought about it.

[laughter]

15:47 S2: We did. I came to you for it.

15:49 S5: You just didn't wanna write the code. Alright, okay. I knew this would happen. [laughter] I'm really excited by the idea of this... Of the video interviews, and us having this as a searchable archive of an oral history. Because more and more... Like for example, you hold up the fundamental VRPs and I remember at the time we were all kind of like, "Eh. Okay." But then a couple of years later it was like, "Oh. This is actually mega cool." And now, it's like, "Wow!" What a visionary artwork that turned out to be by a guy who is the least digital native that I've ever met. My mom is more digital than Lawrence Paul is, right? [laughter] When he was discussing making the piece, and man, he did a little artist talk and he was talking about making and the pixies cells. What? It's just a little thin there!

16:38 S2: They should be interviewed on the archive.

16:41 S5: To me...

16:41 S?: Yes. Why should we be having the just so you know.

16:44 S5: The context in which these pieces are made, the context in which they are received, this is, to me now, as important as... It's fundamental to the artwork. It's part of the artwork and the

fabric of the artwork, so I really appreciate you doing that. We have had many, many conversations about how we're going to revivify, in many cases, some of our older works. And this is a conversation that we have every time, and I'll bring it up again. How do we resurrect CyberPowWow, which was built on a completely obsolete platform that no one in their right mind would try to recreate? We can recreate it but we don't want to revivify it. Do you guys, have you guys spent much time thinking around that stuff?

17:29 S2: We haven't... I'd like to say a couple of things in response to that CyberPowWow thing. So that's part of... That's why we're doing this grant. That's why we got the money, is for these things, but CyberPowWow was always... We said maybe that could be the test case for the database, but it turns out there's a scholar named David Gartner, who is at UBC, and he loves CyberPowWow and he is... We had his canned version, remember?

18:02 S?: Yep.

18:02 S2: He's very interested in... We wanted him to be here, but he's doing something else. He couldn't be here today. But he's doing it. So as far as CyberPowWow is concerned, he's like, you guys got to get in touch because he's already, he's like, "Give me all your files." I'm like, "I'm not sending you these floppy disks." [laughter] "I'll come and bring them to you." So we're like, we are talking about that as far as that specific...

18:28 S5: That's wonderful. So that's one prime example and I'm so glad to hear that's happening. That's a huge weight off my mind. I think about it a lot.

18:34 S2: I know it's been bothering me for years also. [chuckle]

18:39 S5: That's me, that's.

[background conversation]

18:43 Speaker 6: Just something from Australia. A lot of filmmakers... It's a big issue about how to archive stuff and how to challenge about stuff that should be shown and what can't be shown and all that kind of stuff and also from living archive. Because we sort of kinda forget about the present as an archive. And so we've been pushing our funding agencies to also support when people do stuff to add a component on sort of a marketing budget. But a archive budget that allows... So it could be something that we just did it with someone's project, so there's something like... So one of the short films, "Marty", they filmed probably about 40 hours of footage that will probably only gets shown by that community, but how they then archived that on the Internet so that the community could fit into it there their own password and then only certain amounts put to archive.

19:52 S1: Right.

19:53 S6: Just something as a thought in that there should be a conversation with the budgeting powers about that sort of that kind of support towards filmmakers and multimedia more for that. If you're gonna market a film, you should also archive the works that are coming, all the stuff that

you're creating on the Internet.

20:13 S1: Yeah, I think that's huge. Going forward, to make sure you have that documentation for all this as well, thinking about the future. There's a few things that you said there that really... Maybe it's a longer conversation, maybe we'll talk. [chuckle]

20:35 S2: Are there any other questions? Oh yeah, Sheryl?

20:37 Speaker 7: Just a question again around net, our Internet. Will there be anything in your, what you guys are working with, that you'll help secure domain names? I know that Scotland and you have had this happened and I've had this happen on several projects where pirates buy the domain and then you've lost it and you have to pay like \$500 to get it back or weird negotiations. So I am just wondering if there's anything in your...

21:03 S2: I haven't thought about that either. My own plan now is... It's not a big great plan really, but I wanna just put everything under one domain name.

21:14 S7: Okay.

21:15 S2: So I am just gonna have Skawennati which nobody wants.

[laughter]

21:19 S2: And then it's gonna be slash Imagine Indians, which is the one I lost, it's why you can't see it anymore.

21:22 S7: Right.

21:23 S2: And yeah, so that kind of thing.

21:25 S7: Alright.

21:26 S2: But it's something that... I think it's great that you bring these things up because the subcommittee has to think about these things. I had never thought of that, supporting arts, supporting a domain name.

21:36 S7: Yeah.

[laughter]

21:37 S1: Or even capturing it or holding it for the artist.

21:39 S7: Our work is unique to the fact that we're the only sub-category of media art where we actually have to rent or lease our title over our work. Go figure.

[laughter]

21:53 S2: Yeah. So I thought we have only six minutes before Jason Ryle is due to arrive and I thought we did go very quickly through the other three topics, the symposia, but especially the residencies and the workshops. So I wondered if anyone had any questions or comments in the next six minutes about that.

22:16 S?: About the workshop or just...

22:18 S2: The workshop, symposium, or residencies, yes?

22:22 S?: So one of the things that I would've liked to have said [chuckle] when I spoke is that, maybe just a bridge, especially for people here who don't know us that well is that, the thinking of the future came from kind of thinking about new technology as a metaphor for the future. And Jason is a professor at Concordia and he is a Hexagram researcher. Hexagram is this fabulous research institute based in Montreal that had bought all this new media equipment for artists to use. And that is, when we've done a couple of residencies in the past, that was one of the things that we invited artists to do is to come and use these amazing machines that we had access to in Hexagram such as a 3D printer or a motion capture system, that type of thing. So I just wanted to let you know that for us, there is a bridge there between this new technology and the future. That's why it's all... We're talking about digital media so much.

23:32 S1: Yes, sure.

23:34 S7: Around residencies, everything you're saying is really fabulous but looking around this room and hearing different people's accents... I know we've met before previously at imagineNATIVE, but thinking about how, what is new media in Australia versus what is new media here, what is new media in [23:54] . It could be really interesting to host something where there is a really concentrated notion of getting on the same page or that understanding those terms and envisioning something for the future, that would be so fabulous.

24:11 S?: Well in a way that's the symposia going forward, that's part of that thinking is that provides a venue where we can say to aboriginal artists or Maori artists or Sami artists or not just artists but people who are concerned. "This is a venue to talk about that, come and talk about your work, talk about how your communities are thinking about the future." We were just in Honolulu for a fantastic conference called 'Creating Futures Rooted In Wonder intersections between fairytale... '

24:48 S?: Indigenous first?

24:48 S?: Oh, sorry. 'Intersections between indigenous fairytale, fairy tales and science fiction studies'. Which was amazing in many different ways but one of the things that was quite noble about it is the amount of thinking about indigenous futurism happening in the Pacific. So Maori, aboriginal, Hawaiian, Samoan, etcetera. So that there's already... There's already conversation happening there that we want to bring into our conversation and we want to go and be part of their

conversation. Because yes, I think that there is really in our most grandiose moment, we want this to become the place for that conversation. Right? We want to facilitate that conversation happening.

25:32 S?: And I just want add one thing. I'm really glad that I was able to smuggle Joseph in here today because I'm gonna eventually have this conversation with him anyway about everything we've discussed, because for me that's part of my practice is to sort of then embed it back in the language, to understand it from that world view. So if you can also include linguists or language specialists or...

25:54 S?: Well, Yeah. One of profiles we'd really love to have somebody come and do a residency is somebody who... A linguist, somebody who works with native languages, or a native language. And to really think through what is that language gonna be like seven generations from now. Right? Absolutely. So if anybody knows somebody who does that work then let us know about them so that we could pull them in.

26:16 S?: Eric Wilden Gray and Gino Komassis from the Plains Language Institute in Regina, they're your people for Cree.

26:23 S?: Great. Excellent. That also brings up something, that there's other people who you think wanna be part of this conversation, send that information to Skawennati, skawennati@gmail.com. It's on the back of your brochure right there. And so part of what we're going to be doing is building up a database of people who are active in this area, so that it becomes a reference for other people. Okay.

26:51 S?: Tell us about regionalism that you were talking about. Is it regionalism or nations?

26:57 S?: I wasn't thinking... Yeah, it could be both actually, it could be both.

27:01 S?: 'Cause it's also that thing of... I know there's a lot of... Like in Australia, I'm Yangel but I live in Sydney. So my work is implied by my community really rather than where I live. So if it was regionalism it would be where I made it, but my formed component is my nation so I think it's really important to make sure that the indigenous components of the nations are data. That's one, and I had another one about...

27:33 S?: There's still time. So just one more... Yeah, just one more 'cause Jason is on a very short window here so...

[background conversation]

27:40 S?: Oh okay.

27:43 S?: Yeah. Let's... Yeah, I think you should.

27:44 S?: So I came early, so I did the question or at least what we're talking about...

27:49 S1: Okay, I'm thinking a little bit more about what we were talking about and I think there's a really interesting thing which we're wrestling with right now a little bit is around the ethics of certain material online and certain material not. That of course depends on a degree of traditional knowledge is incorporated. But one of the things we're looking at in terms of front end software that will help us manage that a little bit. We don't have that all figured out yet but I think that's one thing that we're looking at.

28:20 S?: And it's also important because, in terms of some of our communities, sorry... I'm gonna shut up in a minute. But in some of our communities, even though we all say we are digital ready, we might be in the cities, but in our territories we are not. We still work in satellite in some of our communities. And so they have the seven minutes opening and then you have 20 gig to download a month on eight bucks. So they don't do a lot in terms of individual states. How do we keep stuff so that they get to see it down the track when the technology is a battle to them? That's why the living archives stuff is also really important.