

DOK Exchange feat. Chloé Lee and Lucy Hammond – “Bringing Archives to Life Through Immersive Storytelling”

Intro

(music starts) Hello, and welcome to DOK Industry Podcast, season number seven, your podcast about the creative documentary and animated film industries. It is in collaboration with our dear friends, the Programmers of Colour Collective, What's Up with Docs and Talking Shorts. Big shout out to our partners, supporters, and contributors. Please check them out. And hey, it's good to have you here again. Thank you for listening and enjoy the conversation. Here is your DOK Industry Podcast, season number seven. (music fades)

Weronika Lewandowska

Hello, and welcome to the DOK Industry Podcast. This episode is dedicated to extended realities and immersive storytelling. I am your host, Weronika Lewandowska, curator and coordinator of DOK Exchange XR. For those discovering Exchange for the first time, it's DOK Leipzig's program bringing together creators and industry professionals working across XR, games and emerging forms of storytelling. The next edition, focusing on archives, is coming up and will take place from 28th to 30th October in Leipzig. At the heart of the program are three formats. Our conference, where we exchange ideas and practical knowledge. The showcase, where projects in development meet international experts and the prototyping zone, where creators can test their works with the professional audience and international XR community. This year, we are adding something new: a think tank on digital archives in transition, organized together with CPH:DOX and Kunstkraftwerk Leipzig. We will look at how XR and other digital works can be archived and preserved as technologies evolve, but also at the future of spatial data, how AI, cloud infrastructures, and data centers may change the way immersive and interactive storytellers create, store, and access work. And there is another side of the story, not only how we preserve immersive works, but how materials from the past can inspire entirely new experiences. And that's exactly where today's conversation begins, bringing archives to life. My guests are Chloé Lee, creator of *Inter(mediate) Spaces*, and Lucy Hammond, an immersive director whose latest VR work, *Ôl (Haunts)*, recently premiered at Venice Immersive. Both projects have a special connection to DOK Exchange. They were first presented at our showcase at an early stage of the concept and development. And since then, they've made their way to international festivals and audiences. So it's especially exciting for me to see how far they've come. And to welcome you both back. Congratulations, Lucy. Congratulations, Chloé. It's really, really lovely to see you again and have you with us today. It feels like we are catching up with both of you at quite a special moment. So before we dive into the projects, could you tell us a little about yourself and your backgrounds and bring us to wherever you are today? Tell us about some of the exciting things that have happened. I don't know if you have met before, but I know you both were in Venice. So maybe this is a good opportunity to also learn more about your different projects and different perspectives.

Chloé Lee

Yeah, hi, my name is Chloé Lee. I'm an artist, director and producer. I'm happy to be here. And yeah, I'm looking forward to the conversation with Lucy also and hearing about her work. I started with immersive works in... it was actually the pandemic. And I have been a documentary storyteller. And I've also been interested in new formats since the pandemic. And I work mainly in memory formats, like both personal and collective. And so recently, that's come through in immersive archives. I have a project, actually now I'm in Toronto for the first year that they're showcasing the immersive works in the innovation hub. So that's really exciting. And I'm showing a work called *Reflections of Little Red Dot*, which I would say is kind of my first foray into a walkable archive. So I've been really into this theme there of agency, designing and agency. And I think this project is where it first started where people in Singapore, because my mom is Singaporean, I ended up collecting a lot of stories there about people rooting themselves in a place that's always changing and familiar places disappearing. And I think there people were not so affected by change itself. You know, like, they didn't think that that was the issue. It was more of the pace and the fact that they didn't have a say in that process. And so I wanted to bring that into the immersive archive to make these 2D videos relevant for today. And so that's kind of how I started working in archives. And that kind of also led to *Inter(mediate) Spaces*, which I pitched, I think it's been since 2023. And so it's really evolved since then. And I think I'll get into it more as we talk. But yeah, my background is as an artist and also storyteller.

Weronika Lewandowska

Thank you.

Lucy Hammond

Hi, yes. So it's me Lucy speaking. Don't know if I should say that at the beginning. But I am here in my office, the Pilot Theatre office in Yorkshire in the north of England. That's where I'm speaking to you from. And yeah, we're a theatre company mainly, and I'm immersive director here. And my career in immersive sort of began with immersive theatre. So we made a project where young people broke into their school after dark and kind of followed a story in a building that they were familiar with, but in a very unfamiliar way. And then that progressed into a real interest in seeing how you can play with different journeys with space, but also how immersive interaction can really lend itself to kind of quite playful storytelling. And a lot of the storytelling we do at Pilot is really centered on young protagonists and teenage protagonists. So that's been a real focus. My journey to archive is relatively new, really. It's interesting hearing from Chloé about her journey, because I actually have made a project recently where I almost created an archive of sorts myself, which was interviews with nearly 300 teenagers about all manner of things in life, what they do, what they use their money to buy, what they travel to school on, the kind of houses they live in, as a sort of record of what it's like to be a young person in the UK today. But with *Haunts*, this most recent project, it all sort of stemmed from a real root of inspiration via the Museum of Youth Culture to start off with, and an amazing project called 100 Years of Teenage Kicks. And they're an archive that's been collated from members of the public all over the UK, and really cover such a range of experiences from youth clubs to youth music culture, subcultures, and it's all in personal photographs and artifacts. And what I found so fascinating about that was, there is definitely like a collective coming of age experience, no matter what era you're from. And obviously, there's so many different angles on that. But what

really struck me was the commonality of the way that everyone in it, they all look like young people kind of finding their way in the world. And I find that really inspirational. So, as a result of that, I started exploring the world of *Haunts*, and I was then also given the opportunity to look at the archive at the Museum of Youth Culture, and also the National Library of Wales, which have a broadcast archive. So really, I've come in from it from a real, like, angle of looking at young people and how archives kind of speak to that experience, and how archiving that experience is actually quite a new thing. So I think using a new media like immersive to explore these kinds of stories is exciting as well. It kind of feels befitting of what these archives are trying to say, and also the experiences of young people, being a teenager as an immersive experience in itself. So, yeah, that's kind of how I've come round to this moment.

Weronika Lewandowska

I think when I was a teenager, I wasn't interested in archives. You know, it's like, it's not the right moment to really be focused on archives, but actually, we all like collecting things and things and memories from our teenager time. And I think it's very interesting that it can be a topic for young generation when you bring it to immersive work, yeah, when you bring it to immersive storytelling. So maybe it's also, like, a great way to think about it. And also, it's very fragile, yeah, like, our memories are very fragile. I'm very curious how new generation, how young people will collect their memories for future. For sure, most of them are collected as digital images and messages. So, yeah, we are talking here about some private archives. We will come back to this. I first encountered both projects when they were still taking shape. So I am particularly curious about the journey since then. Before we go further, let's briefly introduce the projects themselves, like, from maybe from audience perspective, what kind of experience audience could have, and how you develop those projects. Lucy, now that *Haunts* has premiered in Venice, is it anything like the project you imagined when you first pitched it at our showcase?

Lucy Hammond

Yeah, that's a really interesting question. It's actually, there are many elements that are really quite similar. For instance, when I spoke about *Haunts* at the showcase for DOK Leipzig, it was really about using two-dimensional film in a 3D space in a different sort of way. I'd seen work that had been really effective and really beautiful that had kind of cast archive material, perhaps on flat screens within a 3D space. And I was really excited, and part of my pitch was, and my discussion of the project originally was about stretching that archive into a kind of magic sort of space, like stretching it across the sky or across the floor or thinking about it, about how it could kind of fade in and out of the real environment, well, the generated environment in a VR context. And so that has absolutely kind of stayed at the core of the visual of the project, and actually, I think, means that the archive in the final project that we've shown in Venice for the last two weeks sort of embeds the archive almost like memory, like you would perhaps replay a memory in your mind. So it was really looking from the very beginning from that first idea that we spoke about, trying to push the boundaries of what a two-dimensional archive could potentially look like in storytelling. The thing that is a little bit different is I originally envisaged that the archive would sort of patchwork together to tell the story simply through kind of like drawing upon archival video and images to sort of piece the narrative together. But what really changed was I worked through the commission that kind of got this project funded, I ended up working with an

amazing team of Welsh artists and producers, and it's really important in Welsh, which is a bilingual country in Wales, to kind of work with artists that speak to that experience, and it also felt like a really exciting new angle on the project. So I worked with my co-director, Thomas Chetwode-Barton, who's also the writer on the project, and the story became much more personal and direct as a result, and so we ended up kind of having a really singular voice as the narrative voice, and using the archive to sort of enhance that experience that was being described. So that's where it slightly differs, but I feel like at the core of it is that spirit of trying to find ways of using video archive in unusual and different ways. And I hope that we've been successful at it, but yeah, it's going out to audiences, I guess, and we'll see what feedback we get as people watch it.

Weronika Lewandowska

Yeah, I really love the narrator of the story. It's very poetic, it's very poetic, it's almost like spoken word, and also when you said about this projection on the sky, you literally did it, yeah, inside the VR, you use it. And what, it's like a traveling machine, your experience, so where we are traveling?

Lucy Hammond

So in the story, we traveled to 2006 in rural North Wales, and the reason for that is that we wanted to kind of tell a story, first and foremost, about quite a sort of singular teenage experience that exists all across the UK, but particularly in Wales, about growing up in a really remote location, and how you find your people, and your community, and how you sort of look to your future, where sometimes a rural space, even though it's so open, can feel quite sort of hemmed in, actually, because you're a little bit trapped by transport and all those kinds of things. But also, we set it in 2006, because we had this gorgeous, rich archive of material from the National Broadcast Archive, from the Broadcast Archive in Wales. And it really sort of spoke to that experience as well, of that kind of rural setting, and also a bilingual setting, being between Welsh and English, and the context that you're speaking to people in. And then lastly, I was really intrigued by this idea of teenagers and young people now almost maybe being nostalgic for a time they never lived through, which I think is quite an interesting concept. Like, there's a lot of videos that are on TikTok and social media that sort of really explore this, like, 80s aesthetic, or 90s vibes, or, you know, like, living your life like you were in the noughties, like, coming home, putting your phone away, and watching Gilmore Girls with a candle sort of thing. And I was like, a lot of people doing that didn't live through that era themselves in that same age. So I really wanted to explore that as a concept for millennials who are nostalgic for a time pre-social media, but also for young people now who are kind of strangely, yeah, nostalgic for this time they never lived through. And that's why it's set, and you're transported to that era and place in time.

Weronika Lewandowska

But we are not only, like, traveling in the past, but also inside our heads. Chloé, what changed most along the way for you? Is the project you have today very different from what you imagined at the beginning?

Chloé Lee

Well, I think when I first presented this in, was it, 2023? There was a concept that still had to be further developed. I mean, I think the core of what I had presented was that I was, two things, I was interested in the way that we use technology to connect. You know, there's this promise of connection. And I think, yes, we're able to connect with more people around the world today because of technology. But in person, you know, maybe that creates disconnection. And so I was interested in playing with this idea of how we inhabit spaces together, whether they're physical shared spaces or these virtual shared spaces. And so the project is actually mixed reality, which I think I didn't define at the time. It's a installation, but it's also living labs. So I was interested also in discovering technology. And when I started, it was, you know, generative AI was just coming out. And so it's been kind of like two years so far of research. It was funded by Medienboard in development phase. And actually, we just secured production funding to go another year and a half or so. And so I'm hoping to have, you know, the final version at the end of next year. And we showed a work in progress in Austin at South by Southwest in March. But essentially what I had was that it was two people in a room across a distance. And they would start off solo thinking about, you know, what was important to them in their respective homes, in their place, how they connect in everyday life. And they would eventually move across this poetic distance to meet in the middle. And these are two people who maybe haven't met before. And what does it mean to facilitate this deeper conversation? And, you know, where are we, and again, pulling back to the seam in shaping the environment around us. And so we used real-time generative AI in the headsets. So that way they would see them creating a world together based on their interaction. And so, of course, at the time when I pitched it, we hadn't developed this at all. And it's been a real process because not only were we learning about the tools, of course, everyone knows that AI and this is released, you know, new things are released every day. You know, it was a hard process to kind of keep up. And I think at the time, too, a key thing I learned about creating these tools and thinking about the ethical implications about what we were building and why. I think in the labs, it was really about getting people to slow down, to reflect on what is important to them. How do they imagine the spaces around them? What would they want to see in the future? And so it was actually, these labs were full-day labs where we brought together people in Berlin and New York and Montreal to think about questions of what does home mean? You know, how do they feel about technology? And so the first part of the day had no technology at all. Well, pen and paper counts, I suppose. But it was guided writing exercises where they could get to the heart of also how they felt and then share it with other people in the room. And that was also a whole, I think that was a whole project into itself also, just trying to get together, you know, intergenerational communities. We hosted one in Montreal in Chinatown, for instance, but also bringing in, you know, people who just passed through for work, you know, guerrilla posting, posters to get people together. And so we had some really beautiful, like, in-person workshops. And then we made these custom tools. I worked with Lucas Martinic, who is my co-founder in our Berlin studio, Present Futures. And so he built all this open source pipelines, basically. You know, when I was digging deeper into it, it became apparent because there were so many ethical issues, even using open source models, you know, where I think, for me, a key point was not wanting to share data from people to these bigger corporations collecting data to profit from. And so, for me, the clear direction was open source, which, of course, there are these issues with, you know, they're not the most powerful

models, you know, are they the most realistic images? But I think I took this direction of creating impressionistic worlds. It was more like the essence of what they wanted to express. And so you can see people who came from, you know, Iran's worlds, mixing in with Chinatown, like, dreams of what it could be, of places that are no longer there. And so in the experience, you can go through all these worlds where people respond to similar questions around home and how they envision the place around them. And I think one key thing is, you know, thinking about AI and the implications of this was that it kind of compresses down individual voices for this collective, right? It's this aggregated average, which doesn't really bring out any individual story and the individual becomes erased. So I think this was like a core concept that I wanted to emphasize in this end product, where people are individual first, and then they explore this archive before generating their own world, that they saw what everyone else made, all their other worlds. And they also heard their voices. In the labs, people interviewed each other. And so you can really hear the thought process in what this world represented to them. And so you're introduced to all the worlds that people made in these one-day workshops. And you walk through these portal doors. So every individual is a world unto itself. Because with AI models and LLMs, it's the opposite. The individual gets erased. So I wanted to really emphasize that. And they come through this concept. And then they land in a shared middle space where they then can open up and they take off their headphones, actually. And they actually, they see each other's form. We used MR capability, mixed reality capability, where you kind of see this organic outline of them and this kind of like gradient pastel image. And you hear their voice because you're standing next to them. And so we had some interesting responses where it brings up themes of accessibility and communication, where, like an avatar, say, in VR chat, right, where there's no pressure to be seen, like, in your physical self. We kind of had that, too, where people felt the intimacy of an in-person conversation and the human voice, but didn't feel the pressure of, you know, looking at someone eye to eye. And so it's kind of become more of a social experiment, I would say, than previously. And it's been really interesting because we've also demoed in all three cities before we showed it in Austin.

Weronika Lewandowska

It sounds like very complex ecosystem that you created really, like, a huge research to create this work. And it's still in the process, yeah, it's like you are still learning each time you have new workshops, and you bring new knowledge and new connections. So I can see that both works are connected also with bringing different generations of people and connecting them. Do you see any meeting points? Have you noticed them?

Chloé Lee

Yeah, well, Lucy, when you were talking about, like, you were really interested by young people's nostalgia for a time that they hadn't actually lived through.

Lucy Hammond

Yeah.

Chloé Lee

I mean, this kind of brought me back to *Reflections of Little Red Dot*, which kind of inspired the format, because that format of immersive archive, just to bring it back to the topic of discussion, is very different than this immersive archive. That was older. And actually, I used a custom

analog projector, and we made, you know, custom slides. And so it merged this old technology that's now obsolete, I would say, with the headset. And that was actually inspired by young people who were trying to preserve places that were important to them in their childhood, and this kind of slower time that they didn't actually experience themselves. It's interesting, like a romanticism for a time that didn't exist, that, you know, they also don't see the downsides of that time, you know... and it, to me, it's like a, you know, a criticism of the current pace of life. You know, it's more a criticism of what's happening around them, and they look for something that's missing in that. And I think it's maybe this nonstop, you know, pace of needing to go to work, and to always keep working, to always be productive.

Lucy Hammond

I also think there's that thing, isn't there about, it's interesting generating this work, using, and showing it to people using technology. It's a bit like you were saying as well, Weronika, it's like, in terms of archive, in a traditional sense, it's quite tactile, actually, there is paper, there's real handwriting, there's, you know, like, in terms of people thinking about historical archive. And I think that, as you say, Chloé, it's like using, using older technology, interestingly, in our piece, we decided to use a kind of older style of shorthand for the way the technology looked, as well, in terms of the noughties. So, like, things do look like they're projected on an older kind of projector, there is, like, a real grain to the footage anyway, because it was broadcast material from the noughties, which has its own sort of quality, but we, like, really kind of amp that up a little bit in the look of that. And I think, I think, as well, it's interesting, you're talking about open source AI, but also the idea of, like, corporations and our data, and this whole kind of additional layer to our personal lives that exists. And not just for young people, but for everyone now, like, all of our memories in our own personal archives are kind of at the behest of much larger corporations, potentially, to just, like, pull the plug at any moment of our whole archive of our lives, actually. And so, I do think it's really interesting, kind of walking that line between, yeah, nostalgia, the reality of what those eras were, but also kind of, like, using that lens from that nostalgia of the past to look at where we are now, and what will exist in 20 years' time of now, and how will that look and feel, and what's the texture of it, you know? Like, what is that aesthetic? I don't know. It's a really interesting question to me, yeah.

Weronika Lewandowska

This brings us to a question about what kind of archival materials did you work with, and where did you find them? And, Lucy, in *Haunts*, I'm really interested in the way different media and different traces of technology, as you mentioned, seem to coexist, because we have an old television screen, but also the noise distortion and glitches associated with particular media, and also a glitched building facade, which, that almost looks like contemporary projection mapping, and there's almost holographic images in the sky created from archival material, so you also bring a technology, and you bring different devices to give us a sense of time. And archival material is not only present through its content, you also seem to bring in the texture, imperfections, and visual language of different media. And maybe to borrow McLuhan's phrase, is the medium part of the message here, and where did this way of working with archive material come from? So what kind of archives you are using?

Lucy Hammond

Oh, great. That was so beautifully insightful. Thank you so much. I think everything you said really sort of tracks the process in a way, but I think a lot of it stemmed from one of the co-producers on this work, and the lead co-producer was Wales Millennium Centre, who brought about the commission of this project via the National Broadcast Archive of Wales, which is housed in this incredible building in Aberystwyth, which is on the coast, in sort of like the middle, halfway down Wales. It's beautiful. Thomas and I went to the archive, and what is fascinating about that work is that they are already, like, chasing the tail of formats that are going extinct in terms of, like, broadcast archiving, both sort of radio archive and television and film. And in that building, they have these incredible machines that are converting old film stock from television broadcast stations into a digital archive. And then they've also got machines that are looking at, like, mini-disc formats. There's all these different, like, old technologies that they are really trying to, like, grab a different format off of before the machines that can convert them completely sort of die out themselves. All the people that can repair them die, which is kind of an amazing concept, really, that there's some of the machinery, there's one guy that can fix this machine, and he's already in his mid-70s, they were telling us. And so delving into that portion of it was already inspirational in terms of, like, exploring the materiality of those formats and the sort of the imperfections, how film stock doesn't last forever, it does kind of decay. But also how in broadcast media, like, especially some of the news reel footage we were using, like, it has this certain grainy quality that does look 20 years old now, but at the time you wouldn't have thought twice about. So I think it was really important to, like, translate that. But I also think that in terms of that material, for instance, like, the glitching and kind of using it stretched across space, I feel like that was sort of all part of the way we were trying to explore this idea of, like, memory and nostalgia, and how it can kind of trick you into not being quite like it was originally. How you could, almost like your mind sort of glitches when you're thinking back towards things, was it really like that, or, like, did I really see it in that way? And also, I think we wanted to really sort of embed that idea of filmed stuff of real people from news footage, et cetera, kind of being sort of part of our everyday lives, but also, yeah, being part of our really strong memories. So that was, like, a really, a really big part of it, and there is a moment in it when you're in a slate quarry where there's a free party happening, and you turn to the side, and you actually see some really old footage, which shows young people in Wales with, like, ponies that were used in the quarries that is all in black and white that was saved from really old film stock. So we tried to sort of really kind of layer up that, that element of the archive. So, yeah, it was, it was interesting, and, like, seeing the material really informed what we wanted to use, and how the pieces were then chosen to be in certain scenes, and stretched from, starting from a television screen, to then being across the whole sky in a later moment. So, yeah, it was very much about that process of looking at the minutia, but also, like, stretching it in the way memories stretch and morph and change, and, yeah, the magic of that.

Weronika Lewandowska

It's, it's like a dream in your VR. Both of your projects have very different relationship with archival material, and also, if I'm wrong, just tell me, but I see it in this way, and also very different relationships with memory. But in both cases, archive becomes something more than a collection of things from the past. I remember when I was working on my VR piece a night for a few years ago, I was fascinated by the idea that VR could become a new memory for a person

entering the world, the immersive world. And I think you mentioned something similar, Chloé, about, like, creating new memories, and I, I was also really interested in how you put it on your website, because you have a really beautiful website dedicated to *Inter(mediate) Spaces*. And you describe your first VR work as exploring a new way of remembering, you said that that was exploration, that, like, you were looking for a new way of remembering. And then with *Inter(mediate) Spaces*, when you move to Berlin, you found yourself in a place where, where you had no personal history, no memories attached to it. So there seems to be an interesting shift from exploring new ways of remembering, to asking how we can connect with a place we have no memories of. And is that where the idea of a living archive comes in? What does a living archive mean to you in *Inter(mediate) Spaces*?

Chloé Lee

Yeah, I think a living archive, to me, I'll first just say is, I think that's why I choose the format of an immersive archive, because I think archival material, if you think about it in terms of a public archive, how often, even though it's accessible to people, do people really engage with it, even if they make it on site? Or if they click on their browser, and they go through an archive, how engaged are they really in that material? And so to me, I think, broadly speaking, a living archive is something that is put in a new format for people to engage with it deeply. And that's sometimes hard, you know, if it's just a series of photos with very cryptic captions and data attached to it. And the visitor has to do a lot of work, because it's not easy to engage with it, you know, it's not people are used to these short social media clips. And so I mean, I don't think the work that I do, really takes that format of a social media clip, which some people do. And I think that's really interesting. But it's somewhere in between for me. I think this ephemerality that you're talking about, that memory is always shifting is always present in the works. Since they're presenting the archival materials, being presented in new ways in every project, temporal world is point clouds that are always shifting, it's a little similar to *Inter(mediate) Spaces* where you see your own presence through your interaction in the environment. So in temporal world, that means, if you're moving too quickly, actually, all the memories these environments are all disintegrating, and you can sculpt the walls. In *Inter(mediate) Spaces*, it's the fact that you're world building with your words and your interactions with someone else, you know, it's not solely you. I think that was the big step was that this is a collective experience. This is a collective decision making, like we do this together, and maybe the onus of creating the space that you want, is not just on you. In *Reflections of Little Red Dot*, which I kind of squeezed in in between the two, I think it, it bridges a lot of the ideas I was exploring, too. It's a collective archive that's older, you know, it was over 10 years old. And it was all about how a place was changing so quickly, and the inability to root yourself. And for me, that's a universal discussion. But I, I chose that format of an archive instead of a linear documentary, which I originally intended. Because if I'm talking about collective memory, and I'm not Singaporean, my mom is, so I was like an insider outsider, you know, how do I really take care of these stories that people trusted me with, like being a steward of, you know, a whole group of people's stories, I wouldn't say that I'm telling the collective story of one place. But I do feel a tremendous amount of responsibility. And that's why I edited them in a looser way, for instance. But you have a projected roundtable discussion where you hear people's stories, you see kind of trace outlines of their bodies, which is similar to temporal world where, you know, they're there, there's just a trace of them, but they're essentially gone. And we're in a present moment where I, I showed the entire space that

you're in, you know, a fairly blank space, which is stools, blank walls, and the archive, the video archive is what you see in the present, you know, you're rooted in the present. And I could have upgraded those to be stereoscopic 3D videos, but they're not, they're clearly shot in, you know, over 10 years ago, and I didn't want to expand them to 3D, because I wanted it, the material to say, hey, this is old material, I want it to reflect the time period in which it was documented. And the window is actually AI generated, like, changing landscape of Singaporean landscapes, and I used the transcripts for every single person. So that way, you would see the landscape based on the place that they were talking about and their sentiment. And that's what led to *Inter(mediate) Spaces*, I think, like, I didn't feel like that this was really empowered, like, they weren't generating these images themselves. And that's why in *Inter(mediate) Spaces*, the participants actually make their own archival. Like, the only way to ensure that people are able to tell their own stories is to literally just give them the tools, you know, and so it's been a long journey, and that's why that project is kind of so complicated. It's trying to address so many things that I couldn't in previous works. Yeah, I don't know. I think my projects always leave me feeling like, you know, I want to do more, and they just want to keep going. But I think it's good in the sense that I just bring them to a new project.

Weronika Lewandowska

Sounds great. Like, new questions are coming, and the next project will answer new questions from the project.

Chloé Lee

Yeah. Well, like, I think living archive in *Inter(mediate) Spaces* has meant that this project travels, like you hear how people are feeling now, you know, like such pessimism around AI, like a lot of doomsday, which rightfully so. And, like, someone told me, I showed it in Onyx in a demo, just like a working version, and they said, I'd be interested in seeing this back in 10 years in New York, and to see how people feel, like, around the current events that are changing. And so this is a different spin on living archive, where it's actually constantly being added to, and it's being created in the present versus, like, looking back at existing archives. So I think that's interesting.

Weronika Lewandowska

Yeah, but the approach could be really different, and I'm wondering, Lucy, when you hear the phrase living archive, what does it mean to you? And is it related to this project you have just premiered, or maybe a new project you are developing?

Lucy Hammond

My gosh, living archive. It already, it's so funny, I can see, it's so funny you're talking about, like, point clouds and stuff, because it almost, in my mind, looks like that, like a sort of shifting, amorphous, like, developing thing, which is sort of amazing. And I imagine quite unwieldy, actually, in lots of ways, like, it's something that is, in an exciting way, you know, growing all the time. No, it's funny, because my approach completely with our project was sort of, it's kind of the opposite, totally. It was, like, re-examining an era quite specifically, and really trying to, like, conjure a feeling of nostalgia deliberately to kind of examine what that is, and why we feel like that about, particularly, our kind of coming-of-age stories. So, for me, it was more about, like, examining the way in which, like, the media that is perhaps throwaway in the moment, when you

analyse it at a later date, actually kind of has a strange importance to you. Perhaps a certain type of newsreader, or the way people have presented themselves during quite a casual two-minute interview during a news segment, like, can suddenly really make you relate to something that you, in the moment, wouldn't have realised, but in reflection. So, again, actually, as you were saying, Chloé, like, people being interested in how, what this would be like to experience in 10 years time is really fascinating. But I think it also perhaps brings up another question, which I'm interested about your thoughts on this, Chloé, actually, is, like, how are you archiving your own work? Like, how are you thinking about preserving some of this process and this work to be able to show it in 10 years? Because it is a really big question that surrounds a lot of immersive work at the moment. Like, how can artists archive their own work, and how can people see it in the future? So, I'm interested in your thoughts.

Chloé Lee

Yeah, this is the big question, right? I mean, we're working with these technologies that are every year becoming obsolete, it seems. I was just talking about how there should be immersive retrospectives, you know? I mean, film has it. Why not XR? I guess very costly. But, yeah, I think for one of the projects, I was actually looking to do a projection map version, *Reflections*, just because it is quite minimal, actually, in what you see in the headset. And with *Inter(mediate) Spaces*, there are actually quite a lot of layers. Surprise, surprise. There's, like, the web version that I want to do, where people can access the archive. I think the labs themselves are a point where people can actually experience it. But if I want to be truthful about what the, like, if everything just kind of burned down, I think the physical, tangible book and written material and documentation is the way to go. Like, I always try to document that. But, yeah, I think it's also in, like, I work with Lucas Martinic, a developer, like, trying to use systems that are more easily ported to new devices that other institutions might have. As you know, it's very costly to port things. But, yeah, we try to use, like, the most standard headsets that can have the capability. So, like, a Quest 3, I think there's the urge to always go to the latest and best. But I think in terms of trying to distribute and show these works, it's already a format that, you know, people just don't have the infrastructure to show. And that's actually a key point in, like, the latest phase of the project, *Inter(mediate) Spaces*, where we did get some funding from Magog, and I'm thinking about the social impact. You know, I had actually met John Keene from Austin, who was, he just, he just came across the showcase. He loved the project, and he just wanted to bring it to Philadelphia. And so, right now, we're working with him just to do, like, a grassroots showing. Because I think that, yeah, like, anyone who just wants to bring it somewhere, like, they should be able to do that. But right now, it's just not really possible. You know, it's a museum showing, you know, and they have technicians. But even then, even if you're a technician, it doesn't mean that you have the technical knowledge of your specific project, even if it's not that complicated.

Lucy Hammond

Yeah. Yeah.

Chloé Lee

Right? And so, I guess, for me, it's, like, layers. It's, like, how can we make a different version that makes sense for another format that can communicate the ideas that I want to communicate? Is it similar for you?

Lucy Hammond

Absolutely. I think it's so interesting to hear this, because it's really making me think more so. I kind of always knew this, but it's really confirming this idea for me that it is, obviously, I work for a theater company. We are a theater company, first and foremost. And it feels like, even though we're working with what is often, like, placed adjacent to film, that actually we are kind of operating in this sort of live space. It's, like, everything is sort of a performance that has to be staged, in a way, using the technology as our kind of medium of delivery. But it's the same way, like, how do we archive live performance? It's, like, every show is slightly different. It lasts for maybe six months maximum, maybe, or some performances only run for a month. And it is making me think more and more, you're right, it's, like, you're having to re-stage this almost every time and rethink those formats. And you're right, you kind of have to pull it away from, perhaps, its, like, original mode of delivery and adapt constantly. And I think that that takes a lot of energy, but also it is an interesting process. But I can't think of another sort of industry that is, like, or another way of telling stories or engaging people that requires this much adaptation and rethinking and kind of remodeling every single time it's shown to audiences. And that does warrant a bit more wider discussion, actually, like, the reformatting of work, but also, in your case as well, the contribution of different communities and groups of people. Again, it's re-staged, remade. I think that's really fascinating and exciting. Yeah, cool. So it's going to be great in Philadelphia. It's amazing. It's also great that someone kind of came in and, like, was inspired to take it to their community. It just shows that, like, the thought, the ideology and thought process behind the artwork, it really is speaking to people and they can see it being rooted in several different contexts, which I think is so cool. Yeah.

Weronika Lewandowska

Yeah, that's the huge challenge, preserving technology and preserving immersive experiences, but also, like, very complex hybrid works. Yeah, because I think, Chloé, your work is more hybrid, it's using physical venue, like, and it's not only existing as a data folder on your computer. It's really, like, interaction. And, Chloé, you said, you talked a bit about challenges you had during working with AI. But do you both met some other challenges in working with archives? Maybe some creative, legal issues came up during your work. Can you share it? I think it's, like, a huge knowledge that we can really be prepared when we start working with archives, that there is something more we have to take into account.

Chloé Lee

I don't know if you want to start with any legal issues, because I think I've worked directly with people.

Lucy Hammond

Yeah, sure. So, this was actually the role that our incredible executive producer, David Massey, was really undertaking as part of this project. We were working with what was, and is, obviously, an existing archive at the National Library of Wales. But there are many individual rights holders that still hold the rights for individual clips within that archive. So, you're not negotiating. This will be different in different contexts, obviously, but for this project, they house archive, which is from BBC, from major British channels, ITV, from the Welsh language channel, S4C as well. And also from, like, much smaller channels that no longer exist, et cetera. It goes on and on. And so, what was sort of difficult was that whilst we were kind of engaging with one centralized archive

of material, the rights holders were many various, kind of, like, had to be found out for each various clip that we wanted. And that was a real challenge, to be honest, it was really challenging. And also, each clip, no matter how sort of incidental, had to be negotiated in terms of the usage. And also, actually, explaining the usage of these clips in an immersive context for perhaps people that are used to more traditional media is also a challenge. Like, well, what do you mean it's going to be used in a virtual reality experience? Is that a game? Is it a commercial game? It's like, no, it's not really that, but it is on a VR headset. And there are those kinds of linguistic, like, challenges around finding a common language to kind of understand the context in which the work's going to be shown and used. And also, things to do with international, very boring, but, you know, like, international territories, local territories, making sure that we were able to show the work internationally and having that pre-agreed and negotiated. This wasn't the case for Venice, but with some festivals, they give you a really short turnaround to have your work approved to be, you know, be part of the festival after you've been accepted. So it could be, like, as short as a week, and sometimes that week might not be long enough to agree the rights to show at that festival because global rights weren't necessarily possible. So, yeah, there were challenges, but thankfully we overcame them. But it's interesting, people that managed to see *Haunts*, me describing all of this might seem kind of a bit mad in a way because the archive feels so embedded into the scenery of the project. It's not like we're using the archive to tell the story in a narrative sense. So I think people might be surprised at the amount of work that there is behind, including those images and clips in our work. So, yeah, it was my first experience of this. And, yeah, it really opened my eyes, actually, to the challenges of using existing archival material in work of this type, for sure. But, yeah, I've got the experience now, so who knows? Next time I might be a little bit more, approach it slightly differently. But, yeah, it was definitely a process for us.

Weronika Lewandowska

A lot of knowledge on how to develop the storytelling with some archives, but also, like, I think AI is bringing a lot here because also AI has different regulations in different countries. Chloé, do you have any, like, experience with it?

Chloé Lee

I think when working with AI, I think there's just inherently ethical implications. I mean, just the fact that even open source, I mean, this was all trained from people's works that were stolen. And so being able to, I guess, be transparent about how these archives are being made was something I wanted to put in the design of the experience. So I think, for me, it's usually the challenge in archives is the ethics of telling people's stories, how I do it, and what creative liberties that I take in that process. And developing, say, like, the visual language. We did use, turn some of the works into Gaussian splat 3D that were 2D scenes. And I have to think, you know, how different is this looking than what someone originally intended, you know? I mean, I think, more broadly speaking, older archives, like, if it's a photograph, right, and if you even add some motion and a person's arm is in a position where it looks like they're about to do something, you know, how much motion are you adding? Like, what are you really making this person do? Was that what they really intended? How much are you blowing up something in the background to emphasize it? I think these kinds of decisions that we make as authors, you know, I guess I really think about those a lot. And I think using AI, it's about transparency and,

okay, my intention, and maybe it's not perfect. For instance, when people are generating the worlds in their room and the shared space and the experience, we actually decided to make the internal reasoning of AI visible so you could see your transcript live. So there's, like, this layer of digital literacy that was my addressing the problem of the ethics was to make it more transparent. And I think part of the process, too, in the labs, that was it. It's this component of digital literacy, like, people don't know how these things work. So it's part education and then teaching people in a playful way. And so then that also appears in the experience where you see the transcript live. You see the mistakes. We used WhisperX, Fast Whisper, to do the transcription from voice to text. And then you see there's actually, like, two agents communicating that are also open-source, LLAMA. And you can actually see them trying to interpret the conversation. You can see it's not perfect. You know, we're not perfect. It's trained off of us. And you see all the mistakes. And you can see if it's hallucinating because so often in the case, that's true. And I feel like in AI generation, projects that use this, you're not really sure, right? Like, you know it's being generated and you just see this environment. And supposedly it's based off what, you know, we're saying and we're giving to it. But, you know, it was more about showing the flaws, too, and just learning how it works. And so then being able to change what you're inputting and outputting and making that playful and not saying that this is, you know, definitive. You know, this is your world of, you know, the beach and the trees by where you grew up. And making sure that it's apparent that this is not perfect and this is where we're at.

Weronika Lewandowska

Yeah, we are all, like, producing a lot of data. I am just wondering, where are you storing all data, Chloé?

Chloé Lee

That's a good question. So in the live generation, we tell people right in the beginning that it's not being recorded. So we actually just don't store any of those conversations. And afterwards, there's an off-boarding area where if they want to opt in at the installation to also leave something behind, they can. And they can generate something after. I think I wanted people to have this kind of... feel comfortable sharing and, like, to actually create a space that has intimacy, that people can genuinely connect. And I think that there's something there because people have come away being friends, you know. And the upside of, like, say, WhisperX is that it is trained on all these languages. So people can come together and speak different languages. So, you know, there's some surprises that are also good. But, yeah, my rule of thumb is that everything is very transparent also in the consent process. So in the workshops, actually, people only sign the consent form after I've explained everything in person. And they can opt in, like, visuals, can we use your voice, you know. And so it's actually a list of check boxes on the release forms. And they can always message me to revoke that. And then I'll remove that. So it's good to stay there.

Weronika Lewandowska

It sounds like onboarding and offboarding is super important when you use AI in your project to really be transparent and describe everything. Because we are wrapping up, I want to ask you what we would like to leave behind us today. Is there anything, like, any advice you would like

to give to people listening to us about working with archives? Or you would like to create some manifesto for sustainable use of data? Any thoughts about it?

Chloé Lee

Wow, a manifesto. I'm not sure about a manifesto. But I think that what's interesting about immersive archives is it lets people kind of weave together their own narrative. And depending on what the story is that they're exploring, I think that the format of the archive can look many ways. And I think it's easy to get caught up in, you know, all the innovations that the technology offers. But to always come back to, like, the heart of what the archive is or the sentiment. So, yeah, I think that it should be story first.

Lucy Hammond

Yeah, that's a great answer. Story should absolutely come first. And I was going to say, in a way, I think if you are a person that is looking to kind of start telling your own stories or even looking for, like, visual inspiration or, like, stimuli that kind of get you excited, I would really recommend maybe stepping away from a search engine or a digital kind of way into that and perhaps explore locally what material physical archives you can go and access. Because, as Chloé said earlier in our conversation, a lot of these things are open public access historical archives, sometimes held in libraries or local museums. And you can get access to them. And even if you're not looking perhaps specifically for a particular person or thing, I found it incredibly inspiring, even just seeing the way the film stock was different for all these different bits of broadcast archive, understanding the size and weight of some of the machinery that's used to kind of preserve it. There was something really poetic and beautiful about seeing that process, but also being able to, like, hold or see a real photograph or a real bit of writing from someone can be really inspirational. So I think in a world where easy access, in terms of, like, seeing things on a digital screen, like your laptop can feel a bit, like Chloé was saying earlier, like a quick connection, actually to really, like, hold the hand that reaches out from the past, if you're interested in that kind of storytelling, is a really great place to start. And I think, especially if you're starting out with something, it could be a really eye-opening experience to go and explore what's available to you.

Weronika Lewandowska

We will definitely explore more this topic during DOK Exchange XR in Leipzig in a couple of weeks. Of course, you are invited.

Lucy Hammond

Thank you for inviting me, Veronica. And also, I can't believe it's been, like, two and a half years or whatever since I pitched this. I know. Like, how does the time go past? It's crazy. So, yeah, thank you for, like, sort of bringing to life that process again, actually, of, like, also the realization of, like, how long it does take to get a project to audiences.

Weronika Lewandowska

I agree a lot of time. Yeah, so it's also, like, be really, you know, like, insist and don't give up.

Lucy Hammond

Yeah, it takes a long time.

Chloé Lee

I mean, yeah, it's, to sum that up, I just feel like you should try to enjoy the process as much as possibly because it's so iterative and you hit all these roadblocks. And sometimes I, you know, wake up and it's like, okay, we, like, why am I doing this, you know? It's easy to forget why you started the project in the first place. That's how long the journey is. Yeah.

Lucy Hammond

Hard to relate to that, for sure. There's moments where you're like, hang on a minute. Well, yeah, why are we examining this again? Why are we looking at this? But then you do it full circle again back. You're like, oh, of course. This is what I started out and I intended. But I do think that when you're thinking about that timeline, it's not a case of, like, you know, a year even from the conception of an idea to starting to talk to people about it, to finding the money to make it, to kind of getting it out to people. It is years. And I think that is kind of amazing because you sort of only see, perhaps publicly, people only really see the tip of the iceberg of that. Like, they see the Venice premiere or they see the, you know, the demo at some big festival or whatever. And it's, like, actually behind that is, yeah, a hell of a lot of, like, self-doubt, but also, you know, like, determination, a lot of conversations. And so it's really nice to, yeah, to have an insight into those processes. And actually, it does take a long time, especially, especially if you're making work where you have to be really careful and thoughtful about your process and the people that are involved in making the work because you can't rush that. And, like, it's really important to take the time to make sure that you're doing your due process, which I think hearing your process around permissions and stuff is really important because I think in the race to get stuff made, that can potentially fall by the wayside when actually for the longevity of a project, that's got to be, like, at the core of it.

Chloé Lee

Yeah, I actually sacrificed a little on production value even because, I mean, I mentioned, they interview each other. They just kind of, like, pass the torch back and forth. I mean, I could have, you know, had them just go into the bathroom or some stall and just talk to themselves, but, you know, that's not very fun for them. And so I was like, okay, well, we'll just see what we'll get. Just see what people want to contribute if it's not, you know, all the answers to all the questions I want. That's okay. Yeah.

Weronika Lewandowska

Yeah, I would love to read your notes, like, you know, your own archive of the process.

Chloé Lee

It kind of exists. I mean, yeah. Actually, this has been great because, yeah, like Lucy was saying, when you asked, you know, how much has it changed, I had to, like, dig back really far. I was like, I don't remember exactly what I said in the beginning. Yeah.

Lucy Hammond

Also, I think sometimes with my own archiving of my own process, I really am, like, I talk, but I don't, like, write the notes, like, as words. I'll, like, talk and, like, draw, like, spatially what I mean, which I think is really funny because then at the end of a meeting, people are like, great, just, like, show me what you've, just let's share what we've, and I'm like, oh, it looks like one of those

things. You know, and they do, like, a play-by-play and, like, a sports thing with arrows and stuff. And, like, for me, it's like, yeah, that makes total sense. But I think if you showed it to someone else that it would, it could, you would have no idea what was going on in those notes at all.

Chloé Lee

I have some of those.

Lucy Hammond

So much of it's, like, a process like that. Yeah. So funny.

Chloé Lee

Is that, like, the choreography of people moving through?

Lucy Hammond

Yeah exactly.

Chloé Lee

Because that's why I have those, too, where it's, like, like, a floor plan. And I have a lot of those, and you can see the different versions of it. Actually, something, another tip would be, I think I'm better at it now, you know, also talking about the venues and showing it and making it accessible. But trying to think about that process earlier versus after you have this completed immersive work, especially if it's an installation or any location-based experience. Yeah, because it's hard. Like, all the spaces are so different. And, like, we even had to, we have, like, a long walkway, right? Like, this idea they're traveling over a distance. It's really beautiful. But, like, how many places have this long walkway and I could do multiple sets? Like, not many. So we actually have it so it can snake. Like, you could draw out the rooms and you can modularly assemble it. But yeah, I wish, you know, like, I thought about this for earlier projects, like, a little earlier. Not, like, in the concept development, but, like, in the design, the user design.

Lucy Hammond

Yeah, that's the thing. That's why I talk about theater. It's like touring theater. It's like you're going to go into a really small space and then a really big space. And then not all the technical things are the same. And also you don't know which spaces are going to want to receive the work when you're, like, doing the conception of it. So you're right, that adaptability is, like, massively important. And, yeah, it's hard, though, when you're starting out. And especially if you've got, like, budget constraints or, like, commissioner constraints or whatever. And you're really wanting to get the work on the road. It is important to think about it. And it does save money in the long run, actually, to take the time to do that because you're not having to remake anything that's essential to the experience for people. But that's why *Haunts*, actually, is it's a VR film, really. So it's great that it just sort of, like, exists on a headset and can kind of sit on its own. But when I did my first project with a live actor and, like, all that other stuff, I was like, yeah, people will love this because there's a live actor and two people in a room. But then after, like, six months of trying to make it work in all the various ways, we were all absolutely exhausted because it was so complicated to try and stage it at different places. Yeah.

Weronika Lewandowska

Thank you. Thank you very much, both of you. It's been really wonderful to meet you again, especially after first encountering these projects when they were still taking shape and now seeing the lives they've developed beyond the early stage. Congratulations again, and hopefully we will bring your works to Leipzig. We will bring you and your next very promising projects for our showcase.

Lucy Hammond

Thank you so much.

Chloé Lee

Thank you for having me.