**Interview with Julian Barr**

**“Politics of Memory: Digital Humanities and Queer Seattle”**

ANNIE DWYER: Welcome to *Going Public*, a podcast dedicated to exploring public scholarship and publicly-engaged teaching in the humanities. My name is Annie Dwyer and, at the time of this recording, I am the Assistant Program Director of a Mellon initiative at the University of Washington’s Simpson Center for the Humanities.

The initiative's name is *Reimagining the Humanities PhD and Reaching New Publics: Catalyzing Collaboration*. Since 2015, two successive Mellon initiatives by this name have supported public scholars at the University of Washington–both faculty developing new graduate seminars in the humanities with public-facing components, and doctoral students pursuing public projects in the humanities. The episodes of *Going Public* consist of interviews with Mellon-supported public scholars after they have launched their projects or taught their public-facing seminars.

Please do check out our companion website, which includes faculty fellow syllabi as well as doctoral student fellow project overviews, artifacts, and other ephemera.

The podcast, along with the website, is intended to serve as a resource for scholars interested in developing similar projects and seminars. You can find the *Going Public* website at [www.simpsoncenter.org/goingpublic](http://www.simpsoncenter.org/goingpublic). You can also find the link in the description of today’s episode.

Today’s episode, “The Politics of Memory,” is an interview with Julian Barr, who at the time of this recording is a PhD candidate in Geography at the University of Washington. Julian also created “Pioneer Square and the Making of Queer Seattle,” which is a digital story map and walking tour that chronicles Seattle’s queer community from the 1890s to the present in the Pioneer Square neighborhood. “Pioneer Square and the Making of Queer Seattle” has been supported, among other awards, by a Mellon Summer Fellowship for New Public Projects in the Humanities in the summer of 2017. Our conversation explores, among other things, the affordances and limits of various digital platforms, the ways in which the dissertation form might shift to integrate public scholarship, and how a walking tour can powerfully excavate gentrified spaces, subordinated knowledges, and competing memories.

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ANNIE DWYER: Julian, thanks so much for joining me.

JULIAN BARR: Thank you, it's a great introduction.

ANNIE DWYER: All right, tell us a little bit about your project, Julian. I'd love to hear, especially, about the origins of the project.

JULIAN BARR: The origins… I didn't really know about it when I started here in 2014. But it had been around for a pretty long time then; it started in about the 90s, mid 90s, which included a lot of different people, various stages. But primarily, where it was left was with Dr. Michael Brown and Dr. Larry Knopp. Michael Brown’s at UW Seattle, Larry Knopp at UW Tacoma, and they're research partners. It just made a lot of sense, they were the ones that were keeping it up as much as possible.

ANNIE DWYER: The project that the Northwest Lesbian and Gay History Museum Project had started?

JULIAN BARR: Yeah, but keeping it up was pretty minimal. They gave the tours sometimes, especially in their teaching, which was great. But it went away and I think largely, the reason for that was the whole project died down around and it seemed like in the mid-2000s. They did a really massive oral history project…and it was really great…and that took a ton of energy…and they created what they wanted to create. Their primary goal is creating an archive, which is now in UW special collections. And I think for folks like Michael Brown and Larry Knopp, while the tour was still great for them, there were a lot of changes to Pioneer Square starting in the 90s, but really in the 2000s, through just the process of gentrification that was happening in the neighborhood that still happens. For the most part, the places that are talked about–those buildings don't exist. Only one really exists in its original form. But even that, it has some alterations to it. So, I think that took energy out of it because for–especially them–they were so used to giving it as a walking tour and seeing all these things. When those original things go away, it defeated it in a lot of ways for them, which is totally fair, made a lot of sense.

Then in 2016, though, the American Sociological Association, their conference was in Seattle. And a dean asked Dr. Michael Brown if he would coordinate giving the tour as a field trip of the conference. And he agreed to do it, but he realized it had been a while since he had given it. The book *Gay Seattle* (2003) by Gary Atkins had come out. All that put together, they were like, “OK, we have some money”, and they paid me to update the tour–for them to give it as a walking tour, which is great. Luckily, the ASA has a pre-conference. And they wanted to do the exact same tour and Michael Brown offered that I would do it. So I did. It was great. I had a lot of fun with it. I thought it was wonderful. And I was like, “what else could be done here?”

That's when I saw the fellowship from the Simpson Center that would fund the time it needed. It needed someone to be able to sit down with it and give it time and think about “where could it go next?”.... So then, that's when I was like, “OK, I think this could be a really cool digital project. I think it could live in a digital space; it wouldn't necessarily have to be a walking tour anymore.” And it does the same thing a walking tour does. You're in the space, you're in a geographic space. You're just not in there physically; you're there virtually. But it also solves the major problem of looking at a building that has nothing to do with that space anymore. Because you can attach photographs, you can do those things. And that truly changes it. Yeah, then I was like, “OK.” I set out this idea of “OK, I'll make it a digital map, but also think about updating it continuously and I think that work never really will ever be done.”

The updating was thinking about who was missing from it. And the history–the project was always lot of gay men, even though the walking tour itself was founded by a lesbian. It comes from a lot of different perspectives, but the history itself was dominated by white gay men. That was the first thing–how to bring forward more stories of people of color and women. Some of that required just research, of course. Some of it was already there, it just was repositioning things and bringing it in a different order. I was also thinking about “what's the logical order here, and how do you get people to engage with those communities that usually get overlooked right away?” It's on the forefront. It took that on. I think it went great and I like the end result.

But ironically the most unexpected part of the whole thing was that, through the creation of the digital map, there became renewed interest in the actual walking tour…which surprised me because I'm like, “well, why would people want to go on this walking tour; I made it into this digital thing.” I ended up starting to do it and it was so much fun. And it was weird that it worked out that way, but it ended up being that it was both a stand-alone thing but also this attachment to the actual walking tour. And I've given it a lot.

ANNIE DWYER: There are so many beautiful things to pull out about that origin story. One is just the iterative and collaborative quality of it. I think sometimes when people think about doing scholarship, it’s: “I'm going to be a Lone Ranger off to reach wider publics.” And the story here is much more of a process emerging out of conversations, events, more organically and building upon people's work. And it seems like that's a necessary part of the work of becoming more intersectional and surfacing alternative histories that seems part and parcel of the collaborative ethos of this project, which I love. I wonder if you can speak a little bit more to digital public scholarship projects. What are some of, not just affordances in terms of digital platforms that you're using, but opportunities, or challenges that are particular to things like working with ESRI, which is the platform that you use for your project. I know public scholarship, digital scholarship; there's a lot of overlap; they're not the same. I want to not conflate those two things, but, in your case, I think you have a digital public scholarship project. If you could speak to that a little bit, I'd love to hear your thoughts on that.

JULIAN BARR: I think that's always the biggest challenge really. It's always a challenge of how much do you want to invest in that part of the process. I eventually will leave UW, as I finish. And what comes with that is losing access to ESRI StoryMap. I knew this in the back of my head. What I was always hoping for–what has come true–is a better open-source platform…which is the one that I'm thinking about is StoryMap JS. The long term–and not very long term because I want to do it over the summer–is to simply transfer the project from an ESRI StoryMap to StoryMap JS. Because it's open access and it's stable now and it's a great platform. It'll look a little different but it works well and I enjoy that.

To explain, too, part of the thinking is it's not just the access thing, it's also that I can use an open-source platform that then anyone can use once they're seeing the map. Because the limitation now is if I give the tour or show someone the map and they want to do this, there's that immediate wall that's built because I use something that costs money and you need access to. So, I'm changing it for that reason as well. But also, I did another project over the summer around the history of racism and student resistance at UW. When the question came up “what platform should we use?” and I was one of the only people who had experience doing this, I said, “Well, while we have access to ESRI, we should not use ESRI.”

My reasoning at that time was because ESRI does have a lot of ties to Department of Defense contracts and a side of geography that isn't great. It felt so contradictory to me that we couldn't make this map over oppression and racism while using a platform that some geographers have said is also being used for some problematic behavior. But I think that shows how complicated it is and it's the biggest decision you have to make, probably, and one of the earliest decisions you have to make.

ANNIE DWYER: Probably before you had an opportunity to encounter and think through all of these different factors, and then you're well under on your way into a project.

JULIAN BARR: And it's hard. It's one of those things I think that comes with just experience and sometimes patience. I think the biggest thing is sometimes you have to have a little bit patience with it, and things will emerge. StoryMap JS has grown and is more popular and looks great now. And I think that's why I feel more comfortable now moving on to it than I did before.

ANNIE DWYER: I like you mentioned patience and I think that applies to public scholarship more broadly speaking. You raise so many good questions and conundrums that one might think about, or think through, in doing digital projects. But what about just public scholarship in general? What are some of the challenges? What are some of the things that people should be thinking about as they get started with a project, whether logistical, interpersonal, institutional?

JULIAN BARR: I think one thing is if you are using anything, if it's digital or not, what's the source of it and does it somewhat contradict what you're trying to do? That’s a big thing to consider in public scholarship. That’s one thing. I think the other thing is preparing for when you get the public scholarship out there. The times that some people might want to challenge or push back on it that are legitimate. There's the one side of it that people might push back because they don't like it for various bad reasons—that's also a challenge. But what I'm thinking, is, there have been times on the walking tour where older folks that lived it have been a little bit of a challenge sometimes to me. That's a really interesting dynamic. It's not new, but it also happened when Dr. Brown and Dr. Knopp did it. They have the exact same thing where there's always going to be those moments of challenge. And it presents itself….

ANNIE DWYER: What kinds of challenge people saying, Oh, no, it was this way or—

JULIAN BARR: I think what it becomes–and this is very much I don't think just a history thing but, especially, a history-public-scholarship thing–is the politics of memory. An example of that, where it's especially happened, is there's this moment in the history of Pioneer Square where there was this initiative, anti-gay initiative. There's essentially two organizations campaigning against it that were primarily made of gays and lesbians.

ANNIE DWYER: And this is Initiative 13.

JULIAN BARR: Yeah, Initiative 13.

ANNIE DWYER: Which was spearheaded by police and the whole point was to undo the anti-discrimination ordinances that were already in place.

JULIAN BARR: Yeah, the perfect summary of it. What you start seeing is one side of queer activism was what a lot of people would expect: the post-Stonewall, very much in the streets, saying very explicitly “this is a targeted initiative against gays and lesbians; this is discrimination. That's why you shouldn't vote for it.” That was one side of it, there was another side that was primarily a little bit older, gay men primarily, they were mostly business owners. And they took this very different approach, where they talked a little bit how it was an anti-gay thing, but they primarily framed it as “this initiative is trying to take away your privacy.”

So, they were against it, both, but took these two very different approaches. If people were living it and they were in one of these two camps, their feelings are different; their feelings are that they were doing the right thing. They were the ones that made the change happen. In the digital map, the photo that I use to represent the Occidental Park where a lot of this happened is a poster made by the side that was not taking the very queer approach. Because I wanted to acknowledge both. I thought that was really interesting the many times that's been challenged. And I think that's something to really prepare for. It's always going to be a thing, especially if you're younger and you're doing this work. But it's a fun challenge.

ANNIE DWYER: And I'm thinking about, for instance, I think the two sides you were talking about–the citizens to retain fair employment–that was the approach led by gay businessmen. Then Seattle women against their team–the approach was more of the queer politics emerging queer politics that you were identifying. As you're having these conversations with people–I'm imagining because your map does this and the framing of the StoryMap does this–where you're unpacking things like queer and you're unpacking things like intersectionality. That might become part of the conversation that you're having.

That's something that this project does so well–it uses scholarly knowledge, or academic knowledges, and it doesn't do it in a way that's either esoteric or simplistic. I think that can be a challenge for a lot of academics who are thinking about public scholarship: “How do I translate academic knowledges for wider publics?” And I think the reverse is true: “How do I allow these local knowledges to play into my academic work?” This project is exemplary in that regard. Can you talk about how to do that? How do you retain intellectual nuance and also, how do you welcome in these counter-stories? I think you've already answered the second question a little bit. It seems like dialogue is really important; the oral history process is really important. But I guess if you have any additional thoughts on that, I'd love to hear them.

JULIAN BARR: I think that's the biggest challenge. I think a lot of times, it's the big things to communicate–the big picture things. For this project, one of the biggest things is acknowledging a history that exists way before the Stonewall riots. And that's always been important to me throughout all my work. It's the history before that I'm so interested in. That's not to dismiss the history that happens afterwards because a lot happens afterwards. The other big picture things are like the police pay-off system, thinking about policing. It's not only an important part of the story, but I made sure it was very much highlighted because it just connects back to now. It's the same exact…very similar issues where police go unaccountable, and they do bad things. It seems to work really well for such a wide variety of audiences. I've had undergrads, I've had grads, I've had people that were in the community, that were not in the community but are queer, high schoolers. The vast ages and experiences that have been on the tour that have been able to engage with it. That's really good because I think it's a sign that it's working and that's what I always look for.

ANNIE DWYER: A lot of the wonderful historical texture and details of your project have come through in our conversation. But as we come to the end here, I'm wondering if we can make space to let you talk about some of your favorite sites and some of your favorite stories that you happened upon.

JULIAN BARR: I think for me, some of my favorite things that have really come out of it that took new light that I think have inspired other ideas that I have, are things like the steam and bath house is probably one of those locations that took me in very different directions. It's a bath house that was around for a really long time, primarily by gay men. But having the intentional moment to look into it, I was able to find a map–a hand-drawn map–of what it looked like on the inside, which was such a cool find and it was so interesting. Because it's a weird system, bathhouses, where you have to explain to an audience that most of the time does not know what a bathhouse is. They just don't know. Even younger queer folks are, like, “A what?” So you have to explain it. Having that map where I was like “see these little squares, these are all little rooms, and you went in and you had sex in.” It just adds so much to it. You were never able to do that on the tour. You always had to verbally explain it. And in the research of that, I found out that they had a ladies’ night and it's still one of the funniest stories.

ANNIE DWYER: That's amazing.

JULIAN BARR: Right, it was such a buried archival thing. When I eventually found it, I was like, “Oh, this is great.” Those are the sort of stories that are really wonderful. It's a different side to a space that you'd only assume was for gay men–in fact, it wasn't. Lesbian women are always looked over in that sort of research because it's just assumed lesbians only have sex in their homes, when in fact they do things that gay men do, it just looks very different. That's a really happy moment for me. Bringing that out in one single space is really wonderful. But it also shows that it's so much fun to just have the time to go into an archive and you explore these things. And you find these little accidental things. It was literally a piece of paper; it was someone writing down; it was one reporter that was interviewing one of the workers at the bathhouse, and he was angry about the women, and he starts talking about this woman's night. And that's how I found it, from there.

ANNIE DWYER: That's incredible.

JULIAN BARR: A handwritten transcript. It wasn't labeled so I was just like, “Oh, this is great.” And if your public scholarship can do that and really gets you into surprising finds, that's super satisfying and that's a good thing.

ANNIE DWYER: I'm just wondering if you would like to speak a little bit more to how this has shaped your dissertation work. Because, I think, we're always looking for examples of alternative dissertations and ways in which public scholarship can surface in dissertation work, or be a recognizable part of dissertation work.

JULIAN BARR: It was a struggle. Because the dissertation, for context, is about lesbian and queer women in Seattle from about 1930 to about 1980. And Pioneer Square is a big, big part of that. But it's not all, it's not just that. And I think the struggle for me was I couldn't find a place in the dissertation research for it at first. It didn't feel great that I was really proud of this–and I'm still extremely proud of it. And at the end of the day, I'll be quite honest, I think I'll always be more proud of this work than I will be of the dissertation.

So, then I was like, “Why is it so small a part of that?” That's so unfortunate, but it's the way that these things are designed. It's just not designed to be supportive of this and that's a problem. I really wanted to do–and it came finally into fruition–a three-paper dissertation. Where it's three papers based on the same doctoral research made ready for journal publication. That makes it that one of my papers is essentially about this tour and about this public scholarship, and then two of the papers are about the dissertation research. And that feels way more balanced. And it makes it like finally be acknowledged in a real way. I just think it's a recognition of that labor. It's a recognition that it's important. And if it's important to you, you deserve it to be part of that final thing.

That extends beyond grad students too. It extends to faculty too, why is it not of the same weight that any publication would be? I personally think I have reached more people with this tour than I’m ever going to reach if it was an academic journal. I don't know. It's pretty hard for me not to argue that. What does that mean? Is that not impact? I don't know. I just think it takes a little bit of recognition and valuing it.

ANNIE DWYER: Well, I know that that's how I see your project–it's something that is inspiring, and that makes me want to do something as cool as what you have produced. It's just really exemplary work and I'm just so grateful that you were able to talk with me about it today. Thank you, Julian.

JULIAN BARR: Thanks.

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ANNIE DWYER: This episode of *Going Public* was made possible with help from the University of Washington’s Simpson Center for the Humanities staff, particularly, C. R. Grimmer, who is also the Communications Manager at the Simpson Center; our sound editor, Oliver Gordon; and of course, support from The Mellon Foundation. The Mellon initiative at the Simpson Center, *Reimagining the Humanities PhD and Reaching New Publics: Catalyzing Collaboration* was led by Kathleen Woodward, Director of the Mellon initiative, Director of the Simpson Center, and UW Professor of English; Rachel Arteaga, Assistant Director of the Simpson Center and Associate Program Director of the Mellon initiative, and myself, Annie Dwyer, Assistant Program Director of the Mellon initiative. We hope you check out additional episodes of *Going Public* on our website at [www.simpsoncenter.org/goingpublic](http://www.simpsoncenter.org/goingpublic) and wherever you get your podcasts.