The Third Screen:
For a Dialogic and Participatory Oral History

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ABSTRACT

The Third Screen: For a Dialogic and Participatory Oral History

Veronica Mockler, Master of Arts in Fine Arts
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Many researchers and artists turn to the field of oral history as an ethic and research practice because at its core lies the principle that we can better understand the world through listening and speaking to each other. By its very nature, oral history upholds the experience of someone who is not the researcher as being epistemologically worthy. Even within the academic setting, oral history maintains that those who know best are those whose knowledge has not been institutionalized. While through its very practice, oral history winds up institutionalizing what was voiced by participants, it understands that it must safeguard, through the record, their original voicing so that the subsequent institutional interpretation can be brought into question if need be. A video-documented research-creation project with four individuals who interviewed each other on their life experiences further deepened my thinking around this institutional interpretation and accountability. Through a three-screen video installation practice, informed by postcolonial theory and oral history's popular education roots, I was able to directly include participants in the institutional interpretation of their interview. Articulating meaning from the interview and presenting results to a research audience are processes I achieved in dialogue with participants, rather than monologically. In the following text, I explore this multi-screen video practice and the dialogic opportunity it provides to oral history practitioners who believe in the epistemological significance of speaking and listening to other people.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Now, my dear friends and your unwavering support.

Serena Beaulieu: Thank you, Boogie, for always seeing and validating my highs and lows, for bringing so much laughter into my life, and for encouraging me to be more generous towards myself. Florencia Sosa Rey: Our complicity throughout the years means so much to me. Tu me fais sentir que ma pratique existe et qu'elle fait des choses dans le monde. La tienne m'est tout autant précieuse. Sara Toulouse : Merci de m'avoir fait sentir comme je n'étais pas seule dans mes tourbillons académiques. Your and Steve's (Steve Brown: Thank you, too!) barbecues in the backyard, hangouts on the stoop, beers, and advice have carried me through.

Words cannot express how grateful I am for my family.

Julienne Garant :

Ma Maman, mon pilier, ma créativité, merci.

Kevin Mockler:

My Dad, my teacher, my confidant, thank you.
* and ultimate proof-reader

Sean Mockler:

My Brother, my joy, my strength, thank you.

To Aden Collinge:

Aden, you are my love, my friend and my family.

I could not have completed this journey without your
care, patience, and love.

We did it.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the following:

I was born on land which has long been nurtured by the
Nitassinan and Wendake-Nionwentsïo nations.

I now live on the unceded land of the Kanien'kehá꞉ka nation.
It is here that my degree and project took place.

As a guest on these lands, as a guest on this earth,
I support Indigenous communities in their struggle for human rights and land rights.

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PREMISE

In the fall of 2021, after several months of speculation, assessment, putting things in motion, and then halting everything once again, a window between variants allowed me to safely bring four individuals together in a room to participate in my master's thesis project. The idea was straightforward; invite four participants: Azzouz, Joanna, Kevin and Sheida, to interview each other (in pairs) about their life experiences, documenting the whole thing with audio-video recording technology. Then, see how articulating these exchanges into a nonfictional video artwork could deepen our understanding of participatory oral history as a dialogic experience.

Rather than pairing complete strangers together, the experiment at the heart of my thesis involved four people that I knew, but who did not know each other prior to the first interviews. I chose to invite Azzouz, Joanna, Kevin and Sheida to work with me on this project because I appreciate them as individuals and knew (from knowing them) that they might be interested in working with me on this experiment. As the person that Azzouz, Joanna, Kevin and Sheida had in common, I was able to facilitate some level of mutual expectation amid each pairing. [1] Upon inviting them to take part in the research, I sat down with each of them and shared the intersecting interests, experiences, and socio-political positionings I considered them to have with the other person in the pairing, even though they came from different age groups and identified differently in terms of gender, culture, sexuality, and spirituality. This upfront, subjective, and interpersonal approach to recruitment allowed Azzouz, Joanna, Kevin and Sheida to enter the interview space both expecting and ready to face someone who was different from them, rather than having this very difference become an element of surprise and potential disconcertment.

The four interviews (each participant taking on the role of the interviewer and interviewee once with each other) took place over the course of a week, in the black box studio of the Acts of Listening Lab, at Concordia University's Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling. This controlled, modular, and intimate environment which allowed me to design an atmosphere conducive to participants' exchange, at the same time served as a space that could physically and technically support the video production needs of my investigation. On the day of their first interview, participants arrived with the knowledge that the person they were paired with, like them, was someone who was interested in taking part in this experiment. They arrived knowing that this person was someone I knew personally, who had been given the same project description and signed the same informed consent form. They were also aware of the participative nature of their involvement and how the outcome of the research would rely not only on the content of their interviews but on their experience of the research project itself. Finally, they came in knowing that

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[1] *Working with 'people you know' has recently been explored as a decolonial alternative to extractive practices of recruitment, consultation, and participation in research, namely by Indigenous and feminist scholars, oral historians, anthropologists, and ethnographers. (Conquergood, 2002) (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012) (Robinson, 2020) After careful consideration and consultation with my supervisory committee, it was deemed best for me to work with a small number of people I knew personally, allowing my experimentation to be understood, first and foremost, as a pilot study or prototype "grounded in active, intimate, hands-on participation and personal connection" (Conquergood, 146). Rather than a mediated and removed mode of recruitment, this person-specific approach allowed me to create informed pairings among participants.*

they would not be handed an interview guide, nor would they be required to prepare their questions beforehand. Instead of "closed-answer methods" of interviewing (Greenspan, 436), they knew entering the black box that the idea was to interview and be interviewed about one's life story, the goal being for them and their partner to work together to understand, as deeply and clearly as possible, their respective experiences.

In the following text, I do not describe what Azzouz, Joanna, Kevin and Sheida shared in their interviews, nor do I describe their experiences with one another. This would run contrary to the very reason why I decided to engage in a nonfictional video art practice in the first place: to allow for the documentation and articulation of these experiences to be made accessible to you, through a nonfictional video art form, rather than through text. So, I invite you as a reader to engage directly with the artwork here:
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1aWcgB9w8rLU-VHweduRfL6kj2SYSVJ3i/view?usp=sharing;
and see for yourself what the experiment looked and felt like for Azzouz, Joanna, Kevin and Sheida as they themselves articulate the personal, social, and political insights they gained from "listening across difference". (High, 2018) However, what I do explore in this text is how my engagement in this research-creation with participants has led me to identify a dialogic opportunity often missed by those who work towards rendering accountable their participative practices in art and research.

Following are a few more details worth mentioning about the project that you can keep in mind as you watch the work and read this text. After each of the four interviews, the participants and I met to make sense of their experiences of the previous day, as either the interviewer or interviewee. These conversations were recorded via audio-video technology as well, and the footage turned out to play an important role in the artwork and in what I perceive to be its contribution. The documentation of both the interviews and conversations was edited, then reviewed with participants, and finally presented as a three-screen video installation, which premiered in the very same black box that Azzouz, Joanna, Kevin and Sheida had sat down in to listen to each other's life experiences. [2] Artists, researchers, educators, curators, activists, students, and other members of the Montréal, Tiohtià:ke, Mooniyang community made their way to the installation together with participants' and my friends and families. Subsequently, the work was featured on Canarsie territory in Brooklyn, NYC as part of UnionDocs' public program entitled *Bearing Witness*. This "night of cinema and conversation", curated by Amanda Gutierrez, looked at "how unique methods of positioning the camera [can be devised] as a bridge between the filmmaker and subject [to] explore how we can ethically bear witness to personal narratives". (*Bearing Witness*, UnionDocs Centre for Documentary Art,
https://uniondocs.org/event/bearing-witness/. Accessed June 22, 2022) Rather than viewers entering a pitch-black room to face the original three-screen installation in space, the triptych was projected in UnionDocs as a single-channel video on a large film screen. Finally, and thus far, the work was presented in *Ethical Encounters* which consisted of the 9th Emerging Scholars Symposium put on by Concordia University's Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling.

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[2] *The site-specificity of the black box (in the case of the premiere at the Acts of Listening Lab) enhanced viewers' sense of immersion during the installation. As a viewer, upon recognizing that one is facing participants on-screen in the same location where participants met and faced each other in real-life, the reality of that encounter and what it must have felt like for participants becomes more tangible for the viewer. As an audience member, one begins to take into account the spatiality and temporality of the work.*

Similar to the screening experience in Brooklyn, the piece was presented in the Symposium as a single-channel video version, yet, this time, on a standard-size monitor with headphones in a gallery space, which is most likely the way you will experience the piece yourself. Upon having brought into being and experienced these different screening modalities, the optimal viewing experience of this piece is without a doubt in space via a three-screen video installation. Without this spatial property, which I am about to explain the importance of, the dialogic significance of the work is lost at many levels.

A DECENTRED SUBJECT

Artists working with moving images have used and explored multi-screen installation as a full-fledged medium to develop and transmit their ideas since the mid-20th century. During the western avant-garde, the use of the projection screen as more than just a technology for presentation stemmed from artists wanting to question, pluralize and deconstruct the authority of the single frame. A myriad of "expanded cinema" practices (Rees, et al., 2011) emerged at the intersection of what art historian and critic Claire Bishop calls "the conceptualization of installation art as a mode of artistic practice." (Bishop, 10) According to Bishop, what is key about installation practice is that it "differs from traditional media in that it addresses the viewer directly as a literal presence in the space." (6) This paradigm shift — that an artwork's meaning depends on a viewer's embodied experience of an "ensemble of elements" (6) within an environment — was and still is very enticing for moving image practitioners as it provides us with the alternative of developing a narrative in space rather than solely through time.

In *The Place of Artists' Cinema: Space, Site and Screen*, media and art scholar Maeve Connolly takes a deep dive into the micro and macro roles that space has played in moving image artworks ranging from the 1960s to the early 2000s. She observes how "[t]he multi-screen video projection has attracted considerable critical attention from film and media scholars as well as art historians." (Connolly, 62) In response to this, she dedicates a chapter to "the factors that may have shaped the pervasiveness of this form of artists' cinema within the public museum or gallery" and underlines that "relatively little critical attention has been paid to the significance of the publicly funded museum or gallery as the privileged place (as well as space) of exhibition for this type of practice" (63). Indeed, there has been little investigation into the implication that the institutionalized art space has had on this form of practice, let alone its relationship to other institutional contexts such as the academic research one. This is where my thesis, a dialogic three-screen video installation, comes into play, more particularly within research-creation into the experience of oral history.

A part of me did not want to turn to Claire Bishop's *Installation Art: A Critical History* because of the art historian's literary omnipresence in anything and everything that is contemporary art. Still, the idea of "decentering" within her critical history is one that has turned out to be quite relevant to my work, as it helps describe the potential of the third screen in my installation. "One of the basic assumptions on which [her] book turns" is the 1960s' "rise of installation art as [being] simultaneous with the emergence of theories of the subject as decentered". (Bishop, 13) In short, the poststructuralist idea of "decentring" — which many "feminist and postcolonial theory is sympathetic to" — "seek[s] to provide an alternative to the idea of the viewer that is implicit in Renaissance perspective: that is, instead of a rational, centred, coherent humanist subject", we should "view our condition as human subjects as fragmented,

multiple and decentred […] by an interdependent and differential relationship to the world, or by pre-existing social structures." (13) "[A]s a consequence, installation art's multiple perspectives are seen to subvert the Renaissance perspective model because they deny the viewer any one ideal place from which to survey the work": "there is no one 'right' way of looking at the world". (13)

The video installation work of well-known artists, such as Eija-Liisa Ahtila, Stan Douglas, Douglas Gordon, Isaac Julien, and Bill Viola, encapsulates for Bishop the "subjective fragmentation" (93) that this type of spatial practice can engender in its viewer. I recently encountered such "fragmentation" in Alexandre Farto's "monumental installation" entitled *Prisma* in Lisbon's Museum of Art, Architecture and Technology. As I stood facing the individuals that were passing through Farto's large winding screens, I experienced what the exhibition's curatorial statement described as "the effects of an optical prism, refracting shared experiences into different wavelengths and frequencies." (*Visit Guide: Vhils - Prisma*, Museum of Art, Architecture and Technology, 2022)

Farto, Alexandre. Prisma. 2022.
Exhibition view: Museum of Art, Architecture and Technology, photo taken by Pedro Pina.
Vhils - Prisma, Fundacao EDP, https://www.fundacaoedp.pt/en/node/15396.
Accessed June 22, 2022.

In *Prisma*, I was "[denied] any one ideal place from which to survey the work." (Bishop, 13) Just like the individuals in Farto's piece carrying with and around them our global urban condition, I was myself only passing through the world both on-screen and off-screen. As I experienced "decentering" in the installation, I wondered what the work would become if as audience I were given access to the subjectivity of those passing by. What would the work become if those who are presented on-screen could speak or verbalize some of their subjectivity? In Farto's work, the expression of an individual's subjectivity mainly falls back on what this on-screen individual looks like. What happens when the expression of one's subjectivity on-screen also relies

on the things one says? The business of creating art that gives viewers access to the things that people say as these people are saying them is, at a minimum, tricky. The communication of our subjectivity, through speaking and listening, is at varying scales and many times a day, an act of "composure" (Thomson, 2015) that "never occur[s] in isolation." (High, 18) As oral historian Alistair Thomson puts it, when we engage in the act of "composure" we "draw upon the languages and meanings available in our culture" "at the time of the telling." (Thomson, 22) Our personhood becomes associated, for better or for worse, with the meanings and languages we use to express ourselves. Enclosing this phenomenon on screen, let alone centring it as 'art', increases the risk of reducing those who speak solely to the things they said, 'that time'.

In relation to this, I turn to Omer Fast's noteworthy three-screen video performance entitled *Talk Show* (2009), as it exemplifies what is at stake for those who frame self-"composure" as art on screen. This brief description of Fast's work was taken from a Radio Papesse podcast episode dedicated to the piece: "On a TV show-like set, a tragic story is being told. On stage, there is [a] testimony and six listeners who in turn become storytellers: the same story is going to be told and repeated before an audience in the flesh [and before the cameras]. [The audience] only knows the entire arch of the story, travelling from the first-hand account of the testimony to the improvised actors' dramatized versions." (*Omer Fast – Talk Show*, Radio Papesse, https://radiopapesse.org/en/archive/interviews/omer-fast-talk-show)
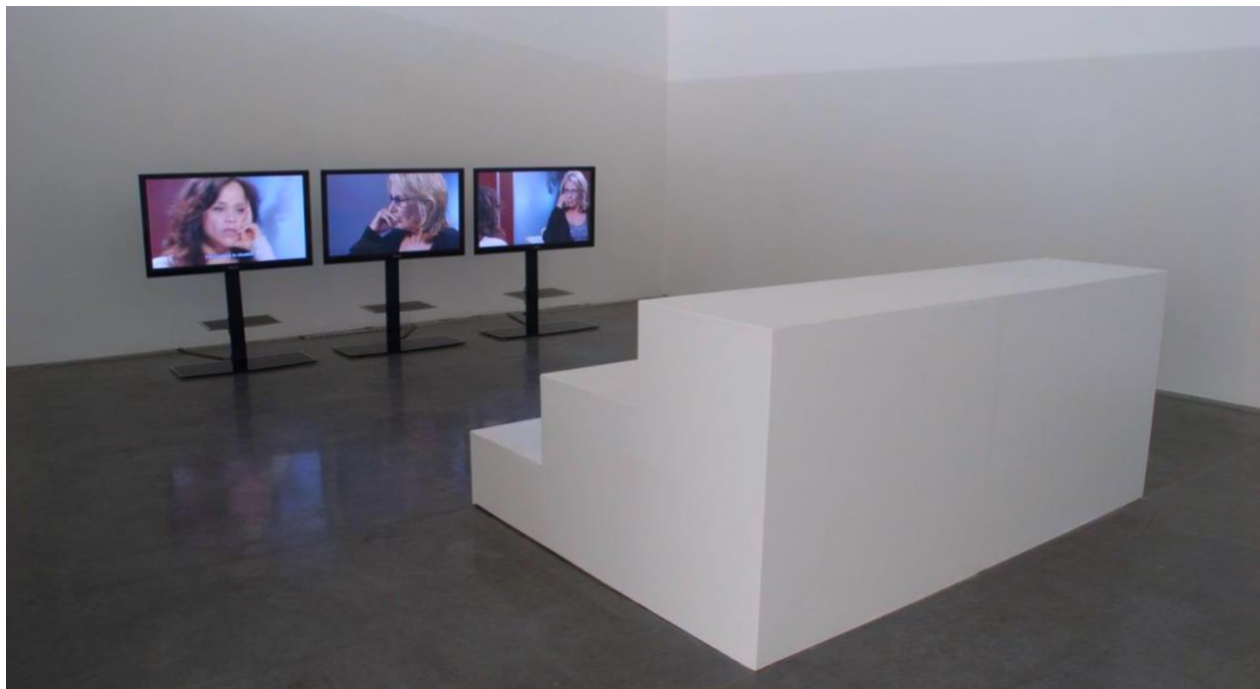
Fast, Omer. Talk Show, 2009.
Exhibition view: FRAC Languedoc Roussillon, France Commissioned by Performa 09.
Artwork Survey: 2000s, Art21, https://art21.org/gallery/omer-fast-artwork-survey-2000s/#/25.
Accessed June 22, 2022.

This work, which essentially is an ethically defiant rendition of "the familiar childhood game of Broken Telephone" accentuates the issue that lies in practices of representation that are based on one-off acts of self-expression. The original testimony of the interviewee (who is not an actor) is interpreted by listeners (who are actors) to a point where after six iterations of 'one-way' interpretation the initial subjectivity voiced by the interviewee becomes a "grotesque" shell of itself. (*Omer Fast – Talk Show*, Radio Papesse, https://radiopapesse.org/en/archive/interviews/omer-fast-talk-show)

What is interesting about Fast's work, and why I wanted to put it in relation to mine, is that although we both make use of the interview modality to explore what it means to speak and listen to 'someone else', although we both employ multi-screen video installation and its spatial property as a narrative enabler, Fast relies on performance and the tension between reality and fiction to dramatize the risks and effects of interpretation of others' subjectivity, especially when this subjectivity was only expressed once. In the case of Azzouz, Joanna, Kevin, Sheida and my work, the modus operandi was basically the opposite: that is, to try and leave no space nor opportunity for the dramatization of others' one-off expression of subjectivity. Fast goes from a nonfictional expression to a fictional one to embellish and dramatize the challenge of the single spoken and heard encounter, whereas, within this thesis work, participants and I begin with a nonfictional expression from which we multiply more nonfictional expressions precisely to deter the singular spoken and heard encounter from its supremacy. [3]

MAKING ART WITH SOMEONE ELSE AS RESEARCH

The biggest challenge for me in writing this text is to navigate when and how to write about content, form, practice, methodology, and theory, as all are deeply intertwined in my mind. In fact, it is becoming harder to tell which is which. But for the sake of clarity, I decided to begin this text by situating what my thesis investigation 'looks' like, which pertains to the scope and tradition of multi-screen video installation art. I will now attempt to situate what it is that my thesis 'shows' on its three screens, and then propose what it is, I think, these three screens 'do'.

Prior to becoming a graduate student and engaging in research-creation, as a socially engaged artist making dialogic art, I have invited individuals to talk to each other, or to me, in front of a camera, in different settings, for different reasons, several times. The nature of this talking and listening between individuals, and the intent of the conversation would vary, yet my collaborators, myself, and our audience would be relatively O.K. with calling this said conversation 'art', or at the very least worthy of artistic matter. Seminal authors in what Carole Gold Calo calls "the canon of literature on dialogic art", like Suzanne Lacy, Lucy Lippard, Pablo Helguera, Grant Kester, Nato Thompson, and of course, Claire Bishop, have and continue to help me navigate what it means to invite someone who is not me to make art. (Calo, 64) But the "conceptual gesture of reducing authorship," (Bishop, 21) to make art with someone else that is "characterized by dialogue" (Calo, 76) in the context of academic research — which must abide by the "scholarly form" and its

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[3] *To watch a single-channel video version of the work, please visit UbuWeb's web-based educational resource for avant-garde artifacts. https://ubu.com/film/fast_talk.html. Accessed June 22, 2022.*

"credibility markers" (Chapman and Sawchuk, 21) — requires becoming versed in a whole new set of "firmly established protocols". (6)

In their guidepost article entitled "Research-Creation: Intervention, Analysis and "Family Resemblances", Owen Chapman and Kim Sawchuk explain how research-creation "acts as an epistemological intervention into the 'regime of truth' (Foucault, 1980) of the university" by putting into operation forms of knowledge production that do not rely solely on text-based "logico-deductive or analytic forms of argumentation or presentation." (Chapman and Sawchuk, 6) When writing this in 2012, Chapman and Sawchuk stated that "the initial acceptance of the academic value of research-creation" had been achieved. Yet according to them, "the task of elaborating new academic paradigms of knowledge production and dissemination" (24) remained and that therefore, "it may be necessary, for strategic reasons, to work with previously existing frameworks of assessment" whilst making sure to not define research-creation within "conventionally sanctioned qualitative/quantitative research." (13) Perhaps, ten years later, this is the "terrain" (Lacy, 1995) my thesis is attempting to navigate by engaging with scholarly "recognized" (Chapman and Sawchuk, 13) components of an academic field such as oral history whilst operating outside many of the field's "standards and criteria markers". (13) Choosing to articulate my work in relation to oral history is not a way to make my practice and reflection on dialogic art legible and compliant to academic "credibility markers" (21), but rather to at once contribute and be enriched by the ethical, methodological, and theoretical contributions of this field and its practitioners.

ORAL HISTORY AS STARTING POINT

One of the most useful recent writings on oral history for me is Daniel Kerr's 2016 article entitled "Allan Nevins Is Not My Grandfather: The Roots of Radical Oral History Practice in the United States". In it, Kerr reclaims the field's popular education and radical working-class genealogy. I am drawn to Kerr's "recovering [of] a lost branch of oral history's past" because ultimately, he frames it as being dialogic, participatory, and intrinsically linked to knowledge creation. Rather than oral history practitioners fixating on the interview and its relationship to "recording technologies, archives, and academia" (Kerr, 371), Kerr welcomes Frisch's and Portelli's influential "democratic re-envisioning" of the "dynamic between the oral historian and narrator" but invites us to look beyond the "interview process itself" to "how [oral history's] dialogical space could inform a collective transformative process." (389)

By sewing a thread between different practices that "drew upon oral history as the starting point" (378) for community knowledge and mobilization, Kerr urges us to remember that, at the end of the day, oral historians "facilitate dialogues grounded in personal experiences and interpretive reflections on the past", which should be "more central to our practice than our production of recordings, transcripts, collections, articles, and monograph." (371) His exploration of Helen Lewis' participatory action research with communities, Myles Horton's "circle of learners", Alice and Staughton Lynd's cross-generational discussions between rank-and-file workers, and of course Paulo Freire's pivotal applied critical pedagogy, grounds oral history as being first and foremost a dialogical endeavour, which is the premise upon which my use of interview as dialogic opportunity plays out. To understand what is 'shown' in my three screens, it is important to situate what kind of dialogic space I "cataly[zed] and organize[d]" (Kerr, 376) via a three-screen video practice so that Azzouz, Joanna, Kevin and Sheida would be able to engage

in "collective telling and listening" between themselves; so that they would want to place their "experiences into the context of others' experiences" (375); [4] and so that together we would use "dialogue as a lens to understand how different forms of oppression intersect in the lives of individuals." (384) In what follows, I situate the work of the installation's first two screens, as they are interdependent and feature the interview modality: one shows the interviewee, the other shows the interviewer. Then, I move on to what is shown in the third screen and explore its potential for future research-creation in oral history.

Still image: Wide shot of the black box as I welcome Joanna and Azzouz into the space.

The first two screens feature my four participants taking part in interviews, in pairs, about their life experiences. The viewer is first presented with a wide shot that features a black box studio in which participants enter to sit down in what looks like a video production interview setting. It is clearly organized as a space for conversation. There are two wooden chairs on which participants sit to face one another. In between, there is a small wooden table with a green plant, a pitcher of water, two cups, and a warm teapot. Lastly, the viewer can see that there are two video broadcasting cameras (and mics) facing each of the seated participants. Cinematically speaking, the placement

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[4] *Why would Azzouz, Joanna, Kevin and Sheida want to place their personal "experiences into the context of [strangers'] experiences" (Kerr, 384) for the sake of my master's research? For insight into how I navigated the ethical reality of reciprocity with participants in this research project, I invite you to watch the single-channel video version at minutes 02:22 and 24:42. Informed by the reciprocity that Alicia J. Rouverol problematizes in "Collaborative Oral History in a Correctional Setting: Promise and Pitfalls", before Azzouz, Joanna, Kevin and Sheida's first interviews, I made sure to facilitate an opportunity for them to articulate in front of the camera, why they were interested in participating in this research.*

of these two cameras is a "staple filmmaking" technique called the "shot-reversed shot" that records the facial expressions and body language of narrators during dialogue. In post-production, it allows to "[create] the impression of a single unbroken conversation by cutting between alternating camera angles." (*What is the shot-reverse shot?*, Adobe, https://www.adobe.com/creativecloud/video/discover/reverse-shot.html. Accessed June 22, 2022)

It is important to mention that in the establishing wide shots, I appear in the frame of both screens, at first inviting participants to sit down and then moving on to explain the dialogic modality that participants are about to take part in: that is, how the two rounds of interviews (one per day per participant) will unfold. [5] Upon having welcomed and set up participants in the space, I proceed to leave the black box entirely. Although I remained available behind the closed door of the adjacent room if participants needed me, I made a point not to listen nor watch participants during their interviews. While I would occasionally glance up to external field monitors installed in the adjacent room (which displayed the moving image that was being recorded in real-time by the cameras) to make sure the technology was still rolling, I wanted to ensure that the intersubjectivity that would emerge between participants was not compromised by the gaze and/or eavesdropping of an exterior subjectivity, whether that be my own subjectivity as the researcher or as the camera operator. The work of Indigenous scholars and artists, such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith's *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* and Dylan Robinson's *Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies* have made me acutely aware of my accountability as a settler listener. Indeed, listening is not a passive act, but an active one that can very easily perpetuate the colonial project when listening to 'someone else' is carried out by settlers within and for the institution of art and/or academia. Listening to participants' interviews while they were taking part in them felt too extractive. In this investigation, my goal was not to extract and articulate individual meaning directly from the interview experience of the participants, rather I wanted to develop an understanding of Azzouz, Joanna, Kevin and Sheida's interview experiences with Azzouz, Joanna, Kevin and Sheida and rely first and foremost on what they deemed worthy of bringing up, sharing, and articulating with me. [6]

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[5] *Performance-maker and writer Rajni Shah's book Experiments in Listening (2021) was crucial in helping me understand the "act of invitation" in my research. (Shah, 159) The ways in which I would welcome and host Azzouz, Joanna, Kevin and Sheida in the black box would help "set up the parameters" (159) for them to "[be]-in-audience" with each other. (21) According to Shah, "the invitational frame" (160) allows those who we gather to be able to engage in the "type of listening that becomes possible in the context of theatre", which Shah defines as "attentive" rather than "declarative"; a distinction that is central to the dialogic nature of my research and its outcome. (Shah, 113)*

[6] *In terms of my video production practice, this meant a series of technical research, testing and troubleshooting beforehand with a myriad of cameras and mics. I had to find (and learn how to use and setup) audio-video technology that had a recording limit of 3 hours at a minimum as there simply would not be camera operator present in the black box to re-start the recording technology should it stop rolling. Moreover, the absence of a camera operator in the black box made it so that I needed the footage I was recording to have a 4K resolution to ensure that I could crop, zoom in and pan through my static "shot-reverse shots" in post-production and maintain full HD video resolution.*

As I exit the frames of both the first and second screens (i.e., as I literally leave the black box during the experiment), participants begin their interview, and the potential of multi-screen installation begins to manifest for the viewer of the installation. Rather than cutting up both camera angles to interweave the speaker and the listener into one single screen (which is traditionally why the "shot-reverse shot" technique is used): that is, "to suggest that the conversation is happening in real-time", I "decentered" the single "perspective model" by "fragmenting" the single frame into two distinct frames, recreating in the space the dialogic experience that was taking place between participants in the black box. (*What is the shot-reverse shot?*, Adobe, https://www.adobe.com/creativecloud/video/discover/reverse-shot.html. Accessed June 22, 2022) (Bishop, 13) The spatial back-and-forth quality of dialogue, which goes from one person to the other, was carried out physically from one screen to the other, allowing the viewer to perceive the meaning-making experience of both participants at once as they engaged in their interview from their respective screens. As the pairs journeyed through their trying to understand one another, rather than collapsing participants' subjectivities into one screen, the installation upheld their "interdependent and differential relationship to the world". (13)

Partial View of the Installation: 2/3

*Shot of Sheida on first screen
listening to Kevin.*

*Reverse shot of Kevin on second screen
speaking to Sheida.*

WHAT IS SHOWN: THE THIRD SCREEN

While the two screens featured video excerpts from each of the four interviews, the actual duration of each interview between participants ranged from 1.5 to 3 hours. Naturally, editorial choices by participants and I were made as to which parts of the interview footage would make it

onto the three-channel final edit, and which parts would not. [7] The screening experience of the viewer (47 minutes in total) would unfold as such: about a minute into each interview, the audio of the first two screens would fade out (although the image would keep playing) and the third screen, at the very right of the room, would light up. The third screen mainly featured (apart from close-ups and automatic speaking exercises) individual participants and me sitting side-by-side at a worktable, facing the camera with a pitcher of water, pens, notebooks, and the green plant (a now cherished recurring character). [8] In this second dialogic space, participants and I met to make sense of their interview experience the previous day, as either the interviewer or interviewee.

As I touched on earlier, my decision not to listen in on the interviews while they were taking place, shifted the source, the information, and the data from which I would draw meaning as a researcher. This second dialogic space and modality in the third screen — in which I listened to participants' rendering of their interview experience, asked questions to better understand what they were sharing with me and reflected with them on what different things meant before having even looked at the documentation — transferred the object of study, from my interpretation of participants' experience to participants telling me themselves what this very experience was. It is on them, and on their subjective articulation, that the research primarily relies on to generate knowledge. To circle back to Bishop's articulation of participatory art as the "conceptual gesture of reducing authorship" (Bishop, 21), I am the "catalyst and organizer" (Kerr, 376) of the research, but the research outcome, not only depends on participants' experience of the research but on the authority they have to share and articulate this experience with me.

While you read this, it is important to recall and visualize how the first and second screens of the installation keep playing the interview footage without audio as participants operate this

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[7] *The editorial process was shared in two ways. First, the conversations that participants and I engaged in after each interview consisted of a time during which we identified meaningful interview moments. Consequently, this guided the editing process in the sense that the video footage containing these insightful moments made it into the final three-channel edit. Moreover, because video editing is in and of itself an exercise in content analysis, synthetization, and articulation, even though Azzouz, Joanna, Kevin, Sheida and I had mostly discerned what moments in the interview were relevant to us (and therefore to the edit), as the person who would actually cut and interweave video clips, I still had to make choices that very much impacted not only how the piece represented participants, but what it would communicate at once as research and artwork. To make sure that all four participants were comfortable with what the work communicated about both their life and research experiences, each of them was shown the final edit and was invited to express any concerns they had. For example, Sheida voiced that I had taken out, through my cuts and sequencing of clips, some of the important complexity that was, according to her, both inherent to, and the strength of, the experiment she took part in. We, therefore, sat down together at the editing station and brought back into the three-channel timeline moments that rendered the complexity of her encounter with Kevin more perceivable. Some of this complexity can be found at minutes 10:49 and 42:38.*

[8] *To get a better sense of what these automatic speaking exercises consisted of and how they allowed me to "share authority" (Frisch, 1990) and "aspects of my own story" and research experience with participants "back in return" (Rouverol, 70), please watch minutes 06:20, 14:47, 18:17, and 27:11.*

authority in the third screen and make use of conversation with me to explore the meaning of their interview experience. When reaching what participants and I considered to be a substantial insight, the third screen would 'turn off' drawing the viewers' attention back to the first and second interview screens, which at the same time had regained their audio to make audible and accessible the said relevant interview moment (which in general consisted of a 1- to 2-minute-long segment). [9] This back and forth between screens, now factoring in a third screen, permitted the emergence of what I think is akin to what post-colonial literary and cultural critic Homi K. Bhabha calls the "hybridity" of the "Third Space" (Bhabha, 2004).

Full View of the Installation: 3/3

* As participants and I make sense of their interview experience in the third screen, the corresponding interview footage continues to play without audio on the first and second screens until an insight reached in the third screen requires the interview footage to regain its audio.

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[9] *This material intervention into the medium of video proved to illustrate quite starkly the discrepancy between how participants and the research audience experienced the representation of the interview experiment. While many viewers expressed having been left wanting more every time the audio of the interview screens would fade out (to make room for the third screen's conversation), participants expressed liking the fact that some of what they shared with each other during their one-on-one interviews remained between them and the person they were paired with. Joanna explained how what she shared in the interview with Azzouz, even though she knew it would be "going public" (Miller, et al., 2017) was in that moment "composed" for and by the intimate setting she was in. (Thomson, 2015) The very real ethical sensitivity of re-directing the words of an interviewee that were meant for a specific interviewer towards a public audience is an important stake in research-creation in oral history for which "going public is the rule more than the exception." (High and Little, 240)*

WHAT DOES THE THIRD SCREEN DO?

What is enticing (but admittedly disorienting) about research-creation, and perhaps more specifically what Chapman and Sawchuk call "creation-as-research", is that it "involves the elaboration of projects where creation is required in order for research [itself] to emerge." (Chapman and Sawchuk, 19) When bound to the temporality and material realities of the individuals who have generously agreed to participate in your research, let alone those of your graduate study program, taking the plunge into practice, and trusting "research to emerge", regardless of how much it is nurtured by theory and past practice, is a tad nerve-racking. In my case, when the research did emerge through practice, it guided me towards a whole new world of ideas and scholarship. As beautifully put by Kathleen Vaughan, in *Pieced Together: Collage as an Artist's Method for Interdisciplinary Research*, research-creation requires me to keep "theorizing at the very edges of my experience and research." (Vaughan, 49) When launching into work with Azzouz, Joanna, Kevin and Sheida, I was not familiar with Bhabha's influential theory of the "Third Space". The theory I had delved into mainly within oral history, listening studies, socially engaged art, postcolonial and feminist studies, and performance art helped me articulate why I needed ethically to facilitate the dialogic modality presented in my third screen. Linda Alcoff spells out this ethical reasoning quite sharply: "if the dangers of speaking for others [in academia can] result from the possibility of misrepresentation, expanding one's own authority and privilege and a generally imperialist speaking ritual, then speaking with and to [can] lessen these dangers." (Alcoff, 23) Therefore, I knew that I needed to follow her advice and attempt to "reconceptualize discourse [as Foucault recommends], as an 'event', which includes speaker words, hearers, location, language, and so on", specifically when engaging in the interpretive practice of research results. (26) I needed and wanted to "strive to create wherever possible the condition for dialogue and the practice of speaking with and to rather than speaking for others." (23) Yet, it is only after having fostered (and then watched) this "speaking with rather than for" on screen, after having discussed it with participants, members of the public who came and saw the installation and with my supervisors that I realized I now had to engage with theory that would not help me understand why the dialogic space presented in the third screen was ethically needed (I had already done that), but rather what the third screen 'does'.

Still image: Wide shot of Joanna (right) and I making sense of her experience as the interviewee.

The third screen in this video installation presents a dialogue between Azzouz, Joanna, Kevin and Sheida (the four research participants) and me (the student-researcher and artist). This dialogue takes place a total of 8 times and is put forth as the chosen modality to draw meaning from the research experience. This mode to "report research" (Vasconcelos, et al., 7) challenges, on the one hand, what research findings are in participatory research-creation in oral history and on the other, how research findings are made available to the research audience. In the field of oral history, the research audience is supposedly able to listen to the recording of the interview that was conducted with a research participant by accessing the oral history archive. This access allows the research audience to engage directly with what was said in the recording and decide for itself if the oral historian's new and informed rendering of the past – which is often communicated via the written article or the conference presentation – justly represents what the person in the recording shared during the interview.

In a way, the audience of a 'traditional' oral history research project has relatively unmediated access to the contribution and recorded experience of research participants. By unmediated, I mean that the words that a research participant has spoken during the interview (although having been mediated via technology such as a microphone and/or camera), according to the oral history ethos and method, are meant to be archived in their narrative integrity. There has been much exploration and 'grey-zoning' of what defines the beginning and end of an oral history interview, namely in Anna Sheftel and Stacey Zembrzycki's endearing anthology that looks at what being "Off the Record" (2013) means. Depending on the ethical backbone that supports the triad that is the teller, the listener and the record in oral history, the completeness of an interview recording may be challenged upon request from the interviewee, who can, for example, ask that certain parts of their spoken experience be removed from the recording, and therefore from the archive. The words and experiences that an oral history research participant has decided to share are also commonly fully transcribed. The written form becomes another record, another document that a given research audience can theoretically have access to. Of course, what is lost and what is gained when orality becomes "governed by written rhetorical rules" and transformed into "oral literature" (Ong, 14) pertains to vast and complex considerations, which much fascinating research, thinking and practice has dived deep into, namely and famously, Walter J. *Ong's Orality and Literacy the Technologizing of the Word*. Although the oral history archive is often institutionalized, a research audience should (perhaps after some drawn-out bureaucratic vetting process) eventually be able to sit down and actually listen to the original recording of the words that someone said. This is at the root of why so many turn to the field of oral history as an ethical, methodological, and theoretical framework: the actual voices of those who have spoken are retraceable which renders our interpretive practices as researchers or artists – may they be literary, performative, cinematic, etc. – more accountable. Which brings me to ask myself the following question: If I have the concern of rendering my research interpretive practice accountable as an oral history researcher, then why am I not also making this very interpretive practice not only retraceable but dialogic?

CO-EXISTING SUBJECTIVITIES

The often clé en main advice for a graduate student entering the world of academic research is to identify the gap that our research is filling. After taking the plunge into practice, letting the "research emerge" (Chapman and Sawchuk, 19), and turning to new theory to understand what the third screen represents for research-creation in "what it means to listen to someone across

difference" (High, 2018), I feel that my thesis, rather than filling a gap, points to an opportunity that is missed in participatory research that aims to draw meaning from and represent ethically participants' words. Ultimately, the subjectivity that a research participant holds (and that we as researchers want to consider), should not be detached from the participant's experience of the research project itself. In order words, the knowledge that we draw from the content of an interview should and is inherently related to a participant's experience of that interview. My multi-screen video practice has rendered clear this often-missed opportunity to give our research audience access to participants' research insight (not just to what they put on record during the interview). The experiential knowledge that participants gain from the research process having been the primary partakers must not only be considered in our assessments but be presented in co-existence with the 'subject matter' they contributed to the interview.

This is where Bhabha's famous notion of "hybridity" comes into play. He says, "the importance of hybridity is that it bears the traces of those feelings and practices which inform it, just like a translation, so that hybridity puts together the traces of certain other meanings or discourses." (Bhabha, 211). In one sitting, viewers of my installation are given access to some of Azzouz, Joanna, Kevin and Sheida's spoken life experiences while simultaneously being offered a window into how participating in the research informs this very life experience which "bears the traces of those feelings and practices" as well. An important feature in Bhabha's "hybridity" is "difference". According to him, "meaning is constructed across the bar of difference and separation between the signifier and the signified." (210) He goes on to say that "identification is a process of identifying with and through another object, an object of otherness, at which point the agency of identification – the subject – is itself always ambivalent, because of the intervention of that otherness." (211) This brings me back to the practice of multi-screen installation art and its ability to recognize its subject, both on-screen and off-screen, as perceived from a place and identity that is "fragmented, multiple and decentred." (Bishop, 13)

As I kept digging into the vast and complex writings of Bhabha, I was thrilled to discover (I could not believe it at first) that he had written quite a bit on contemporary art, and amazingly enough on "Conversational Art" which is the title of his contribution in *Conversations at the Castle: Changing Audiences and Contemporary Art* (1998). In his words, "the act of conversation […] moves away from the temptations of transcendence and teleology toward a notion that cultural value, or the 'truth' […], lies in the contingent relations that come to be constructed through the working out of a particular practice" (Bhabha, 41). Bhabha also refers to the words of philosopher Richard Rorty and says that conversation unsettles our "dependence on the foundational myths of the Enlightenment – rationalism, scientism, universalism – as the bedrock of culture judgment, producing a tyranny of fact over value, logic over rhetoric. 'It is the search for a way in which one can avoid the need for conversation and deliberation and simply tick off the way things are.' (Rorty, 3)" (Bhabha, 41) Rather than articulating academic meaning after the oral history interview by ourselves as researchers and omitting the reality that being listened to and speaking in the interview for participants deepened, revealed, and changed the very subjectivity that is of interest to our research, why not strive to foster a space for that hybridity to exist. According to Bhabha, this hybrid space, which he has coined the "Third Space", "gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation." (Bhabha, 211)

When elaborating my work with Azzouz, Joanna, Kevin and Sheida, the second dialogic space that is shown in the third screen could have taken place without being documented via audio-video technology, let alone edited, interweaved, and presented in relation to the two interview channels. A less labour-intensive option could have also been to simply meet with participants to make sense of their interview experience the previous day and take notes. This option, and the one of not engaging at all in a conversation with participants and simply drawing my own conclusions from the interview recordings, encapsulate the missed opportunity I spoke of earlier. Why would I dissociate Azzouz, Joanna, Kevin and Sheida's experience of participating in our research experiment from the process of searching for results?

It has been noted in oral history literature how significant memories and meanings arise for interviewees from, during, and after their participation in an interview. Being the "subject-who-takes-part" (Sotelo-Castro, 593) in such an activity is according to oral history performance researcher Luis Carlos Sotelo-Castro, a "positioning". In his 2010 article for the *Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, Sotelo-Castro discusses his own experience as a participant in "an experimental intermedia performance work" (593). He identifies the often "problematic aspect" of participatory practices that only focus "on the representations that are produced and remain" from an individual's participation. Rather than turning towards participation for what participation can provide us researchers with, Sotelo-Castro invites us to "embed additional sharing and self-reflective mechanisms" so that participants can see for themselves what participation has provided them with. According to him, "the act of sharing of these stories [that stemmed during and from participation] is the very device by which the self-mapping, empowering agency of [participatory] practice may be achieved." By "self-mapping" here, Sotelo-Castro refers to participants having space "to 'read' their participation process" (608) and "be enabled to position themselves subjectively in relation to" it. (594) This sharing and self-reflexive space is what takes place in the third screen as it enables Azzouz, Joanna, Kevin, and Sheida to position themselves in relation to their participation. This new positioning can be witnessed and traced by viewers as it is presented beside and in co-existence with, participants' initially framed subjectivity during the interview.

What is interesting about the "Third Space" theory, is that "the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to [Bhabha] is the 'third space' that allows for other positions to emerge." If I continue to apply Bhabha's thinking to my installation, what is unique about the third screen is that "it does not give [participants' voiced subjectivities in the two interview screens] the authority of being prior in the sense of being original: they are prior only in the sense of anterior." (Bhabha, 211) This is very important because the third screen allows the viewer to perceive participants and their subjectivity as not fixed but evolving. We speak of 'being painted in a negative light'. Perhaps ensuring that our research does not paint participants in a reductive light, means ensuring that they can paint themselves more than once. For Azzouz, Joanna, Kevin and Sheida's extremely valuable research contribution to be recognized by viewers, these very viewers needed to witness this contribution in a hybrid space as it allows for participants' "prior" subjectivity during the interviews to be made accessible alongside their now new and latest subjectivity, which is what a multi-screen practice allowed. I think it is safe for me to claim that oral history practitioners profoundly recognize the worth of speaking and listening as a way to explore the meaning of specific events and experiences, so why is it such common practice to articulate and present research results monologically, rather than dialogically? (Bakhtin, 1963)

I will circle back to Alice and Staughton Lynd, who Daniel Kerr defines as some of the "radical forbearers" of the oral history practice. In their pivotal book *Rank and File* (1973), the Lynds "made a deliberate choice not to offer their conclusive interpretations of the interviews". (Kerr, 376) For me, this best describes at once the value and discomfort of dialogic epistemology and practice. Using dialogue as a way, a mode, a method to generate understanding, meaning, and knowledge, equates to a type of knowledge that is inconclusive (Lynds), that cannot "tick off the way things are" (Rorty), that holds within itself difference and otherness (Bhabha) because this form of knowledge comprehends that "there is no one 'right' way of looking at the world" (Bishop). Kerr states that the Lynds' effort to "decenter intellectual authority" (Kerr, 376) consisted of a methodological contribution. This thesis is an example of how "decentering intellectual authority" in oral history can be achieved via a dialogic multi-screen video installation practice.

FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

To use the words of Chapman and Sawchuk, I am "aware of an irony at the very core of this article, which has taken a traditional academic" text-based and monologic form to argue for the creation and representation of dialogic knowledge through multi-screen video practice. (Chapman and Sawchuk, 22) I recognize now that even though I had to engage in the written form as a "criteria marker" (13) for the evaluation and completion of my degree, I could perhaps have chosen a style of writing more embracing of the dialogic epistemology I speak of — María C. Lugones and Elizabeth V. Spelman's seminal "two-voices" article structure in "Have we got a theory for you! Feminist theory, cultural imperialism and the demand for 'the woman's voice'" comes right away to mind. I say 'perhaps' here as it remains to be seen if such a format would have been viable for me to write and deemed acceptable by my institution's thesis standards. Yet, as Kathleen Vaughan reminds me as she journeys through her own arts- and practice-led research, "[t]he aim and outcome of the research process, in all its manifestations [including, in my case, the writing of this text], is not to reach consensus on a single 'correct' model of research — but to raise informed debates by locating and communicating research activities". (Vaughan, 49) It is my hope that the combination of this text to my research-creation project provides you with a good enough basis to raise informed debates about what I am proposing.

I will conclude by exploring another consideration that emerged during my writing process. Upon getting revisions for this text, it was pointed out to me that I share very little of the feedback that was given to me by Azzouz, Joanna, Kevin, Sheida and other members of the public after their experience of the three-screen video installation in the black box of the Acts of Listening Lab. This is where what I am exploring in this text comes full circle. The feedback conversations that I had with viewers of the installation (including those with participants) were very much akin to the conversations participants and I had on the days following each of their interviews. If I were to continue with the rationale I have developed over this text, why is my three-screen installation not a four-screen one? Why are participants and viewers' informative experiences of the installation — which we discussed after their viewing — not made accessible to you, the subsequent research audience?

Right away, this impasse propels me to conceive of a research-creation project that would embed, from the outset, a third round of subjectivity development and representation; that is, on the subject matter of the research, the research experience, and the research dissemination,

including the public pedagogy this dissemination enacts. To use Linda Alcoff's nomenclature, for the time being, I am unable to let Azzouz, Joanna, Kevin, Sheida and other viewers 'speak for themselves' to you about their experience of the installation piece. Seeing how there is no fourth screen to present participants, viewers and I engaging in dialogue about the installation as research dissemination, is it a disservice to participants and viewers that I don't at a minimum 'speak for them' of the feedback they gave me off-camera in this text? According to Alcoff, "[i]t is not 'always' the case that when […] we speak for others, they end up worse off." (29) Would participants and viewers have been better off if I had 'spoken [or in this case, written] for them' about their experience of the installation rather than not?

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