

DIGITAL AGNES

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Curatorial Pedagogy and Practice

An Institute for Curatorial Inquiry

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SPEAKERS

Vince Ha, Toby Lawrence, Neven Lochhead, Elyse Longair and Paige Van Tassel, Audience members

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TRANSCRIPT

Elyse Longair: So, my name is Elyse Longair. I'm an artist curator and image theorist currently pursuing my PhD here at Queens in the Screen Cultures and Curatorial Studies Program. I've had some several really incredible opportunities here at Agnes that I wanted to share with you. I've been doing an internship with Alicia where I've been looking at collage in the collection. I've spent over a hundred hours in the vault. And I'm really thankful. Part of my final output is having the privilege to curate an exhibition for Count and Care in September. Participating in Sunny's hands-on curatorial class has been really important. We developed our own curatorial encounters with mentorship support and resources here at Agnes. Playfully haunting the Etherington House with Neven's Paranormal Playgroup has been really fun, and being a research assistant for the institute as well. I found that I've been learning and growing from the whole team and community here at Agnes. And I mentioned this to not only to thank and acknowledge everybody which I'm really grateful for. Thank you. But also primarily because today we're going to be talking about curatorial education and that's been my experience here in a year at Queen's. This panel embraces the timely opportunity of Agnes Reimagined to critically re-examine the potentials of curatorial pedagogy and practice within our institution's social and cultural contexts and curatorial partnerships. Among different considerations, curatorial pedagogy and practice focuses on the positioning for curatorial methodologies, the roles of curatorial practice as research creation, the educational turn in the curatorial, and the changing studies of the curatorial in academia. This session is an opportunity both to reflect on the potential of curatorial pedagogy and practice and to look forward to future transformations. Today we have four incredible curators here with us. Vince Ha, Paige Van Tassel, Neven Lochhead and Toby Lawrence. Vince is going to begin our conversation today. He is a writer and director who captures fragmentary moments and uses them to challenge issues of race, class, gender, and representation. He's currently pursuing his PhD in Screen Cultures and Curatorial Studies at Queen's University, investigating transnational media and its relationship with queer diasporate sociality with special attention to homoerotic representations in Asian cinema.

Vince Ha: Good afternoon, everyone. Before I begin, I would just to thank Elyse, Alicia, and Agnes for giving me this opportunity to share my work and stories of the communities that I am involved with. I'm sorry, I'm a little bit nervous. So, I do apologize for my wavering voice. The Canadian Asian communities especially the Queer Asian diaspora in Toronto embrace many disparate individuals

who come from diverse cultures, religions, and political backgrounds. What binds us together is a common experience as immigrant subjects. An experience that is continuously tethered to Asia, an imagined object we are often asked to reject in order to assimilate. Many second generation immigrants and those afterwards must learn a difficult lesson particularly with the rise of Asian phobia during the COVID-19 pandemic, that their social and cultural standings would not protect them from racial discrimination, that as Asian bodies they are perpetually foreign. The mobility in diaspora, as some scholars like Mel Y Chen have observed, can reverberate to Queerness which can also be read as a mobile category disrupting the stability of fixed identities. It is precisely this concept, the slippage between diaspora and Queer, that can intervene our understanding of an imagined Asian diaspora community or Queer Asian diaspora communities. With the increased rate of globalization, this movement can be seen as liberatory or restrictive, frequently bringing forth fissures and cracks between Queer and diaspora, between those who were born in Canada and newcomers, between the old guards of Queer liberation and the young Queer cultural shakers. What is unavoidable is that these conflicts often result in a sense of hurting. Why I also celebrate joy, fantasy, and futurity, this theme of Queer hurting is most frequently found in my work. I refer to Queer hurting as our capacity to hurt ourselves, to hurt others, and for other Queer bodies to hurt us. Here, I'm not referring to the physical harm but will focus on the psychological and emotional residue that reside in us. It's imperative to observe why we feel the greater emotional pain when we are hurt by another person of colour or community to which we think we belong. For many Queers, it might be a second or third time being hurt by a social institution, the first being our biological families. When we cannot find comfort in our blood relations, we hope that the at large Queer community can be our unconditional wish fulfilling refuge. And when that proves untrue some of us glance further finding Queer diaspora communities. We expect these members to understand the challenges of what it means to be Asian -- to be Asian in Queer spaces and to be Queer in Asian spaces. That this shared experience will make us more seen, heard, and accepted. When reality fails to meet our expectations, we feel that we have made the wrong choice by putting our faith in the wrong people. In late 2015, I was told by a prominent white Queer artist reviewing my filmic work that no one wanted to talk about race anymore. That the topic has the stale air of 1980s. The comment prompted me partially out of frustration to bring the Invisible Footprints project to life. The idea of intergenerational experiment within the Queer Asian communities was burrowed in me since 2013 but at the time I did not have the necessary relationship to realize my aspirations. Motivated by the work of Queer artists of colour such as Naomi Zack, I was yearning to inspect fault lines and blind spots within my own communities. In that same, year along with a close friend I started Rice Roll Productions, a light-hearted media initiative that prioritizes socially engaged art. It was through Rice Roll, with a few short well-received undertakings, that we were able to build trust in our communities and find the necessary funding for the project. It was also through these interactions that I met Alan Li, a well-respected figure in the queer Asian community, a long time HIV activist, and a gifted community leader. In the early 1980s, he and a few friends started a community newspaper called Celebration. So, they start a newspaper called Celebration, in addition to other seminal projects, recording and archiving Queer Asian lives in Toronto. Along with novelists like Wayson Choy, Paul Yee, filmmakers like Richard Fung, and organizer like Nito Marquez and Tony Souza, he and his cohort represent the first wave of documented Queer Asian heritage in the city. Alan is also dazzling meticulous. Many of the artifacts that were shown in Invisible Footprint 0.1 came from his closet, including an original copy of Gerald Chan's article Out of the Shadows from 1979, and Jonas Ma multimedia project Invisible Visible from 1983. If a Queer Asian community

archive is ever to be created in Toronto, it will be greatly indebted to him. His experience and activism undoubtedly informed the way he wishes the Queer Asian communities to operate. When he participated as an advisory committee member and was later assigned to be a mentor to the young participating artist, I could see hints of his frustrations. Mainly his disappointment that many young artists do not understand the context of the artifacts and events, lacking the needed nuance to interpret them. During a potluck, another advisory member added that the young Queers can see further into the future but with a limited view of the past. That it is the older generation who has an extended view of history. While I partially agree with this generalization, I want to extract the underlining assumption that is the unstated expectation of the younger generations to understand a history strapped to the queer liberation movement. Scholars like Kadji Amin have noted this hum of Queer liberalist ideology on Queer spaces. It ranges from a gentle background vibration to a dense bellow, muffling other voices. In 2005, the special issue of *Social Text* the editor David Eng, Judith Halberstam, and José Esteban Moñoz asked what's queer about Queer Studies Now?" implying a constantly recalibration of not only our historical but also our political understanding. This repeated nowness in Queer cultures feel obligated to include social justice, tinged by its historical echo and one that must effectively outperform previous generations. These restrictive expectations are often time unmet. In the case of *Invisible Footprints*, many of the young artists find it extremely hard to access Queer Asian material. When they do, the material is often or the material is commonly presented by institutions and individual that are not part of the Queer Asian diaspora, habitually missing the necessary contexts. Young Queer of colours finds it challenging to identify a lineage when much of a community history might not be recorded, or in some instances, recorded work of and artifacts are embedded with biases that are daunting for young folks to unravel. Now these barriers are precisely why projects similar to *Invisible Footprint* can help bridge the gaps. Our goal was to present submerged voices, voices of Queer elders', transgender members, and people of nationality that were not previously given a platform. Mindful of the myriad expression that Queer Asia can take, we cautiously label the iteration 0.1, 0.2, and 0.3 from 2017 to 2020. The work that you see here is from Heidi Cho. This was presented in 2017 at the OCAD Open Space Gallery. Though *Invisible Footprint* is regularly viewed as a disruption to white heteronormative culture and archival practices, at the heart of the project is our intention to foreground the lacking within our own communities, excavating the social and economic factors that contribute to queer asian collective distortions. I met Yoichi Haruta two years prior to working on the *Invisible Footprint* Project. During our first meeting, he shared that while he was part of the Queer Asian community during the early 1980s, as a new immigrant, he felt that he did not have the same experiences as others, especially those who grew up in Canada, or came to further their education. He was constrained by financial obligations, hindering him from social and political enrichment. In the mid-2010, when it was time for him to care for his ageing mother, he sponsored her to come to Canada. At the beginning, he established two apartments on the same floor allowing him to slip away and retain some privacy. When her health declined, he moved her into his unit, sold the other and they lived together for many years in that arrangement. He had little to no contact during this period with the Queer community and an almost barren dating life. When his mother passed away, he felt haunted by her wrinkle, ashy hands. He spends most of his day in retirement painting them. He tried reaching out to Queer spaces but felt ostracized, constantly needing to filter what he says at the risk of offending young activists. He felt isolated from the community that he was once part of. [Inaudible] story present only a small sliver of the intergenerational conflict happening in Toronto. The older generation bemoaning that the younger generation fails to understand the hardship of

the past, while younger generation feels frustrated that the elders are uncritical of their own privileges, not questioning the conditions that supported certain voices. My curatorial work, especially in the Invisible Footprint project, invite artists to engage with other community members, for community members to examine how mobility and other economic factors contribute to their collective distortions, and for cultural and economic institution to consider the people and spaces around them. Before I conclude, I would to add a few thoughts about working with organizations. While funding and institutional support are helpful, not everything that comes knocking is an opportunity. Sometimes it's a Trojan horse. Sharing collective stories and institutional spaces can be simmered down to reductive images of community harmony, which can later develop into it further hurtful dynamics. I'm not endorsing an over emphasis of disunity or espousing a false dichotomy, but we must make room for conflict. It is a natural and vital element of our growth. While my talk might lead you to believe that I am against the commodification of care, a phrase that many cultural institutions will shrink from, good care and commodification of care do not preclude each other. Instead, a sweeping of these cultural and economic conflicts under the proverbial rug, we can reduce feelings of resentment by publicly examining what it means to conceptually, ethically, and practically while not shirking away from issues of extraction and exploitation, for institution to commodify care, and to use it under the right conditions to support others.

[Applause]

Elyse Longair: Thanks Vince. Next, we're going to hear from Paige. Paige Van Tassel is Anishinaabe Ojibwe and Cree from Timmins, Ontario. She's currently a PhD candidate in Art History at Queen's University. She's a member of the Indigenous Advisory Circle here at Agnes Etherington Art Centre. Her interests include storytelling through the presentation and engagement with indigenous art and artifacts to facilitate knowledge transfer.

Paige Van Tassel: Yes, so, Elyse stated I'm Anishinaabe Ojibwe from my mom's side and I'm Cree from my dad's side who was born in Thompson, Manitoba. As you might have noticed I guess we're all academics. We all have scripts in our hands [chuckle]. I have mine on my phone. And I'm currently doing my PhD in Art History. Recently defended my field so I guess that makes me a candidate now. Yay [chuckle].

[Applause]

And throughout my fields I kind of had this idea to develop the show Land Protectors in response to the experiential learning that I wanted to have with the fields rather than just writing an essay defending it and then move on to the next thing. So, I'm going to share with you some excerpts from one of my fields titled Museums in First Peoples is about exploring that relationship between Indigenous communities and museums across Canada. And first thing I want to notice is that in the title of my slide, it's Challenging the museum-goer experience, Being comfortable with discomfort. And that discomfort for me is a two-way street. It's discomfort for me being one of the only visible Indigenous people in my program, and navigating walking in two worlds the academic and the spiritual emotional way of life that I often encounter when dealing with Indigenous topics. Because, for me, it's mostly learning it for the first time. You know, I didn't have that experience growing up. Both my grandmas were in residential school. My mother was a part of the 60s Scoop, and I was in

foster care growing up. So, it's very intergenerational and ingrained, and it's something that I always have to face when dealing with this content. The other discomfort is the audience's experience because they also have never maybe not been taught this growing up either. Or they just don't know about it. And they would rather live an easier life not knowing about it. So, that is the other discomfort that we're that Land Protectors tries to sort of engage with. From the early 1960s onwards, there was a huge political shift in indigenous self-representation, in tandem with the American Civil Rights Movement that was mentioned before, how Pamela mentioned earlier in the first panel this morning. A lot of activist rights movements have been inspired by Black people and their movement. And so Indigenous self-representation and activism, I would argue, was inspired by what was happening in the 60s. So, in the late 1970s there was a huge political shift for Indigenous self-representation. One of them being in response to The Spirit Sings exhibition at the Glenbow Museum. There, you see on the screen, is a performance by Rebecca Belmore in response to what went down at The Spirit Sings, and for those who don't know, Shell Corporation funded the exhibition even though they were illegally drilling on Lubicon Cree unceded territory. So, many people, many institutions during this time were still unsure how to respectfully engage and honour telling Indigenous stories. It didn't fit within the framework that they had at the time. There's also Into the Heart of Africa at the ROM that happened and that was 1989, had a huge backlash from the Black communities there in Toronto, because of the large misrepresentation that happened and completely ignored the troubles that they were having contemporarily in Toronto. On a positive note, coming into the 90s, we have really powerful Indigenous-led exhibitions that occur. So, INDIGENA and Land, Spirit, Power both in Ottawa I think and Anong Beam who was presenting on Monday. She mentioned that. So, those were very influential in how Indigenous-led shows are vastly different from non-indigenous shows, like what happened at The Spirit Sings. And so, I just want to, I know I'm coming up on my time, but I just want to end with a quote by Daniel Heath Justice. Something that really moved me and really inspired, partly inspired the Land Protector's exhibition, is in his book Why Indigenous Literatures Matter points out that "stories that will make a difference aren't easy ones. If they don't challenge us, confound us, or make us uncomfortable, or uncertain, or humble, then I'm not sure what they offer us in the long term." Miigwech.

[Applause]

Elyse Longair: Thank you, Paige. Our third presenter is Neven Lochhead. He's an artist curator and PhD student in the Screen Cultures and Curatorial Studies Program. From 2017 to 2019 he worked as director of programming at SAW Video Media Art where he founded and operated Knot Project Space, a discursive venue through which he engaged artists in the presentation of a series of interrelated exhibitions, performances, lectures, learning contexts, residency platforms, and offsite public art projects.

Neven Lochhead: Thank you. Hi. Yes, I'm Neven. I'm a local artist here. And want to thank Elyse and everyone at Agnes for keeping this afloat. I also have a text I'm just going to read to stay on time. And I have one of these dreaded artist-led educational projects to share which I happened this past winter out of the Etherington House called Paranormal Curation. So, I'm just going to start by describing the formal structure of this initiative, and then if I have time, I'm going to share a bit of collaborative writing that happened on either side of it which remixed and purposed some of its methods. So, Paranormal Curation is a project that was produced adjacent to an exhibition called A

Guest + a Host = a Ghost which took place earlier this year in the Etherington House, and on which I worked as its Shadow curator. Shadow curating is a concept that was originally proposed by the Scottish curator Nuno Sacramento in 2011 on a long-term project called The Town is the Venue. So, the Shadow Curator is a figure who Sacramento describes as constantly proposing a layer of inquiry and analysis with regard to all aspects of a project in order to contribute to a consolidation of the methodology. My own use of shadow curating for the Agnes exhibition tried to push Sacramento's idea a bit further and evolve or mutate the figure of the shadow into that of the ghost. Throughout my process the figure of the ghost became a key avatar and collaborator on the program's design as well as on the stated themes of the proposed activities. So, with the ghost in mind I initiated a learning platform for collaborative paranormal curatorial experimentation which took up the Etherington House's Broom Closet as its headquarters. The closet-based projects that emerged involved 12 Kingston based artists curators and writers over the course of four months, who were ushered into the exhibition through the portal of Paranormal Curations Dusty Micro Institute. Over time, the Broom Closet experienced its own reimaginings with the humble nook functioning for us as a writing room, a book, and PDF repository, an amplification system, a recording studio, and a radio station. The organizational structure for paranormal curation tried to shape itself around the complicated relationship that ghosts have with their publics. I wanted to develop a program that, like the ghost, had the ability to modulate and play with its forms of publicness, operating on different levels of visibility and legibility. So, this resulted in the stacking of three scales of collaborative activities, a micro activity, a meso activity, and a macro activity with each of these having their parameter of publicness dialled up or down in specific ways. So, first there's the micro activity. This is called the shadow library. And this functions within a relatively closed guild of practitioners with members of the Shadow library acting as one another's public. The activity explores the production of handwritten marginalia and material alterations of books and PDFs as ghostly acts of mediation, haunting a text's future reader. With the shadow librarians Hillary and Peggy, various haunted and overgrown publications were produced and some selections from the Shadow Library are here for you to peruse afterwards. Secondly, there was the meso activity. This was called House Band. This activity functioned more publicly in the space of the exhibition itself. Its aim was to covertly embed sound into the Etherington House, haunting it from its own architectural margins. Sound was explored as a tool through which to alter the way in which a site is navigated and sensed by a visitor, sometimes imperceptibly. This activity culminated in the production of a collaborative soundscape with band mates Bojana, Jung-Ah, Mo, Brandon and Elyse which builds around a deconstructed cover of Madonna's Country Dance Hit Don't Tell Me. This was embedded into the staircase of the Etherington House near the end of the exhibition and will soon be released on other formats. Lastly was the macro activity called Phantom Market. This activity's still ongoing and has yet to really properly emerge. But it has the highest publicness parameter of the platform. So, in considering the aims of Agnes Reimagined to return the Etherington House into a home, the phantom merchants proposed to take this idea to a somewhat absurdist point by placing the Etherington House on the local real estate market through the form of a Kijiji advertisement. So, the small working group that formed around this idea with Bojana, Andrei, and me together discuss the ethics, humour, and performativity of this proposed gesture. And we're still in the process of determining if and how it could circulate publicly as a good joke. So, one last structural element to note about paranormal curation is that the program is meant to haunt itself. Each activity is intended to run at least twice back-to-back and with different groups when there's enough committed participants. This creates a crease or fold in the platform which becomes a point of

translation. So, in other words when one round of paranormal curation ends, and another begins, the guild that has previously formed around a specific activity inducts its new members through the codification and teaching of its shared craft. With this translation aspect of the platform, participants in paranormal curation are required to become paragoges or "peeragoges" of their own workshop environment, externalizing their otherwise ephemeral homegrown methods in a way that allows for them to be taught and used by the activity's future practitioners and beyond. This is the closet in question. So, to make a slight pivot now on either end of paranormal curation there were two critical reflexive writing practices that took place. The first was taken up by myself through the production of what I called the infra ordinary journal. This journal simply contains daily entries of descriptive writing, inspired by Georges Perec's *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris*, capturing a steady flow of minuscule events and sounds that take place in the Etherington house over the first two weeks of the exhibition. The other writing practice emerged collaboratively near the end of the project between me, and the writer, and curator Dylan Robinson. So, I had been in conversation with Dylan over the course of the project going on walks when I would give updates on the exhibition and the related learning platform. We had discussions about the turning away from a site as a site-specific response, about the colonial loudness of the Etherington House and about finding ways to break down and interrupt insistent architectural ambiances. On one of those walks an affinity was generated when discussing the marginalia relay method that had been invented by the shadow librarians. Their activity was discussed as a haunted interpretation of book thickening. So, book thickening is an 18th century material reading practice which results not in a reduction of a given text but rather its wholesale transformation through amplification. Significantly thickened books and volumes often deranged rather than reiterated the conceptual trajectory and goals of the printed text. And I'm paraphrasing here from The Multigraph Collective. So, on our walk a connection was made between the shadow library's practices of haunted thickening with Dylan's own exploration of the dramaturgical tradition of Regietheater, an act of radical adaptation of an existing opera or play which doesn't seek to centre that which is being derived from. Following this, Dylan and I devised our own altered process for the thinning, thickening, and redirecting of text, building through this building this through remixing the dynamics that were produced and tested out in the shadow library. Our modified structure for thickening was then applied to derange and fully transform the infra ordinary journal's descriptive portraits of the Etherington House and its ambiances. So, I wanted to end my presentation today by reading first an excerpt from the original infra ordinary journal followed by an excerpt of the altered text that Dylan and I produced through this method. This is meant to highlight a unique capacity of Paranormal Curations invented and translated methods to be reapplied and remixed in different contexts and different scales where they can mobilize sets of adjacent practices. So, first, we'll hear the infra ordinary journal describing a moment in the home in its early empty state, and then we'll hear the same entry after it's passed through and been haunted by the shadow librarian's paranormal process or a version of it. Infra ordinary journal February 10th. There's knocking on a door upstairs. No one answers. Then a door opens, likely Agnes staff. Frost on the glass. Bird sounds bleeding into the home. Someone has heard whistling a tune. Footsteps then enter the house. A person wearing a long white parka. I emerge and say hi. They say nothing back. They walk to the staircase as if they're looking for something. They peer up the stairs pausing for about five seconds looking and waiting. They seem to see nothing, or they see what they want to see. Then they turn around and walk in the other direction without saying a word. Now they're walking away from the house. I hear them leaving through the atrium, the sound of their wet boots on the polished concrete. And so now to close is

the same entry after passing through the thickening method. An open door opens to an open door, to another open door. This one has a view of more open doors and the still chandelier and the frost on the glass, flake scene through thick curtains. And the sound of a door opening to another open door. A handwritten note on the door reads a score for a visitor. Approach the house and then suddenly walk away. Then enter the house and then walk away. Then walk away again. Down the ramp hear wet boots on polished concrete Terrazzo composite. If you can leave and then do leave and then see leaves, you've left it. And you can leave the house again, just like this, leaving it again, and again, and again. That's all I have.

[Applause]

Elyse Longair: Thank you, Neven. Dr. Toby Lawrence is our final presenter today. She is a settler Canadian curator of mixed European ancestry. She's a curator at Open Space in Lekwungen territory where her work centres anti-racist, decolonial, and intersectional feminist methodologies, grounded through intuitive and relational processes. She holds an MA in Art History and Theory and a PhD in Interdisciplinary Graduate Studies from the University of British Columbia.

Toby Lawrence: Hello. So, I also want to extend a really warm and grateful thank you. A grateful thank you [laughing] to Elyse, and Alicia, and Emelie, and the other folks at the Agnes for putting this program together, and building space to talk about curatorial practice in a really more or in an expanded way. So, yeah thank you. What I'm going to do today is actually read. I'm going to read some stories. I'm going to read four excerpts from various publications. So, Excerpt 1. I begin where I began in Secwepemcúecw. I was born at the Royal Inland Hospital Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc now Kamloops, British Columbia. Although I have no familial ties to this region, and I only lived there for a handful of years before age six, the land has shaped me. The dry air, rolling hills and unique cliff formations modelled by sage brush cradled the city of Kamloops. I took my first breath there. Yet it was not until adulthood that I realized precisely why I am so elated and comforted to come across landscapes resembling this place. To my surprise at the time, but somewhat obvious now, a similar experience occurred when I visited Toronto for the first time as an adult. I had not been there since I was three or four, but I immediately felt the same familiar comfort and elation activated by dry hills and sage brush. Projecting into my own wanderings and the memories of my father's many stories about growing up and as a young adult in Toronto, I imagined my ancestors, six generations in my paternal line born in Toronto to the current extent of my knowledge. I imagined these ancestors in the streets of Toronto throughout the city's history and wondered how they understood their own relationships to the Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabe and Mississauga territories on which they lived, and their connections to their own ancestral homelands in Europe by way of these links are broken. How did they enact these relationships? Did they know about the pre-colonial histories of trails converging at Tkaronto near the Lake Shore traverse for over 10,000 years by the many Indigenous peoples and non-human inhabitants for resources and trade? The main trail from the harbour front of Lake Ontario ran north to Lake Simcoe, now Yonge Street, like many others encased under concrete roadways. Did my ancestors walk through those trails too before they were paved over? Excerpt 2. For mothers, grandmothers, weavers or radicals. My earliest memory of an art museum is visiting an installation of art making machines with my mother at the Kamloops Art Gallery in the early 1980s at its previous location. At least this is what I recall I was 4, perhaps 5. In first year of art history, I came to learn about Jean Tinguely's, Metamatics drawing machines and made the

connection. I don't know what the exhibition was exactly but the association through this memory is real enough to have influenced the way that I understand embodied experiences of art. Recently my mother told me that, as a child, I used to make artworks and build exhibitions in discarded fridge boxes standing in for what I imagined a gallery to be. She confessed that she did not know then how she could make this a reality for me. What my mother didn't realize, my mother one of the first eight women allowed to take woodworking in high school in British Columbia, allowed to take woodworking, was that she was already teaching me to work from intuition and imagination, and to consider how one might build a gallery differently based on circumstance and need. Excerpt Three from *Architecture of the Bush*, first published in *C Magazine*. The teepee has been an ever-present feature of Bush Gallery but it does not stand as the gallery. Erected in 2015, the structure has weathered, presented, and housed many of the actions of BUSH Gallery. At the BUSH Gallery Writer's Union Retreat in August 2017, the structure was dismantled, the canvas too brittle to maintain its architectural function after having ripped apart in a windstorm earlier that summer. Following a Sunday afternoon convergence of friends and colleagues at the annual Kamloops powwow, Tarah Hogue, Tania Willard, Peter Morin, Ashok Mathur and I gathered at Quaaout Lodge on little Shuswap Lake which is now sadly burnt down. And then at BUSH Gallery the next day. The Powwow, as a shared point of departure, centred indigene and located experience as material for making, performing and thinking together. At dinner, Tara expressed her need to utilize acts of labour to connect to place to land performance situation as she and Tania had done the night before while dismantling the teepee. At breakfast, Peter asked what is it that we want to build? Monday, we cut up the teepee. We laid out the teepee canvas. We intuitively assumed roles. We marked the circumference of the canvas, staking pink survey flags. Peter, with a blue raven rattle, and Tania, with tin can rattle, circumnavigated the canvas as Peter sang. The canvas ripped easily apart along its weave, and we made cuts to direct the tearing. The canvas pulled by two of our bodies to arrive at segments large enough for specific repurposed functions. The largest uncompromised section was kept being suspended in the trees as a movie screen. Smaller segments were used to produce solar prints and their edges finished with pinking shears; the excess made into ribbons. Crouched within the teepee's flag outline and then shrouded by the dense forest fire smoke that permeated the region, we cut ribbons and produced a series of solar prints out of rope, rattles, rock, ribbon, collective writing, laser cut citation text, and toys. Ashok prepared meat bison meatballs, shish kabobs and Chilliwack corn. By Wednesday, the flags had been removed. The activities were now concentrated around the forested area and the trees that supported the large piece of repurposed canvas. The screen became the conversational teepee. The location shifted along with the reference. Now in segments, the canvas marks as it is marked. Material for objects, and surface for solar prints, Lunar experiments, backdrop for movies, foreground for shadow play, hunting ground for insects. In one of my trips back and forth from Kelowna to BUSH Gallery, I was charged with transporting 12 large Mylar panels produced for Ashok's 2019 exhibition of *A Little Distillery in Nowgong*. Together, we hung them to weather and to remain in the trees at the edge of the forest with cord coloured the same pink as the survey flags. A twofold final installation. The final action of the BUSH Gallery Writer's Union retreat took shape through our collective curation of Ashok's panels and a collaborative performance by Ashok and Peter. Backed by the layering of *A Little Distillery in Nowgong* and the teepee illuminated by a work light, Ashok read aloud accompanied by strategically timed drumming by Peter. The text from one of the Mylar panels was incidentally visible through the canvas. So, I'll leave this up for visuals. Excerpt 4. From *Plant Stories are Love Stories Too*. These words are not solely mine. I share them with Michelle Jacques. And to

be honest I don't actually know whose words are whose anymore. We've mixed them up so many times. So, in 2020, after a year of dreaming, Michelle Jakes and I officially embarked on the development of Moss Projects, an itinerant educational platform that aims to create knowledge and relationship building opportunities for curatorial thinkers committed to peeling away the colonial layers of the art museum. As an alternative or parallel program to academic curatorial training, Moss Project supports inquiry and learning by and with underrepresented and racialized curators alongside allied practitioners through peer-to-peer learning and mentorship. Central to this program is the valuing of knowledge systems and modes of organization beyond and in dialogue with dominant parameters of curation. And the recognition of the urgency with which we must learn to work otherwise in the museum field. As white settler, and Black Canadian curators, Michelle and I utilize our professional resources for curatorial incubation and to establish spaces and mechanisms for sharing cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary methodologies. By engaging with our own ancestral histories and by respecting cultural knowledges shared with us, we are learning how our histories fit within the places that we reside and work to better advocate for and walk alongside in support of Indigenous and non-Indigenous methodologies. At a moment when the colonial foundations of mainstream museums are being rocked in protest, how do we prepare to build something new. In the Canadian context, curators continue to be trained predominantly through settler colonial and academic art, art historical and curatorial paradigms which shapes and influences the historical narrative. By inviting and compensating collaborators with a range of experiences, ideas, and worldviews to participate, we aim to create a platform that promotes multidimensional readings of the museum's potential, countering it's legacy as a space devoted to a singular canon. Similarly, Moss Projects is not institutionally bound but presently operates through the network supports and institutional relationships that we hold and actively foster. Our first host the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria where Michelle was chief curator when we started, stands as an important point of departure a public art museum with a developing openness to examining its own structure, and at the same time an example of residual and prevailing legacies of colonial systems throughout the arts in Canada. Applying pressure, Moss projects nurtures practices that require the art system to flex to accommodate the needs of historically underrepresented practitioners and communities rather than the need to flex to a system that is an uncomfortable and sometimes unsafe fit. We are co-learners in this process. Thank you.

[Applause]

Elyse Longair: Thank you all for presenting and sharing your knowledge with us today. Looks like we have about 35 minutes. So, we'll start off with a little bit of a round table and then we'll open it up for the last 20 minutes for a conversation with the audience. One of the questions I've been curious about, as a student, and I know we're all students or recent graduates, is that within the institutions where we research and study, what practices already exist that can help generate critical dialogue? So, feel free to just jump in and respond as you as you feel.

Paige Van Tassel: Apologies for anyone that is a professor in Art History here but I'm going to speak honestly here. There's not really any form of critical space for dialogues in Art History from my perspective as one of the BIPOC students in Art History. I'm sorry, but it just doesn't exist in Art History, at least. But I will say that one way that we can create spaces for critical dialogues is invite more elders in our classrooms, because the courses that I took, it was coming from a singular

perspective. And I feel experience that the elders have is a form of research, and a form of critical inquiry. Miigwech.

[Silence]

Vince Ha: Actually we're in the same program, the Curatorial Studies, and- Cinema Studies and Curatorial Studies Program. And it was actually the curatorial side of the program that really drew me to come to Queen's. And during my time here, I've seen so many people with the expertise and things that I can learn from. There's actually so much resources in our department. And so many knowledgeable folks that we can try to utilize to kind of start these conversations. But one of the things that I wasn't prepared for was the emotional labour that I was asked to do when I'm in this program. Because it's usually, especially Queer Asian students, undergrads, they would pull me aside, and they'll share stories and they feel very frustrated, or they want to leave Kingston, or they're facing a lot of issues. And for me, I don't think, I think people in our faculty is overworked. They're trying their best. They're limited by resources and there's perspective I don't know on the other side. But then I also feel the student's frustration, especially students of colour, or if they're international students. And then there's expectations from both sides, both from the student, both from the faculty. But I feel at times, we're not sitting down to talk to each other. And there's a lot of friction that I feel that could be easily solved, if we just sit down and have an honest conversation with each other. And I think that hopefully this conversation can then start, and we can have those kinds of dialogues.

Toby Lawrence: This is a hard question.

Elyse Longair: They're all hard questions, Toby. They're big questions.

Toby Lawrence: I would agree with Paige. Art History is an unforgiving discipline. [Chuckle] It is -- I do not call myself an Art Historian even though I have two Art History Degrees because it doesn't fit. And I don't, I haven't seen expansive criticality in the way that it needs to happen within the field of Art History. I did my PhD at UBC at the Okanagan campus. And when I was there, Ashok Mathur was the Dean of the Department of the Creative and Critical Studies Department. I believe -- now totally blanking on what his actual title was or what actual department he was. The department I was in anyways. And much like this gathering although more expansive, he worked alongside a number of other faculty and graduate students to build a summer residency space wherein courses were tied to artist residencies and public panels. And there was a lot of space for conversation and dialogue, and space for just being together, and thinking through things together and experiencing together. And I think that was a really important space for a lot of people. And people still talk about it. And it's still running. It's now running under the direction of Tania Willard. All that being said though, that space doesn't necessarily translate into the main school year, the September to spring kind of school year. It really does, is really is centralized within the summer months. It's called the Indigenous Art Intensive. I just realized, I probably didn't say that yet. So, there's there are glimmers, but for the most part, as a whole, a program that really has the appropriate kind of critical dialogue -- I don't know if I've ever come across one yet. This is precisely why Michelle and I have been trying to build alternative spaces for discourse and learning within curation.

Neven Lochhead: Yeah. I'll try to say something positive. In regard to our program, we have tethered to our department this gallery called Agnes. And so that's available to us obviously as an audience, you know. I think about sites of critical dialogue for me often happen within art scenes in the sort of informal clusters of friendship that form through being part of a scene. And so, the Agnes is here doing great programming and activating those kinds of informal spaces. And then there's actual efforts within the curatorial staff here to create these playgroup structures which at least you participated in my little thing was sort of a riff on. So, Michelle and Sunny have been trying to continue building these playgroups around each of their exhibitions, which are kind of named sites of where dialogue is meant to happen. And I believe in that approach, I think. Like, that's kind of why I like the shadow curator approach is that it names, this is the place where critique is going to happen, or some kind of outside perspective is going to emerge. And sometimes that's necessary to give a nudge in that way. I don't know -- do you have anything to say about that. Yeah, so, we have those things going at least.

Elyse Longair: Yeah. Does anybody want to share? I know we've started touching base on it but is there any other thoughts about what areas might need re-imagining or how we can care a little bit more for our role in the institution?

[Silence]

Neven Lochhead: I have like a thing that I'm working on that I want to really reimagine which should present a resource for curatorial education. And that's re-imagining the afterlife of exhibitions. I seem to have a kind of ghost afterlife thing, but it's something that I've been working on in relation to the Guest + a Host = a Ghost Project. And this paranormal curation thing which is to recast learning programs or exhibition projects as open educational resources, and think about what that would mean to recodify an exhibition in a way that it could be become a resource to teach what actually goes down or what goes on in exhibition cultures. And so, this could involve things like writing scores about how a project came to fruition or telling stories about this kind of otherwise hidden informal context where curating happens and things like that. And so, I'm excited about that idea. I keep bugging Sunny about this. And it helps that we can explore it. And another thing that I think this opens up, or another thing that I'm excited about with that approach is that it would also reimagine the way that exhibitions get toured. And this is something I haven't talked to Sunny about, but if you could codify an exhibition as an open access resource, then you can share that with other institutions of the same scale and create this kind of opportunity for institutional remix where you're playing out a score for an exhibition or something in your own way, and then modifying the resource as you go and things like that. So, those are some tangents that I wanted to just share just stuff I'm thinking about.

Elyse Longair: Thanks, Neven.

Toby Lawrence: Open-Source exhibition is a really compelling and I imagine somewhat terrifying proposal. I think what that really touches on for me is this idea of authorship and expertise that gets really tied into the field of curation. I work collaboratively a lot and I think within public art museums particularly I mean that's my experience -- the idea of collaboration is still something that is a little bit, it's not as common perhaps as you would think. So, I mean there are organizations that

work together on exhibitions but what does that actually mean? So, what does it actually mean to be in collaboration or in dialogue in order to build an exhibition? And, at times, in my own experience I've found that I think that there is an assumption that a collaboration indicates that everyone is either doing the same thing, or that somebody loses control of their own authorship. And so that's why I think what Neven's proposing becomes a really compelling, but potentially terrifying, idea for a lot of people. But perhaps it's a way to really open up the space of discussion around where ideas come from. So, ideation is never uniquely within one person.

Paige Van Tassel: Hello. Okay. I feel I have to check every time now. I'm thinking about something that was said in the previous panel by Emelie about the way that architecture plays to construct this narrative. And I'm thinking about because I was in a few meetings about Agnes Reimagined, and they were consulting Indigenous students about what kind of space you would want when you do engage with sacred, ceremonial Indigenous objects within the Agnes collection. And on the flip side of that, I was also in meetings with the conservation because I have a Master's in Conservation at Queen's. And they wanted my experience as a student being in that program. And so now that I'm seven years here, seven or eight years, and I'm very familiar with the space, I would like to see a space, and I've mentioned this in other meetings, [chuckle] but I'm just going to make it public, a space that is more open and integrated between conservation and curatorship because I've worked in, interned at a number of institutions where the conservation work is dependant upon what the curator and the show is on, and has no respect for the object that we're working on. Because there's been a lot of times were working with a senior conservator, and they voiced their issues to a curator, and the curator is like, "well, it needs to be done, so, figure out a way." And that's just not healthy [chuckle] at all. And I see it in this space. Conservation building is a completely separate building from the Agnes, and I feel like it would be really cool if you had offices where both staff and students are working more collaboratively together. And the same with curatorial studies. I am just finding out today that there is curatorial studies. I had no idea [laughing]. I'm like there's curator studies here. What? I was very shocked. Anyway, that's what I would like to reimagine: our relationships between the people within the museum field.

Vince Ha: I guess I have to up myself. I did not come from an arts background. I started doing this work before I started reaching out for an arts education. Most of these works are done prior to, so I always feel I'm in a constant mode of catching up, and try to educate myself. I think for me, at the moment, it's a very privileged place to think about re-imagining. You need to have the resources, and the capacity to be able to think about re-imagining. I'm also involved with the Vietnamese community. And we're trying to build the first elders care in Ontario. And the sad fact is the task is so momentous that by the time that we get it done we're not going to be able to serve the generation that it's meant to serve. So, in the meantime we're thinking of ways how can we still help them while we're trying to set this up. So, in the Queer communities, I also find that so many of my peers are in survival mode. So, I guess at the moment, I'm more interested in this kind of working in that mode, more so than re-imagining. But I find that there are a wide spectrum of what the now can look like, and that I feel like it just it resonates with me more than this kind of reimagining.

Elyse Longair: Thank you for generously sharing with us your thoughts. I'm going to open it up to the audience while we think about the future and reimagining for the last 20 minutes. There's the microphone that you can come, ask your questions and converse with us.

Toby Lawrence: While people are contemplating their questions. I wanted to add an example thinking about Vince's, the work that you just shared. I think one thing that I really desire when I'm in these kinds of conferences or spaces of dialogue is specific strategies. And I've been working with modelling, not modelling, but looking at different models quite extensively as thinking about the offering of precedent. And not necessarily as ways to replicate these models but as just suggestions or pushes into certain directions that maybe hadn't otherwise been thought through. In the current exhibition that I co-curated with Eli Hirtle at Open Space which just opened a couple weeks ago called for Love, Loss, and Land, there is one artwork that is a fairly large installation, and it's called Laying Flowers and it's by a Michif artist named Rain Cabana-Boucher. And what it is is an installation of a tiny, beaded orange flower for every single grave that has been uncovered on residential school sites across Canada, what's now known as Canada. And in thinking about installing this work within the exhibition space, Eli and I had extensive conversation between ourselves as well as with our Elder In Residence which Open Space is really a privilege to have. And Rain and the other artist Jinny Yu whose work is paired with Rain's work in the exhibition space, about what it means to support people coming into the exhibition space to experience this work. So, not only are we thinking about what it means to support the general visitor but also what does it mean to support the staff going into that space every day, our Indigenous staff, the non-Indigenous staff. What does it mean to support survivors that are going into that space? What does it mean to support the general public who have knowledge to some degree I mean that or the knowledge and understanding of residential school and the history of Canada varies across every demographic. And then how do we support people in learning or learning further. And one of the things that we actually built into the exhibition space was a respite and resource room. So, we have this funny little mezzanine and a little resource room space that we've been using it as a resource room underneath it. And what we've done is curtain off one section and we use soft white curtains. We use curtains instead of doors because curtains are something that most people are used to using and touching, and so that people wouldn't feel uncomfortable opening or closing the curtains. There's a couch in there. There're some reading materials. There's also some sage for smudging and a smudge bowl. And we separated it off because there are people who have offices on the mezzanine, but then they won't have to pass through this reading resource area. And this idea actually came from another colleague of mine in Victoria who works at the Legacy Art Gallery Lorilee Wastasecoot, who had organized a number of years ago with Andrea Walsh in exhibition on artworks by residential school survivors. And one thing that she had said, while we were converging in a gathering of curators on Vancouver Island, was that she had wished that there had been a space for people to just step out for a minute and kind of catch their breath, and have a little bit of a place to be with their thoughts, or to regather themselves but not have to leave the exhibition. And so, what we did was we adopted and adapted this idea that Lorilee had presented in order to make this space within our gallery. So, thinking back to Emelie's point about architecture, and somebody else mentioned that, about architecture, to think more about, again, this flexing to what the exhibition and the artist need as opposed to what is convention within an art museum. So, it's not really, I imagine that a lot of spaces wouldn't be able to do smudge, we're an artist-run centre, we have a little bit more freedom. Plus we own that, Open Space owns its own building, so there's different parameters

there. But just adding these elements that essentially are elements of care within the exhibition space can make a quite a significant difference, and then can lead to other changes [chuckle].

[Silence]

Alicia Boutilier: Paige, I wonder if that's an opportunity for you to talk about the spaces you created in your exhibition.

Paige Van Tassel: Okay. [Laughter] Yeah, I wasn't sure if you had an actual question because I was going to fill the silence. So, I didn't really talk about my exhibition layout in my talk, just what led up to that. But yeah, the other part of the inspiration for my exhibition was I participated in the Wet'suwet'en March led by students and faculty, and staff here at Queen's. And that was really powerful for me because I was one of the drummers who was leading the march. And then following that march, we ended up at a talk with Ellen Gabriel who is art and activist from Kanehsatake. And she was one of the main focuses in. Alanis Obomsawin's 270 Years of Resistance. So, I got to meet her, and I was wearing my full regalia. I had my drum. And then I just got up to talk to her after her talk. And I just I froze. I didn't know what to say [chuckle]. And I was like hi and then she was very natural, and she reminded me of my auntie. So, then we got to talking and it's like okay, you're amazing, awesome. And so, that really inspired me to create and honour these indigenous people who are sometimes at the face of extreme opposition, and military violence, and racial bigotry. Like I know a lot of Indigenous students, not myself personally, but a lot of Indigenous students during the Tyendinaga rail blockades were yelled at; they were cursed at. They had a bunch of racial slurs that were said to them in passing. And so, it was a really tense time and, obviously, it was mostly privileged people from Toronto who were inconvenienced that the via rail was down. And they couldn't take the train to from Kingston to Toronto. And they were complaining that they had to take the bus. So, I just wanted a space where we could uplift these inspiring Indigenous people again, and be proud of who we are. You know because it was during that time, it was really tense, and we were really down. And there was another incident in Fall of 2019 in a residence in first year where they put up on a bulletin board, a bunch of god-awful things that I dare not repeat. And so, I needed a way for myself and to uplift others. And so, I created this space. And the main aspect of this space was healing. Because it's not just, it wasn't me personally, but it was a lot of my friends. And the only safe space that they had to talk about that was Four Directions. There's not really any other Indigenous space on campus. So, we came together, talked about it, and then after those few weeks of chaos, pandemic hits [chuckle]. And then I was isolated, and it gave me a lot of time to think, and I was ruminating for a long time. And then I realized I need an outlet to uplift these people, my people, like just all friends that are completely traumatized by this event. So, it was really important for me to have an ancestor, the water drum, along with the sacred medicines because it confronts you with a space of contemplation, and reflection, and healing, first and foremost. A space where you can just breathe, and be in the presence of those sacred medicines and feel the energy that's coming off of them. So, that when you enter that space, and when you exit that space, it offers a way to, like Jan Hill said in the welcoming reception, just release the burdens that you have at the door. You're going to take on those burdens when you go through the exhibition. You're going to be confronted with those burdens. But when you come back out, you leave it at the door, or you can take it with you. It's your choice. Yeah. Miigwech. Any other questions?

Elyse Longair: Maybe that's a nice place to end, and to think about going into the next workshops. And, tomorrow, as we move outside the institution to FAR what that means in this dialogue and conversation. So, thank you, for sharing your time and knowledge, and your hearts with us.

[Applause]