From Roots to Digital Realms: Jordan Jamieson on Revitalising Indigenous Culture through Archaeology and Technology

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Background

Jordan Jamieson, a Michi Saagig (Mississauga) knowledge keeper and Lead Field Liaison Representative for the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation from the Department of Consultation and Accommodation (MCFN-DOCA), brings over a decade of experience in archaeology and cultural resource management (CRM) within the treaty territory. Growing up amidst the revitalisation of Indigenous culture, Jordan fosters learning and community allyship. He serves as an Anishinaabe leader and youth ambassador, advocating for dialogue between Indigenous and settler archaeologists in Canada.

Since completing the 'train the trainer' program from the Ontario Archaeological Society, Jordan has regularly offered training sessions for Indigenous Field Liaison Representatives. He is also a key researcher on a research project that aims to teach Anishinaabek Mississauga traditional practices and archaeology in a way that centres Mississauga knowledge, community learning and capacity building. As an emerging artist, Jordan is also making waves in music as MR. SAUGA. Grounded in the traditional and cultural influences of the Michi Saagiig people, his music blends Indigenous culture with experimental sounds and storytelling. Infusing his heritage into lyrics, rhythms, and themes, Jordan offers a refreshing and authentic perspective, showcasing who he is and sharing his passion with the world.

Abstract and Purpose of this Interview

This interview with Jordan Jamieson explores the intersections of archaeology, technology, and the revitalisation of Indigenous cultural practices. With over ten years of experience in archaeology and cultural resource management (CRM), Jamieson reflects on the role of his upbringing in a community actively reclaiming its cultural practices and situates his work within wider trends towards decolonising archaeology in Canada. The interview begins with an overview of Jamieson's own story and how those formative experiences have led him to where he is now advocating for Indigenous perspectives in archaeology. He stresses the positive potential of technology — particularly its ability to challenge the androcentric, colonial structures that have often been imposed on the discipline.

This interview examines tools like virtual reality, digital archives and 3D printing, and how these tools are used to preserve cultural heritage, by rematriating artefacts and engaging youth in Indigenous knowledge through cultural education. In addition to promoting community-based archaeological standards and procedures formed by Indigenous voices, Jamieson draws attention to the ethical concerns associated with digitisation, including ownership, authenticity, and accessibility. For the purpose of cultural preservation, he places a strong emphasis on the role that young people play as guardians of their emerging traditions and knowledge systems. This interview broadens the discussion of archaeology to include cultural themes, engaging readers beyond the traditional archaeological audience. The conversation also explores the roles of music, storytelling, and the creation of new spiritual spaces in cultural revitalisation. For Jamieson, technology is a tool that bridges traditional knowledge and modern innovation, creating a deeper connection to Indigenous heritage and inspiring collective learning and empowerment for generations to come. This interview offers a compelling narrative for readers interested in the evolving intersections of archaeology, culture, and technology through decolonisation.

Keywords

Indigenous culture, cultural resource management, decolonisation, rematriation, digitisation, youth engagement.

Sacha Samouk:

Can you share how your early experiences and upbringing within the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and your own community influenced your journey into Indigenous archaeology and cultural resource management?

Jordan Jamieson:

I guess for me, it wasn't apparent. I didn't know my upbringing was going to have the impact that it had in the work that I do now in being a Lead Field Liaison Representative (FLR) working in cultural resource management (CRM). So, I was raised in a traditional lifestyle. My parents and my family, my extended family, were one of the first adopters in the community of bringing culture back [...]. I, fortunately enough got to grow up with that foundation and that coming back into the community. Before that, everybody was united under a Methodist or Catholic church. And without getting too far into the details of it all, there was time where culture, time where ceremony, song, and dances were frowned upon. You weren't allowed to practice them openly [...]. I guess that feels weird to say of having a fear of your own culture, but a lot of people live with that. It's a real feeling [...]. So that was the incentive for me. I know you have some questions around digital incorporation into culture and how it's going to affect it in the future. I think there's all these different things that happen to our culture but understanding on how we can utilise those tools to bring back that joy of learning or that I want to learn, especially in youth that are so eager to learn it [...].

I don't fear the culture. I embrace it. At the same time, there's movements going on. Near my home, there was the Douglas Creek Estate[1], which was a blockade in Caledonia (DeVries, 2009). I would attend these things as a traditional singer and go to rallies[...]. But one of the CRM companies said: You guys want to work for us? So, I just jumped in without understanding it. And so, after a few years of working in that as a field technician on the developer side, I finally came to a point where I wanted to understand the value of traditional knowledge in that realm [...].

And going through that whole process, I realised all those protests, all those rallies that we did, a lot of that's based around the mismanagement or misuse of that duty to consult. Companies weren't consulting First Nations in CRM, so they're just going in and bulldozing sites and ancestral remains. And so that clued in for me on my journey of becoming a lecturer. I was like, wow, it's been there this whole time growing up. And so that's why I said I didn't realise how my culture was going to draw me to my life that I am now. I don't think I would have taken the path of being a speaker, being a knowledge keeper in archaeology, if I didn't have that strong foundation of culture first.

And so now I'm trying to do the opposite. I'm trying to use archaeology as a way to build up our culture. Because one of the biggest things that we have to deal with now is that early archaeology is very androcentric, with very white and colonial viewpoints coming from a male dominated society. And so all the early anthropological recordings, it would carry that viewpoint. It would put on their ideas of the world. It was what they're witnessing. And a lot of the time wasn't the reality of what was happening [...]. People are using that as a foundation for things like treaty research or any type of research on community. That's ingrained into some of that, and then it starts affecting our culture. But that's one of those things where it's good that we have it (technology), but it's bad. It's why we have it (technology). And that's going to lead into the points about how technology can be useful going forward.

Samouk:

In other words, do you also believe that digitisation could help leave more prints, if not physically, but digitally, to educate those?

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[1] The Douglas Creek Estate protest is part of Canada's larger history of land rights and Indigenous struggles. Canadian authorities have historically challenged Indigenous claims to land areas protected under treaties or other arrangements. The dispute arisen from the different legal traditions from which colonial land ownership versus Indigenous land ownership emerges especially in terms of consultation. The event is part of broader resistance against what Indigenous communities see as legacies of historic injustices and the absence of substantive reconciliation in Canadian law and politics.

Jamieson:

No, that's a really good point because what digitisation does is that we're able to physically show things that we couldn't before. That's one of those exciting things that technology is able to accomplish. Whether it's audio, it could be something visual. Like virtual reality is going to be, I think, one day a big thing. But audio, I think... What I always think about audio in our culture, I think about being a small kid and first walking around with a cassette tape recorder and being out of power. I'd be secretly trying to record the power drum, and then I knew I was never supposed to. You never are allowed to record the power drum. I'm trying to hide it and record because I can't learn the song, and I'm trying to remember. You get caught a few times and yelled at by the drum keepers [...]. Within 20 years of how fast that technology moved. Not only that, it moved the social understanding and acceptance of those technologies into what they are today [...]. You have people with full albums on Spotify that are traditional singing. You find recordings of powwows on YouTube through technology. That's just the positive to it. One of the stories about powwow is one of the popular forms of singing that we do also called round dances [...].

We have to bring in people to teach us about culture and ceremonies. You find that this is a tough spot, especially for recording those songs. We do have to understand that culture is going to change and shift and to not harp too much on a certain point in time [...]. That cadence, that beat that it has with it and that community it builds around it. So it's like that method, repeated, rinsed over and over with recording, with videoing, and then it's going to happen the same thing with digital data, these virtual spaces that are going to be created. How can we utilise it? How can we make that round dance effect happen for learning the language, for learning more of your own culture [...]? Every community is learning it now. That's your beginning steps. The idea is that you move beyond it. You're like, okay, I love my culture again. I don't want to learn my culture. I'm proud of it. What is my culture? And then you go back into this individualisation again.

Samouk:

How do you see the role of youth in the future of protecting Indigenous archaeology, and cultural preservation? Do you think that using technology might be a way of preserving culture and more community-based archaeology?

Jamieson:

I think it's definitely vital. We can not only do archaeology, but it's vital across the board. The foundation of Indigenous thought or Indigenous thinking is that you're supposed to be thinking about the future generations [...]. That's the whole step. What my whole role is, is to build capacity and community. And so, with the archaeological camps that I do, I recognize that when I was young, my first experiences with archaeology were from a negative viewpoint. I was at a blockade. I was at rallies because archaeological ancestral sites were being desecrated. And if I can inspire future youth to think, oh, I attended this camp where I learned how to engage with archaeological materials and understand their significance, then it creates that positive step for understanding or wanting to understand more of it. I think we're going to need technology, not only in capacity building, but it's going to be vital for Indigenous nations [...].

To bring everybody together is quite a feat. Even in terms of communication, having the ability to use it instantly or access it is important. When we run our field school, if we get materials and we digitally create artifacts around them, then we can have those in each of the communities instantly. If they just got to find a 3D printer and all of a sudden, the collection that we've collected over that site, now each community has a set of those collections, and they can understand them. That's not only for something like ancestral materials, but I've always thought of the idea. There's a line in there, the one I've referred to as "Places of Spiritual Importance." There's no line in there that says, we can't create a place of spiritual importance today. So, if we all decided that Celebration Square—if we came back here every June 21st (National Indigenous Day)—is this place starting to become spiritually important to our community? And then who's to decide that? Do we decide that as a nation? Do we decide that as an individual? Who decided it back in the day? Was it just one family that went out and did that or was it the whole nation? That's more of a grand scheme to look at things, but it's something that is going to be important. We're going to have to incorporate youth and technology into it. And they're probably the ones that are going to understand how to utilise technology in a positive way the most.

Samouk:

In your lecture at the University of Toronto Mississauga, you emphasised the need for rematriation and possibly returning artefacts to communities. Do you think technology can facilitate this process? For example, could 3D copies of artefacts serve as a substitute for original artefacts in terms of cultural significance?

Jamieson:

That's probably some of the earliest conversations I had around digital data or 3D copying materials is, well, what if we just went to the museum and we 3D printed everything? We're more specifically talking about what remained at the time. If we just 3D printed all the remains, and we gave them back to the communities and they do whatever if they want to rebury them. And then that was the idea of, is that ethical still? You wouldn't display a physical or a real ancestor remains today, in at least Ontario, maybe across Canada now. Yeah. Certainly, there's places in the world that still publicly display that. Even that question alone is: Do you think that viewing remains is being displayed to create shock value or a shock factor to emphasise that this is a real thing or that this was a real human being? Can 3D copying technology obtain that objective? Or as soon as you understand that it's not real, does that significance wane? Does that still make the same impact that you have?

Yeah. It's one of those things. It's such a big question. How we view that, that idea of copying it, and then you get into the nuances of it. Like I mentioned before, but if we printed this pharaoh, and now every museum in the world has a print of this pharaoh, who owns it? How many endless copies can we make now? Who owns that data, that original data? Then with how easily usable digital data is, everybody maintains a copy and becomes the owner of that copy and able to reproduce that. That's where it's going to be tough to control for communities of how do we limit that or how do we control those limits that happen? Or to accept it. We just accept that this is going to be something that is accessible to everybody and anybody. Maybe we have certain things that have that designation. Maybe in other things, we have no digital data on it whatsoever.

What we're going to have to try is allowing this digitalisation to happen and see where it goes or see where it takes you. We're going to have to allow different methods or our ideas to happen if we want to see that progression. It's going to get used negatively somewhere, somehow. But as long as our outlook is on the future of it. If we could recreate an entire village and make it this outstanding augmented reality or virtual reality toolkit to get implemented into schools. If you walked into Crawford Lake, which is a recreated Huron village, and then it had this augmented reality aspect, where you're experiencing Huron while speakers and language holders contribute to enhance that experience—that could create the same awe effect as seeing Indigenous remains. I think that's the whole idea is to use this technology to create that awe, to want to learn more.

Samouk:

What changes do you believe are necessary in the standards and guidelines governing archaeological practices to better accommodate Indigenous perspectives in CRM and possibly within technology? How can Indigenous communities be more actively involved in shaping and keeping archaeological standards?

Jamieson:

I would say autonomy over materials that are collected and then consultation. The first round of policies, there was little to no engagement with communities for those guidelines. You have to start there. You have to start this idea of revamping them and how we're going to revamp them because this is the minimal effort or standard that is created for CRM companies to follow. If we build in there that they have things around the control over those materials or even thinking about the data that gets created, the research that gets created, and the narratives that they're telling. We don't often talk about the intellectual property that gets created after the excavation of these sites. Even as it is now, we have very little involvement in the story that gets talked about that site or even very little involvement of it after we're out of the field and it's out of the ground. It just becomes this resource that the company uses or has to take care of. Hopefully, they're using it. Well, I shouldn't say, Hopefully, they're using it, but as odd as it is, a lot of times it's barely taken care of for a lot of people. If you look up old research or as time goes on, you just have a line item in people's research of collection, it was lost, like unexplained why. It was lost. Whether it was transferring damage or- Yeah, because they're delicate as well. It sounds simple to say

but consulting those communities and understanding that that's going to change the main viewpoint on almost every aspect from the beginning and being involved in every step of the way and after.

Concluding Statement:

The interview with Jordan Jamieson sheds light on archaeology, technology, and the revitalisation of Indigenous cultural practices, demonstrating how the combination of traditional knowledge systems and contemporary technologies can bring about transformation. Jamieson uses Anishinaabe knowledge to advocate for the preservation of cultural traditions and to dispute the narratives that archaeology presents. His community-oriented approach demonstrates how Indigenous epistemologies can alter heritage and identity discourses in both academia and society. For further reading on Indigenous archaeology and the preservation of cultural heritage, consider the following recommended articles: "Through Wary Eyes: Indigenous Perspectives on Archaeology" by Joe Watkins (2005), "Buried Stories: Archaeology and Aboriginal Peoples of the Grand River, Ontario" by Gary Warrick (2012), and "Doing Archaeology Without Strings: Capacity Building and Education in Northeastern Ontario" by Sarah M. Hazell and Alicia L. Hawkins (2019).

For more information on Jordan Jamieson and his work, see the following resources:

Personal Website: https://mrsauga.bandzoogle.com/home
Canadian Archaeological Association Award:
https://canadianarchaeology.com/caa/about/awards/recipients/margaret-and-james-f-pendergast-award/jordan-jamieson

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Disclosure statement
No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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