

IIF Symposium Toronto - Jason Lewis

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00:18 Speaker 1: So. Why are we here? This is a product of a partnership called Initiative for Indigenous Futures. This is a partnership that just got a grant from SSHRC, Social Sciences Humanity Research Council, to conduct a seven year long project investigating what we think of as an Indigenous Future Imaginary; just the future imaginary. Then the genesis comes out of a ten year long trajectory of projects that we've been doing under the aboriginal territories in cyber space, lab tech, research network. So just focused on investigating how native people in our communities are using digital media to tell our stories. Part of what happened over the course of that time is we found ourselves thinking more and more about this, about the future. So the future in science fiction terms. We're big science fiction fans. We're working with youth who are big science fiction fans. And part of what we notice is that in the workshops that we're doing with youth on video game design in particular, in aboriginal story telling, is that in our communities we spend a lot of time talking about the past, as we should, right? And most of the time is left over is dealing with some very serious challenges in the present. What we don't do is we don't spend a lot of time dreaming of the future. We talk about the 7th generation, and I think we try to honor the 7th generation to come.

01:55 S1: But what we didn't see very much of is concrete illustrations of what we want that life for our descendants to be. That's whether the 7th generation, the 10th generation, or the 20th generation. So really science fiction territory. This was also something that came out in conversations with the youth that we were working with, is that their future imaginary is the future imaginary of the settler culture, right? It's the future imaginary of western culture because we're saturated with that. It's in movies and films and literature. That's where most of my future imaginary comes from. So, one of the things we started talking about and thinking about is like what could we do to both promote the presence of native people in the whiter culture future imaginary, 'cause that's another issue is in those western future imaginary there's very rarely indigenous people. So what can we do to get more indigenous people in those futures? But what can we do to also develop ideas and illustrations of the future that we want? Then how can we build a foundation so that we are in a position to help build that future, or like concretely make that future come to pass?

03:11 S1: So out of that came the Initiative for Indigenous Futures. So that's a research network of 3D educational institutions, five community organizations, one industrial partner, five or six co-investigators who are academics, artists, community activists, technology developers, game makers, etc., who we're all very much interested in populating the Indigenous Future Imaginary and doing work in that direction. So, what we're gonna do to sort of start off today is we're gonna talk in a little bit more detail about what if Initiative for Indigenous Futures is going to be doing over the next seven years so that you're all aware of that. And we're always looking for playmates, right? We're always looking for people who want to come in and collaborate with us and do interesting things, and reach communities that we're not part of, and we're not working with, etcetera. And begin to sort of get the word out there.

04:15 S1: And then we have four speakers that we invited to come today and talk about the future imaginary, talk about their take on that idea and what they think might be interesting about that. Then at the end of the day we'll have a round table conversation for half an hour, forty-five minutes that gives an opportunity for everybody to chime in to the conversation and see where it's going. Its

a super exciting time. We've spent a lot of time getting to this point, but it's really amazing to think that we have at least seven years to flush this out, and we're super excited to see what the other people have to say, and what other people propose might be done that help us grapple with this issue in a very interesting, and constructive, and fun way. So with that, this is kind of the mission statement for the initiative. We're exploring the cultural, conceptual, creative and technical dimensions of the Indigenous Future Imaginary while encouraging aboriginal people to craft the future of their choosing. Okay? So, that's the heart of the matter, and then what we're doing concretely is four big project areas; one are the symposia.

05:33 S1: I realize I said first annual, but if we can make it happen every year we'll do it. It might be bi-annual, or go on episodically, but it will be something we'll be doing on a continuous basis over the next seven years, and it's exactly what we're doing right now. So it provides a forum for us to talk about these ideas all together, for us to present the work that we're doing within the initiative, have other people come talk about the work they're doing that might be similar to that in their communities, and the ones in the future most likely will be public. We did this first one as an invite-only because we still have training wheels on as a partnership. We're still just getting warmed up. We had our first annual meeting just this morning, so we thought let's start with something small where we can probably manage it without killing ourselves, which we haven't so far. But the idea is that this will become a public event, where we can invite everybody in who wants to be part of this conversation with us. We think there's lots more people out there who have something interesting to say about this. So, you'll be hearing more about these as we go off into the future.