

Whale Chat

Whale Chat is a website that offers a multi-layered digital investigation of an oral history artifact to convene several points in time as a way of maintaining, building and activating the vibrancy of the historical knowledge it contains. In this case, the artifact is an excerpt from the conversation between Ramona Peters and Dr. Jason Mancini on the subject of Indian Whaling. At the time of the recording, August 2013, Peters and Mancini were collaborating on the gathering of artifacts for whaling exhibits. The original recording took place at the Mashpee Wampanoag Indian museum, the site of Peters's subsequent exhibit.

My goal with this project is to weave together knowledge rooted in the events discussed in the recording (18-19th centuries), knowledge activated at the time of the recording, and observations and associations emerging from my interaction with the recording today. Building on my family connection to Ramona Peters, my mother, and my own interest in Wampanoag activism, my "marginalia" offer my personal insight related to the conversation. Through this transparent bridge building and acknowledgement of my hand in the presentation of the project, I am attempting to "join" the Whale Chat in a way that collapses the imposed structures of timeline based historical recounting. Items from the Peters and Mashpee Tribal archives are included as a means of "illuminating" the text, while clips of the speakers are embedded into the site to offer a sense of the tone of the conversation. The different approaches to sharing knowledge are apparent in the conversation. While Peters's recounting stems from lightning fast associations of many moments in time at once, Mancini tends to stay on a track—continuously offering information that hovers

around an area of focus. This aspect of the exchange offers an interesting glimpse at the dynamic of academic thought structures, often more structured to defend insights, in contact with Indigenous thought ways, at times channeling intense experiences of interconnectivity through location and time.

Although this project was partly built as a personal exercise to deeply engage with the knowledge shared in this recording, I also see my tribe and academic historians of Indigenous whaling, activism, and slavery as a potential audience. As I mentioned, the dynamic between the two speakers, neither appearing to guide or shape the conversation while freely offering their knowledge related to the topics that emerge, is informative in its expression of equal collaboration.

My main issue in developing this project has been time. I have managed to develop new skills in Otter.ai and GarageBand which will come in tremendously handy as I move forward with my work, but I know there is even more that could be done given more time. Interestingly, I was relieved of the task of selecting an endpoint of this phase of the project, as Otter.ai limited my free transcription to about 30 minutes. I, however, was not as lucky in being relieved of the task of selecting representative sound clips to include in the project. This proved to be quite tricky, and revealed quite loudly the heavy hand I must have in shaping the user's experience. Given more time, I might have chosen different clips, or edited the existing ones.

Building this project further would need to include closer collaboration with Dr. Mancini. Images related to his areas of interest with equally poignant or impactful ties to his specific relationship with them were not as forthcoming. I could see a gallery being built out to include more images

as a whole, a list of resources to learn more about the topics discussed, and a digital expression of the whaling exhibits Mancini and Peters eventually exhibited.