

Transcript for Research Speaker Series: Storytelling s̓mi̓ma̓y̓ Futurisms from the Digital Frontier – Challenging Colonial Narratives through a Digital Embodied Story Practice and Research-Creation

BCcampus Research Speaker Series session hosted on January 21, 2025

Presenter: Mariel Belanger

Hosts: Gwen Nguyen and Leva Lee

GWEN NGUYEN:

So good morning and welcome everyone to our Research Speaker Series, the winter and spring sessions. My name is Gwen, and I'm a learning and teaching advisor at BCcampus. It is my pleasure to welcome to the very first session of the Research Speaker Series 2025 on the topic of s̓mi̓ma̓y̓'s storytelling intersects with digital technologies. Before we start, I'd like to go over a few housekeeping items. One is the whole session will be recorded. You're welcome to keep your camera off and feel free to rename yourself to Participant if you prefer. We also enable live captioning for accessibility. I want to say thank you to my two incredible teammates Leva Lee and Kelsey Kilbey. Leva has been a wonderful partner for this Research Speaker Series project, and Kelsey has always been a wonderful support behind the scenes for all of our teaching and learning sessions at BCcampus and today's session as well.

So I'd like to begin with the territorial acknowledgement. I joined you today from my home office, which is situated on the unceded territories of the W̓SÁNEĆ and the Esquimalt and Songhees Nations of the Lekwungen Peoples. As both individuals and as an organization, we continue to learn and be in relationships as we actively respond to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Actions. So it turned out to be a very beautiful day on the island, even though it could be a bit frosty in the morning. So I hope that you will have a joyful and nice day wherever you are zooming from. Please feel free to share your introduction in the chat if you wish.

So, turning back to our session focus today, the Storytelling s̓mi̓ma̓y̓: Futurisms from the Digital Frontier. Challenging Colonial Narratives through a Digital Embodied Story Practice, and Research Creation. This session will delve into some innovative approaches to challenging the colonial practices through digital and body story practices and research creation methodologies. I had a chance to meet with Mariel at the Educator Wellness Forum last year, I think, is it October? It should be the end of October in Kelowna, I found her work on the Indigenizing and de-colonizing education practices really powerful and insightful. So I feel really happy when she said yes to our Research Speaker Series session. So Mariel Belanger is a PhD candidate in cultural studies at Queens University. Her research focused on the storytelling s̓mi̓ma̓y̓ futurisms. I hope that I say the word correctly. If I said it wrong it's on my part, I asked Mariel to help me with the pronunciation before the session, but I'm trying. As an Indigenous scholar and artist, Mariel's work challenges the colonial narratives through innovative digital storytelling practice and research creation methods. You're in a really good hands and please join me in welcome Mariel for this session. Thank you.

MARIEL BELANGER:

Thank you very much for that introduction. I will share my screen. Started here. Okay. Let me reorganize my screen here. Wai, xast sxlxƒalt. Inca isk^wist Cen cen, kn mut il nk' maplqs il n' sis' oola^w. Hello, good day. My name is Mariel Belanger. I'm from Dry Creek at head of the lake just outside of Vernon on the Okanagan Indian Band. Born and raised here. I've gotten my education all the streams that you can think about. I went to Algonquin College and got my associates diploma and came back and went to UBC Okanagan for my undergrad and for my masters, and then I went back east to Queens to well, first to York through the theatre program. I took the first year theatre PhD courses, but then I quickly transferred out to cultural studies because I realized I was not doing applied theatre. Applied theatre is something completely different. And what I've come to acknowledge is that I'm articulating what smi?may' storied life would be if we were able to tell our own stories as Indigenous women, specifically as Syilx women. And I have about 30 minutes of dialogue of text of the theory and the reasons why I do things. But in between, I'll discuss, I'll talk about the photos that you see. Most of them are from my art practice, and most of them are digital. Like this particular one, I created it in studio in Kelowna as a part of my masters because it was performance theory, and I was thinking through the Indian princess iconography and stereotypes, and what does it mean today? I was also thinking through cartography and mapping and what Mercator's map did to the Indigenous woman of every continent. And all of the things in the background are materials that I work with now that my grandmother worked with that her grandmother worked with that all Syilx grandmothers and people knew before contact. And that everything in the image is not as you see it. The chair behind you, the chaise is actually a bunch of pillows with blankets and a fake fur covering it to give the illusion of coloniality, which is really just white fluff underneath. And the methodology is mixed, and it's always been that way for me.

As an Indigenous performance theorist, I am informed by Indigenous research methodologies, which emphasize relationality, reciprocity, and storytelling. My approach to research creation involves multiple mediums and platforms to share stories and teachings. This connects to ideas about digital sovereignty and using technology on Indigenous terms. I have referred to it as embodied story practice, and my MFA work contributes to cultural resurgence and preservation by concentrating on Indigenous family knowledge systems. My PhD work builds on these relationships in digital context. On this screen, on this slide, you can see some photos, black and white photos, digitized photos, all with children and them. In the black and white photo, if you Google Okanagan family that is the photo that comes up with the whole family. The little girl on the aunt's lap and her siblings and her uncle and her mom and dad behind. That's my grandmother. And her father, Joe Abel, and my grandmother, were two folks that were visited by scholars as I was a child, in the other black and white photo with the woman and the child. And that is me dancing at cultural events where folks would gather to learn who we were through our songs and dances. And in the centre photo is a digitized photo of my daughter when she was little in the cultural immersion school. It wasn't until 2014, I think, 2004, maybe 2005 that our class, our students on the reserve, had an opportunity to stay in community and

learn the language and learn culture through our own teachings. And so my youngest daughter was the first in our family to be raised with language and culture intact. Margaret Kovach's book, "Indigenous Methodologies" provides guidelines for respectfully approaching Indigenous knowledge systems and empowering Indigenous perspectives in research. Kovach's work helps me to situate my storytelling practice within Indigenous methodologies. However, it is my *s̓m̓iʔmaʔ*, my personal storied history, and my remembering of history as I experienced that brings it all together.

So growing up, as you saw in that earlier photo, I was raised with culture. I was raised with my grandmother. However, when she passed away, the culture kind of stopped with the exception of pow wows and, you know, pan-Indigenous customs and going out harvesting. We never stopped doing those things. But the way that I found my way was through the story, and it was through embodying the animal people that helped me to better understand what my position was in society, in the world, how to act because our *captikw̓ł*, our animal stories, gave us those guidelines. And in her dissertation, Syilx Okanagan orator and *tmix̓* centrism, and the article, "My Reflection of that Time." Dr. Jeannette Armstrong articulates the importance of understanding self as *tmix̓* as being the environment of the land of the animals and connecting specific Syilx words to Syilx-centric methodology. Sourcing contemporary interpretations of Syilx words has helped grow my understanding of the depth of the meaning they have. Dr. Percy Lezard provides a well-developed understanding of the deep meaning that is contained in the word *captikw̓ł*, which they define as a collection of teachings about our laws, customs, values, governance, structures, and principles that together, define and inform *sqilxw* rights and responsibilities to the land and our culture are both ontological and epistemological.

For Lezard, relationality is an inclusive methodology that demands all voices be heard in the same manner as told in the story of how food was given, which they utilize as guiding principles, because everyone has value and something to offer. Natalie Lovelace suggests that in interdisciplinary humanities and political art practice could be a roadmap to creating an old, new way forward. What they allow us to do, she says, however, was to begin by considering the way that research creation practice works to tell new stories within the academy. Lovelace mobilizes different idioms with different audiences to distinguish between stories that hurt and stories that heal, stories of hierarchy and of cooperation, stories of autonomy and of responsivity, encouraging us to take seriously the way that research creation configures interdisciplinarity. In this slide, there are five different scenes that I've created physically and digitally. We'll start in the bottom left-hand corner. That is me in a Salish and sturgeon-nose canoe that was made by Dr. Shawn Brigman in our community. He came up and I organized a workshop where he showed us how he put a contemporary skin on a traditional frame. And from that workshop, I began to work with that canoe in the waters, our traditional waters where it hadn't been for eons since colonization, since we stopped being able to locate the Western white pine that was necessary to make these bark canoes. Because the trees stopped growing in our area because we kept cutting them all down, becoming loggers ourselves.

The second photo is actually still from the game Red Dead Redemption online. And it's a horrible game, to be honest. It's about the Wild West, and you literally do Wild West things in this game. However, and importantly, it's situated in North America on Turtle Island. So the landscape and the art and the topography and everything is genuine to here, to our land. And so what does it mean for young people to go and experience a digital version of the Wild West today with no one stopping them from doing what they want and organizing how they want. What happens? It's incredible because they take over. And if we were allowed to continue to be who we are in this new world, who knows what possibilities we could have been having right now? In the corner photo is a painting that I did in my undergrad. Because I was in a performance studio-oriented program at UBC Okanagan, we had to learn studio practices, which included other arts, and I was not a painter. However, I spent about 800 hours trying to learn how to paint skin and vectors, which I still don't know what a vector is, but it makes things look level in your painting, and that's a really important aspect of believability and reality. However, being diagnosed bipolar has given my perception a skewed presentation, and I think that I captured it quite beautifully within those two paintings. And in the centre as a photo that was captured inside a tule mat lodge, which is, again, Dr. Shawn Brigman's, I had him come up to go to UBC Okanagan and set up his lodge size tee pee because it was the only one that I knew of in the whole territory all the way down into Spokane, like the plateau. It was the only one I knew who was doing it. So I actively brought him up so that we could reinstate these buildings for the animals to see and to recognize us again because for all this time, we don't know if they knew that we're still here themselves. In the other photo is a place in Second Life that doesn't exist anymore. Second Life is a virtual worlding game where mostly artists and academics are using it, but it's an interesting place where you can build your own landscapes. In a class with Dr. Mary Bunch, I co-created a landscape that was a marsh, where all of the students helped to create this landscape. What we learned about co-creating landscape in virtual territories is that some people are there to help build something amazing, and some people are just there to put their mark on something, whether it belongs there or not. It taught us a lot about social skills and about what we think is important on the land, whether other people think it's important or not.

The digital, sorry. The digital frontier presents opportunities and challenges as Indigenous people seek to assert sovereignty over cultural representations online. Guillermo Gómez-Peña discusses the digital frontier as a mentally dangerous place in his theory of five worlds, equating cyberspace as a mirrored reality and the fifth world. Gomez Penez's [. theory of cyberspace as a mirrored reality, informs my perspective on navigating Indigenous identity and community in online spaces. Gomez Penez's perspective on perspective highlights concern about losing connection to culture and nature through virtual worlds, while recognizing their potential to provide community for marginalized people. This connects to my aim of further understanding relationships between Indigenous self-determined existence and technology. This also relates to my interest in Indigenous experiences in online gaming worlds like Second Life and Red Dead Redemption. In this screen, in this slide, the two photos are digitally-created pieces. The top one is based on a short experimental music soundscape to video was created, was also put into

VR hubs, which I don't think that it works as well as it did at the time, although it didn't really work at that time, either. VR is still something that's growing as its own medium. And I've had the opportunity to screen my work in VR 360 Dome. And it looks really cool. However, it loses the details that you can see in the video, which we'll watch in a bit. And that photo was taken from a presentation that I was a part of with my supervisors, Dolleen Manning and Mary Bunch in the York Sensorium Lab. And the bottom photo is a still that was taken in Second Life, and this is a place that still exists in AbTeC Island, which was created by Skawennati, who is a Mohawk artist and Jason Lewis, who created this lodge that is as genuine as an outdoor lodge would be outside with the fire, and you can hear the fire crackling, and so there's an auditory and a visual a fact that makes you feel like you're in a learning environment. Of course, if everybody is in their own home and they're wanting to get together, this is a place that you can do that and just go and visit. Second Life is free to use. It's really crude with their avatars. It started as an adult-oriented place. Some of the things are not as ideal as we would want. However, given the way that you can create your own environments, you can buy islands, which is what my supervisors did. We had an island for class. We were able to create a whole bunch of different spaces to explore art and culture and language and videos and all kinds of really amazing things. Digital storytelling is a powerful tool for preserving and revitalizing Indigenous culture and languages, especially in educational settings. As an Indigenous artist and scholar, I've witnessed firsthand how digital platforms can bridge traditional knowledge with contemporary contexts. Through my PhD work, I have been exploring ways to translate my land-based artistic knowledge into digital spaces, while maintaining cultural integrity. This approach allows me to reach wider audiences, particularly youth who are increasingly engaged with technology. For instance, developing interactive virtual environments, incorporating Indigenous languages, plants, and animals to educate users about local ecologies. These digital spaces don't replace land-based pedagogy, but rather supplement it, providing dispersed communities access to cultural knowledge to imagine performing them in new ways. That's the video. I am also experimenting with participatory digital performances and immersive experiences that challenge colonial narratives and centre Indigenous voices. By adapting our storytelling traditions to digital formats, we're able to engage new generations in language revitalization efforts and cultural practices, ensuring that our cultural wisdom continues to thrive in the digital age. This work is crucial for maintaining our sovereignty over stories and representations while also creating innovative ways to pass on teachings in a rapidly changing world. Challenging traditional educational practices can foster new forms of expression and knowledge sharing. So on the next slide, it starts black. It's the creation story in its original edited, digitally edited format because it is an actual drone, just a straight drone photo, I mean, video of different places where I was on the Columbia River. So I digitized the performance of a VR project with my supervisors, Dr. Dolleen Manning and Mary Bunch, that started as a performance rehearsal and a new drone operator practice. The location of the filming is important because we found me from Revelstoke, British Columbia to Brewster, Washington, standing up in this contemporary Salish sturgeon-nose canoe that is made by Shawn Brigman. This clip is from a point in the confluence of the Spokane River where it enters the Columbia River. And it wasn't until I digitally altered the original clip with the edge detect filter that the

river came alive under the surface. This detail is lost in VR. When viewed on a big screen or in a darkened space, you can really see fish and other floaties going by me. We're going to watch that now.

[VIDEO STARTS]

A long time ago, long before time was an issue, as it is today, the old one created the sun. The Old One said there should be light. There should be light so I can see. And so there was. And what the Old One saw was a world of water and thought, There should be something here to stand. Down floated a leaf to the Old One, who whispered to it to grow. The Old One stood. The Old One called to the Water Spirit. Then created Turtle. The Old One then created three other creatures. One with fins, one with arms and legs and tail, and one with wings. The Old One then told them. You dive down as far as you can and bring back something we can use. Down, the Old One with wings went, but they could not hold their breath very long and came back up gasping, clawing back onto Turtle as if their life depended on her. One with fins went down as far as they could, too, but still nothing. The Old One was disappointed. Finally, it was the Tailed One's turn. They told the Old One. I will not come back without something of use. They took a very deep breath and dove down into the water deep. The Tailed One swam, and swam, and swam, down, down, down. The water seemed to have no end. The others are waiting in the top for them. The others wait and wait. It seems like they waited a long, long, long time and still nothing. The Tailed One didn't come. The Tailed One was losing power. So they began singing in their head. [Singing in Syilx language] to the end of their song. The Tailed One reaches out, grasping into the darkness. The song ends and a few bubbles escape. Finally, someone on the surface points out to the water. Look, there are bubbles over there. Sure enough, the Tailed One loaded to the top. One of the animals jumped in and brought them back to Turtle, and they carried the Tailed One to the middle, barely breathing, hand clutching tight. The Old One opened up to little paw. Nothing. The Tailed One had nothing in his paw. But faintly under their nails was thick black mud. The Tailed One must have pushed off the bottom of the ocean to make it back to the surface. The Old One scraped the mud from under each fingernail to make a ball. The Old One rolled and rolled it, and it got bigger and bigger. It got so big. Turtle offered her shell to be the foundation. And so the Old One put the ball on the Turtle's back. In some stories, it is said that the Tailed One was massaged into the Earth to become the people to be as reward for sacrificing self for them. That is the story of the land and how our people were created from it.

[VIDEO ENDS]

MARIEL:

Yeah. In that one, read about right here. That's a beaver. At first, I thought it was a salmon and I had a big argument about it, but there's no salmon. Well, actually, that's not true. There's salmon in this part of the Columbia River this year. At this time, there was not, and I had mistaken it as a salmon. Clearly, when you saw it move, though, it Well, my cat just dumped in my face. Sorry. This was all created with a person who was learning how to use a drone and my

ability to... Okay. That's enough now. Sorry. My ability to edit my own video performance. That one's now started with Make my laptop run to. I tend to use consumer-level to consumer-level camera equipment. These days, my smartphone and my laptop are my personal film studio. I use free editing software like Davinci Resolve, and music editing software like GarageBand. I use free or low-cost resources as much as possible to demonstrate how technology does not need to cost a lot to be effective. I also share time for prints and video and music as ways to build capacity with other emerging artists and technicians. I also contract my daughter to illustrate our family research outings by teaching her cousins how to use Procreate, which is a low-cost digital drawing app so that they can illustrate their perspectives as well as build their capacity in the digital illustrations as well as each one, teach one. We always try to share the knowledge that we gain from our mentors with other people. Using available technology and free online social media sharing apps subverts the colonial narrative. And creates free resources for folks disconnected from their home communities and culture. I also access regional funding sources to tell generational healing stories with my daughter as a way to provide firsthand perspectives from an Indigenous mother and daughter perspective. So we'll see the trailer for Horse Woman, which is a documentary that I created with the help of Story Hive and Telus through their Indigenous Storytellers Fund. It was now, like we started writing the grant. Well, we made the pitch in 2020, and it was a year after a forest fire and we wanted to tell the story of my daughter and her horses. And the corner photo, and that was called and I'm not a fluent speaker, and I was not raised with the language intact. So when I say words, I always I'm saying them like a child. But it's sńkćá?sqáǵa? tkłmílx^w, and that means horse, and I can never say the woman part, and I'm saying that publicly now because I have a hard time with the language. And that's a part of the reason why I do this work. In the corner in the black and white photo is a still again, from Red Dead Redemption. And the characters and all the things are kind of funny. However, they're also important story characters. They're free places to use beautiful landscapes and just record yourself in them. The centre photo is actually from my master's. It was the first photo series that I created that I then altered to create this kind of aesthetic, which is very much distorted. And that's my actual wedding dress, and I toured, and I'll talk a little bit about that, too. I toured a show that was about fabric and the layers of coloniality associated with ownership and marriage. And again, the bottom photo is that marsh area that co-created in Second Life. In that game, I am Fox Woman, and Fox Woman wanders, and she learns and witnesses other people's experiences.

I've observed a profound interplay between youth, digital technology, and our connections to the land. My research and personal experiences have shown me how these elements can work together to strengthen cultural continuity and foster Indigenous resurgence in unexpected ways. In my work with my daughter, Sienna, I have seen firsthand how digital spaces can become extensions of our land-based practices. Sienna's experience with the game Red Dead Redemption demonstrates that virtual environments can facilitate meaningful connections to our cultural heritage. The game became a platform for her to express and identify her identity as a land woman, even as she navigated a digital landscape. The intersection of traditional

knowledge and modern technology is at the heart of my PhD research. I'm exploring how Indigenous stories, songs, and land-based knowledge systems can be integrated into future-making through digital mediums. It's about bringing our traditional artists' capacities into new realms, using materials and technologies in ways that honour our ancestral wisdom. The documentary *Horsewoman* that I created with Sienna further illustrates this connection. It examines how digital media can support cultural continuity, bridging the gap between youth engagement with technology and our crucial land-based practices. This project showed me that digital storytelling can be a powerful tool for preserving and transmitting our cultural heritage to younger generations. My work in creating digital representations of our family stories has been challenging, but rewarding. It's a delicate balance to maintain cultural integrity in a colonized world while leveraging the reach and accessibility of digital platforms. Through this journey, I've come to understand that our connection to the land doesn't diminish with digital engagements, rather it enhanced, it can be enhanced and expressed in new ways. By embracing these technologies, while staying rooted in our traditions, we're creating spaces for Indigenous futurisms that honour our past while looking confidently towards our future. By embracing this interconnectedness, we can empower our youth, preserve our culture, and strengthen our communities in the digital age. So in this slide, this is the work that I do with my daughter and my daughter's work. So in the bottom left-hand corner is Sienna and her horse, Lily, who is illustrated in the image above. And Lily is a wild horse that domesticated herself one day when she was on the road, and my daughter had a telepathic experience with her. She called to her in her mind and said, Come into the field, I'll take care of you. I'll take care of you because she had a little baby, and at the time, there was a lot of horses on the road, wild horses on the road in our community that were getting hit, and she didn't want that for this one because she thought that it looked like a horse that she had when she was little. Crimson. And this was the story of rebuilding that horse relationship and land relationship. And the centre photo is of the end product of a workshop I did with Vanessa Mitchell on why story and we need to listen to Indigenous stories in health care contexts and be open to understanding why people tell these extended stories when they are trying to get help when they're vulnerable. And in the corner photo is my daughter and my niece and nephew out on the land in *Red Dead Redemption*, harvesting Yarrow to feed to their horses in game because they need to keep the health of their horses up if they want to continue riding. It's a really interesting contrary place to be in the digital frontier.

This is the trailer for the documentary *Horse Woman*. You can watch it now on the Storyhive YouTube channel, or if you have, if you have Telus Optics, you can watch it on their optic channel. But here's the trailer.

[VIDEO STARTS]

When Sienna decided to leave, I, to be honest, I doubted her. Sienna: My family wasn't believing in me and supporting me in that way. I also don't like the air quality. Like, there's literal ash falling from the sky. And I don't want to play no risk. I just want to play life. Mariel: That's it. I'm out of here, and I'm like, boy, it's fine. Everything's fine. You don't have to worry

about it. Fire won't get here. But the fire came. So she was right to leave. Sienna: I don't know you. You don't know me, but I'm here for you. I was like, Thank you so much. Mariel: Then this lady came. So it was very shocking and surprising and awe inspiring to watch them together. Sienna: I had a really deep, profound connection with these horses. ♪ ♪ Something beautiful came to me. Something beautiful came to me. Something...

[VIDEO ENDS]

MARIEL:

Nested sovereignty, as explained by Leanne Simpson, refers to the layered nature of Indigenous governance and self-determination within settler colonial structures. This idea extends into digital spaces where we as Indigenous people navigate complex relationships between our knowledge systems and new technologies. Relationality is fundamental to Indigenous ways of knowing and being. In my work, I emphasize the importance of maintaining connections to land, community, and cultural practices, even as we engage with digital realms. This relational approach is crucial when considering how we assert our sovereignty in virtual environments. Digital spaces offer both challenges and opportunities for expressing Indigenous sovereignty. On one hand, they can provide platforms for sharing our stories, languages, and cultural knowledge on a global scale. On the other, they risk further colonization of our minds through algorithms and data extraction. This concept of nested sovereignty helps us navigate this tension by encouraging us to create Indigenous centred digital spaces within larger colonial structures. In my research, I've explored how Indigenous artists and communities are leveraging digital technologies to reinforce cultural continuity and self-determination. This includes creating immersive online environments that incorporate our languages, stories, and ecological knowledge. These digital projects exemplify nested sovereignty by carving out distinctly Indigenous spaces within broader digital landscapes. In the digital realm, this translates to developing protocols for a respectful engagement with Indigenous knowledge online and ensuring that our digital storytelling practices maintain cultural integrity. The intersection of nested sovereignty and relationality in Indigenous digital scholarship challenges us to think critically about how we maintain our connections to land, community, and tradition while embracing new technologies. It pushes us to create these spaces within the virtual world. As we move forward in this field, it's crucial to continue to centre Indigenous voices. By doing so, we can harness the power of digital technologies to support cultural revitalizations, determinations, and the transmission of knowledge to future generations. And this is kind of a timeline, the images that you see. In the far left, well, I don't know if it's left for you. I'm sorry. I'm dyslexic, and these things get backwards to me. But in the photo of me was taken in 2014 and I was in Southern Chile, and this is a monument, a grave monument that has been exploited as a tourism opportunity by the regional area, and the Mapuche people are not appreciative of it. And they follow our resistance to the government and just as much as we follow theirs. I'm wearing a shirt that I had got from Kanahus Manuel when the UN Northern Caucus was meeting in Kamloops that year as well. And so being able to be physically in Chile to take this photo with this shirt to then study and be in community and share my creative practice with the Mapuche people so that I could learn what the common relationship is

between our landscape and their landscape, which I learned was the red fox. And red fox is, you know, you can find a red fox almost everywhere in the world. And that is the kind of relationship that I'm now thinking through and building into these virtual concepts, these virtual worlds, and these digital stories, like, beaver showing up in in my performance rehearsal video that I was then able to translate and create this beautiful creation story with the help of Hodari Clark and, you know, Dr. Manning and Dr. Bunch, who were pivotal and moving me into the virtual.

However, balancing traditional knowledge and academic requirements has been a central challenge and an opportunity in my PhD journey. Because I started my PhD at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, my entire experience has been online. The remote program has allowed me to be rooted in my community and cultural practices while pursuing rigorous academic research. Being able to research from home has enabled me to maintain close connections with my family, including my mother and my daughter in our intergenerational living situation. This aligns with our traditional ways of knowing, traditional ways of knowledge, transmission, and family structure. It has allowed me to continue learning and teaching my daughter, who I consider a knowledge keeper in her own right due to her cultural immersion and language fluency. So we share that learning which was taught to me by an Ojibwe Elder Lilian, who in Ontario, when my daughter was born, told me that she was going to be my teacher. And that was how this journey happened. This is a photo of a slide of my family, not all of my family, but the ones who have contributed to my performance practice and who continue to inform my PhD practice and my future art practices. My dad, French Canadian. He had a way with the land. He was very gentle. He was a select logger. He worked with my grandmother, who was shown in the middle with the hides. And my mother worked with my grandmother on the hides, and my dad worked with her on the ranching with the cows, and they modelled, they role modelled what it meant to care for our elders. And so that is the responsibility that I've been tasked with as the youngest child. And you can see my daughter, Sienna. We rescued a little raccoon. It ended up becoming a story that we created on Zoom during the pandemic and her dancing and then me in performance. I found some slides in Toronto on the street that had that lake in it, which is the Shuswap Lake, which is not far from here, which is part of my grandmother's mother's people, the Secwepemc People's territory. And so I was desperate during the pandemic to feel the heat of the land on my body. And the projection was that that medium.

Challenging ethics boards and positionality in Indigenous research. So, this is more about my research process and the things that I've gone up against. I found that challenging ethics boards and navigating positionality in Indigenous research is a complex and often frustrating process. My experience has highlighted the disconnect between traditional academic ethics frameworks and Indigenous research methodologies. When submitting my research proposals, I've encountered ethics boards that struggle to understand the nature of Indigenous research. Their questions and concerns often stem from a narrow Western concept of research that doesn't ally with Indigenous ways of knowing and being. This misalignment has led to numerous back

and forth, trying to explain and justify my approach within a system that wasn't designed for it. One of the main challenges I face is explaining the importance of relationality and my positionality as an Indigenous researcher. Ethics boards often view my close connection to my research subjects: my family, and my community as a potential conflict of interest rather than a strength. I've had to repeatedly emphasize that Indigenous research, that in Indigenous research, these relationships are not just acceptable but essential to the integrity and authenticity of the work. I've also encountered difficulties when trying to incorporate traditional knowledge and storytelling into my research. Ethics boards tend to view these elements through a Western academic lens, questioning their validity or raising concerns about consent and ownership of knowledge. This has required me to carefully frame my methodologies in ways that satisfy academic requirements while staying true to Indigenous principles. The process has taught me the importance of being strategic framing my work in ways that bridge the gap between Indigenous and academic perspectives. Despite these challenges, I've found that persistence and clear communication can lead to progress. By patiently examining my methodologies and their importance to Indigenous research, I've been able to educate them, and in some cases, help them expand their understanding of what constitutes ethical research. Yeah, this is a performance that happened in the Upper Canada Chambers in Toronto, and this place is highly regulated. You're not allowed to touch the books. You're not allowed to lean on or hang anything from the bookshelves because it's considered a Canadian heritage. However, I beg to differ that as an Indigenous woman, I am a Canadian heritage as well that predates Canada. So I sat on the bookshelf. Don't tell anyone that.

Defiance is what I am good at. The role of AI in Indigenous storytelling and research. I've come to understand that my neurodivergence, specifically, my bipolar disorder, and potential autism has profoundly shaped my approach to art, research, and storytelling. Being diagnosed in 2015 was a turning point for me. It was just before I started my master's, I actually had the accident. And then six months later, while I was still recovering, I wrote my proposal to get into the master's program because I had like an epiphany of what I needed to be doing to have folks better understand what does it mean to be neurodivergent Syilx woman who lives the way that she does through art rather than getting a job in normal Western capitalism. My experience with AI, particularly, Otter AI, which is a meeting organizing app that I upload all of my recorded audio. I'll record meetings with my supervisors, with my editor, with different people that I'm working with, and I'll upload it, and the AI will help me organize according to Western expectations. Because the AI is formatted to whatever the Western format formats are that you're working with. If you don't know what you're working with, you just say, Otter, write a paragraph in MLA or APA or Chicago, and it will do that for you. Then you'll start to recognize, this is what Chicago looks like. Oh, this is what APA looks like. For me, that's what happens. And it's become an integral part of my research and creative process, I use it to translate and analyze conversations, which is especially helpful because as a neurodivergent person, I often want to talk about everything all at once, because it's all connected, and, I can show you exactly through multiple conversations about something completely random that you won't even understand, probably how it connects until I show this one tiny little thread and you're like,

Whoa, that's a reach, don't you think? Some people do that. However, if we're not reaching for that one little thread, what is the point of research? Yeah, AI helps me focus and organize my thoughts more effectively. AI helped me with my presentation today. However, I'm also very aware of the potential pitfalls of AI in Indigenous contexts. I was raised with "Terminator," so I know, "I'll be back is a threat." And I make jokes of it. However, there is a real risk of extracting and appropriating Indigenous knowledge without proper context, and we're seeing it. There's racist AIs out there because they're just grabbing whatever's out on the internet. And it's not genuine Indigenous knowledge. It's like, you know, other people's conversations that they're having on a public sphere. Whereas Otter AI sources only my conversations and only the Otter helpdesk information that they've been given to help us go through, and do these things. And it learns, but it doesn't retain the knowledge. Like, I'll have to remind it that I am the person that they're writing with, and so then it has to adapt itself to adapt its question or its responses to me. Also, I see a form of nested sovereignty in our engagements with AI. Just as we find ways to assert our Indigenous identity within colonized spaces, we can find ways to use AI tools while maintaining our cultural integrity and control over our narratives. Creating work in virtual spaces allows for cultural imaginative play and knowledge transfer specific to each and situational projects knowledge requirements. This approach aligns with my neurodivergent perspective, allowing for non-linear interconnected ways of thinking and creating. While I believe AI can be a powerful tool for preserving and sharing our stories, it must be used thoughtfully and ethically. Knowing that Diablo Canyon, 750-acre power plant on California's Central Coast, that opened in 1985 and still produces nearly 10% of the state's electricity is now currently being used to run AI. We've heard in the news lately that there are Google power plants and Meta and all of these other internet companies, power plants where they're using cold water to cool these systems. So there's very real land implications in our virtual use. So we can never just imagine that it's a wild west out there. It isn't. It's centred on land that's stolen. It's a stolen territory, which is why it is also important for us as Indigenous people to get our knowledge out there and reclaim that territory. Because the digital is the space between. That's like saying that our ancestors and their messages are able to now get to us in different ways. Manulani Myers reminds me that a digital message at the appropriate time could be a message from the ancestors. When you hear a ting from an email and somebody that you really love sends you a message, think about, what were you just thinking about? Because that was the universe telling you, maybe you're in the right direction or maybe you should rethink this direction.

I'm almost done. I hope that I'm not too far over. Please stop me if I am. I see virtual worlding platforms like Second Life as virtual as powerful tools, powerful tools for enhancing community engagement and co creation and digital research. These virtual spaces offer unique opportunities that transcend physical boundaries. It's like we're able to visualize the spiritual realm, but in animated reality or in animated virtuality. In my experience with Second Life, particularly on AbTeC Island, I was introduced to a transformative potential. The AbTeC Island was created for the web series Time Travelers, which you can watch on YouTube by scholars Skawennati and Jason Lewis in 2014, that provided an immersive experience and inspired me to

vision village life, Syilx village life in both physical and virtual worlds. This experience highlighted how they can serve as extensions and offer new avenues for creative expression and preservation. Virtual world enhances community engagement by providing accessible platforms for Indigenous people together. You can be on Zoom. It's already 12 clock. I'm sorry. You can interrupt me.

GWEN:

It's okay, Mariel. It's okay. Yeah. We are mindful of the time. It is 12:00 now. So if you have something else and then you'll move on, then we understand that, but we will be here a few more minutes because I believe that Mariel is at the end of the presentation. Yes. But thank you for all your sharing. It's been great.

MARIEL:

Oh, yeah. Well, this is just about Second Life. And you can co-create these landscapes and really think through important plant-based things, like why are plants here that shouldn't be here and what should be here? That's how creative art practice can reach into multiple disciplines, not just art, and culture and language. With that, thank you so much. I'll stop sharing. Yeah.

GWEN:

Wow, thank you so very much. I will share, like the last slides for the speaker series session next time. But other than that, I think I want to say thank you again, Mariel, for offering us a really great look on the role of digital storytelling in decolonizing the historical narratives and also creating new opportunities for Indigenous voices in this world. So please note that the recording will be available on our site. I noticed that we don't have much time for the question, but I believe that Mariel is open. If you have further questions, please say along the way. And the next session is going to be on February 25. Mariel has shared a little bit about the role of AI in Indigenous storytelling and research. And I think that is going to be a great session around the artificial intelligence disclosure framework in research in our next session. So please join us and also help us with some feedback about this session. Yeah, thanks again for being with us till now. Have a great rest of your day.