Alt-text Potluck Launch of Alt-text as Poetry

Finnegan Shannon:
Okay, we're recording.

Bojana Coklyat:
Got it. recording in progress.

Finnegan Shannon:
Yeah exactly [laughter]

Bojana Coklyat:
[Laughter] All right. Well, I'm Bojana Coklyat.

Finnegan Shannon:
And I'm Finnegan Shannon. And uh we are talking about an event that we held in December of 2020. That was an Alt-Text Potluck to celebrate the launch of our Alt-Text as Poetry website and workbook.

Bojana Coklyat:
Yeah, I remember us - I think we were trying to plan something in person. But obviously, we had to change that. And - you know - put together a virtual event, but we also wanted to make sure it still had that fun vibe of like a celebratory vibe. And so we started to talk. And I think we're just having one of those great, like, conversations, just sharing ideas, and you know, good energy, and, you know, the idea of a potluck, you know, like coming together and having a potluck, and how fun those could be. And I think Finnegan, you were like, what about - like, Alt-Text Potluck? I was like, Oh, my God, that is so good!

Finnegan Shannon:

Yeah, I think it was also some of the groundwork for that idea was through conversations that we had with Aislinn Thomas and other artists when we were planning for Alt-Text Time, because-

Bojana Coklyat:
Yes-

Access Metaphors

Finnegan Shannon:
- Which was another remote event that we're trying to think about how to set a kind of friendly tone. And I know, Aislinn and I have had conversations about the way that sometimes food metaphors relate to access, you know, thinking about like, a menu of options -

Bojana Coklyat:
Mmm-hmm, mmm-hmm [agreement] -

Finnegan Shannon:
- Or thinking about ... Yeah, like, kind of taste or sharing or savoring together or things like that-

Bojana Coklyat:
Or a buffet of choices -

Finnegan Shannon:
Yeah-

Bojana Coklyat:
Yeah-

Finnegan Shannon:
So I think like food, food metaphors were on my mind,

Bojana Coklyat:
Who doesn't like food? I mean ...

Finnegan Shannon:
[Laughter]

Bojana Coklyat:
Yeah, yeah. No, that's right. I think that it was kind of it did get built off of that, because Alt-Text Time, Alt-Text Bee, like Bee, you know, kind of tying back to Spelling Bee or Quilting Bees, like trying to think about, like, what are those metaphors are like those kind of what's analogous to those times when you're spending a lot of time together, but really relaxed. And yeah, so then we just built off of that, and began building out what we wanted, you know, in the virtual space.

Finnegan Shannon:
Totally. And I think, you know, when I was, well, so we had a lot of collaborators on this project -

Bojana Coklyat:
- Right yes-

Finnegan Shannon:
- On this project, we were working with Laurel Schwulst and Taichi Wi on the website and Companion–Platform [Lexi Visco + Calvin Rocchio] - a design duo- on the workbook, and so part of the idea of the event was a chance for all of them to share their work and kind of what they had done and, and both kind of teams were interested in creating video to kind of like, document it. And I think that was also a point where Bojana, you had this idea of also adding an audio component to that to the event?

Artistic Audio Experiences and Sound Description

Bojana Coklyat:

Yeah, you know, because I think this is also came after hearing Alice Sheppard speak about blind people don't necessarily come to her performances, to hear a description, you know, I mean, or you want to go to somewhere to have a creative experience, an artistic experience. So they - Alice - had been thinking about you know, how do you do that? How do you create that, that experience alongside something visual that that blind people can enjoy? What can also be pleasure, and instead of just this like, description of what's happening, and so I started to really think about that. And if we were going to have something visual, I thought, well, well, maybe we can also have some audio. What can we do? And we just so happen to know somebody um, and yeah, we're in this like, cohort with JJJJJerome Ellis and we reached out and yeah, was really, we were really lucky with what came out of that.

Finnegan Shannon:
Yeah, JJJJJerome made a piece - um like an original composition. And related to kind of the mood of the project and the mood of a kind of celebratory event. And made a one minute version and a five minute version, both of which we played at the event and also have continued to use. It's now on the Alt-Text as Poetry website. And we use them sometimes in workshops. And Bojana, also wrote a sound description with - that kind of gets it to the texture of the music, also to kind of like supplement or create a richer experience for like the captioning, which, you know, we had CART [Computer-Assisted Real Time Captioning] at the event, but the CART provider, I don't, you know, that's not really typically part of their role to have that kind of detail on it. I think it takes a couple listens to kind of ...

Bojana Coklyat:
Mmm-hmm [affirmative] and I, you know, it was interesting for me, when I did that sound description, I realized it was really utilizing techniques that I use for image description, and that we talked about, and I think that we started to talk about like, oh, maybe, maybe we can talk a little bit about sound description in our workshops. So that could be an option for people who maybe didn't ... describing an image wasn't their top choice, maybe

they wanted to describe sound. And there is this kind of connective tissue between describing sound and imagery. And so we, you know, I think we practice that we were trying it out in some of our workshops. And I think that's one of the things that I - it's been beneficial for us all these workshops, virtually being able to experiment a little bit more and play around. And definitely been enjoying that seeing where the different directions that we go. Different things we learn different people we meet.

Finnegan Shannon:
[Laughter] Yeah, totally, I think that has - yeah, that kind of like iteration and experimentation- through remote events has been really exciting. I also, I want to share a little bit more about just kind of the structure of the event or the kind of idea of the Potluck. So Companion–Platform, and - Laurel and Taichi who also go by Abundant Blue - each of them shared kind of some video documentation of their work.

And then we also you and I talked a little bit about the project and about, yeah, kind of how it had come to be. And that's kind of new, these new materials of the website and the workbook. And then the second half of the event was the kind of Potluck part where we had asked attendees to, when they registered, we asked them to also share a piece of alt-text or an image description that they liked or found interesting. And then we read some of those aloud at the event to kind of, yep, share them and and think about them together.

Feeling Remote Community

Bojana Coklyat:
And I think what I appreciated about - I think the overall tone is it did feel like people coming together. And I think partly that was because of all the collaborative - all the collaborations that just existed within the project, like breaking it up and having people talk and introduce different things. And even having the music woven throughout the event, like we just created a totally different dynamic, just having that going on. And I just want to say

about the videos, you know, the videos ahead of time, we, you know, talk with each group about like, - gave some notes on accessibility and what might work better. So that was even a collaboration within a collaboration. You know, and I mean, and I think we kept it really open. I think there was like, people were able to engage in whatever ways they felt comfortable. And yeah, we've definitely got a good response from people from the event. And it really was - for me, it was really a joyful experience. One of the better ones I've had online.

Finnegan Shannon:
Yeah, I think having that -Yeah, that celebratory feeling or the kind of like the feeling of coming together and toasting. Do something together. It kind of can be hard to feel over the Zoom. But I really felt that at this event that there was this real - Yeah, just I just felt so grateful to have our community and people beyond our community kind of come together in this moment. To mark this kind of - Yeah, big kind of turning point in the project.

Bojana Coklyat:
Great. Yeah. Um ...

Examples of Alt-Text

Finnegan Shannon:
So I have a couple of examples of the alt-text I that I think maybe I'll read aloud.

Bojana Coklyat:
Oh great!

Finnegan Shannon:
And I also wanted to read just the what that what the ask was in the invite. And so we had written: "In the spirit of access that is nourishing and shared in community, we invite attendees to bring a favorite piece of alt-text or image description to the event, something you've written or something

you've read. We'll read some of these aloud at the event and savor them together." And one thing that I really loved is that a lot of people actually chose like food related images -

Bojana Coklyat:
-Yes! Oh my gosh, yes! Oh, my gosh, I remember that now. Oh, it was great.

Finnegan Shannon:
Um, Companion–Platform looked through the New York Times recipes and found foods that they would have liked to share with the group and then described the images.

So one of those was a photograph of: A clear glass mug with warm daylight bouncing light off its rim and curved handle. Inside of the mug is a semi-opaque amber liquid. The mug sits centered in a dark, wooden, slatted surface, with a slightly out of focus picture in the background. So, like bringing something like tea to the potluck.

And then there was another one. Oh, yeah, from Sarah Hallacher: "A small group of people gathered around a table of various foods they brought to share with each other. There are all types of foods sweet, savory, hot, cold, and various containers and packages. The people look comforted and loved by each other and are excited to share a meal".

Bojana Coklyat:
That was my favorite one. I remember that when I was like, I want to go to that potluck! I am at that potluck, but virtually right now.

Finnegan Shannon:
Exactly. And I'll share just one more - Taichi's, which is not ... not an image of food, but brings in a food metaphor: My friend Lucas is wrapped in a satin blue hammock tied between two trees. Only his head pokes out like an edamame a bean with a serene sleeping face.

Bojana Coklyat:
It was such a good one too! Oh, man, people really brought it you know, at Alt-Text as Poetry. I'm telling you food is just a great catalyst for all different kinds of-

Finnegan Shannon:
Yeah. Well, yeah. Is there anything else you want to add? Or memories you have related to the event?

Feeling Remote Community

Bojana Coklyat:
Oh, gosh, um I mean, I think you may have already said something along these lines that I just felt, even though it was a big event, and I think it was something they were planning for a little while. And I think I was disappointed that we weren't going to have an event in-person. But after this event, that totally that dissipated. I felt like this is even more comfortable. For me, I was able to have such an engaging fun time, but in a much more relaxed way. So after that event, I didn't necessarily have that same feeling of like, Oh, I wish I could have been in person. I mean, I'm sure that would be very, very nice, too. But if yes, I think it really went over well. It's very satisfying, like a satisfying meal.

Finnegan Shannon:
I realized one other thing, I want to shout out J. Soto at Eyebeam

Bojana Coklyat:
Yes!

Finnegan Shannon:
Who like produced the event and I think well and Eyebeam, which hosted the event and I'm just so appreciative of the way that J. approaches access. And -

Bojana Coklyat:
Yes.

Finnegan Shannon:
- Um, just felt really kind of like, hosted and cared for.

Bojana Coklyat:
Absolutely.

Finnegan Shannon:
In terms of like the process of producing and planning it

Bojana Coklyat:
When it feels collaborative when working with J., which is also very nice.

Finnegan Shannon:
Yeah, totally. Okay, cool. Yeah, that sounds good. I'm gonna stop the recording.

Bojana Coklyat:
Okay.